



April 20, 2012

Citywide Council on Special Education  
28-11 Queens Plaza North, Room 522  
Long Island City, NY 11101

To the CCSE:

Thank you for your letter inquiring about the ongoing work to build capacity in supporting our schools' work on behalf of students with disabilities. As you know, the special education reform is consistent with federal IDEA processes and safeguards for IEPs. The DOE recognizes that there must be capacity building for schools and administrators. As we get closer to the end of the current school year and the start of the next one, I would like to take the opportunity to share with you various endeavors that are both underway and upcoming in order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities in the areas of parent outreach, professional development, and budgetary support.

#### Parent Outreach and Support

In the fall of 2011 the DOE published a booklet titled [Raising the Bar for Students and Schools: Our Commitment to Action](#) (copy included.) As described in the booklet, the DOE is committed to both informing and involving families as partners in our work to close the achievement gap for all students. The DOE has recently published a supplement to the booklet: [a one-page document for families discussing the special education reform](#). This document (attached to this letter as well as on the DOE website) includes information on what the special education reform is, that the process and procedures around IEP meetings are not changing, and a list of helpful resources for parents of students with disabilities. Translated copies of this are available in additional languages.

Additionally, the DOE is undertaking the following supports for parents and families:

- Twenty sessions for parents and families (completed in April, 2012) on describing the process for developing the IEP, including parent and family participation throughout the IEP process.
- A website for parents and families with various resources (including videos and FAQs) that will go live in April, 2012. Parents and advocates have been active partners in the development of the site.



*A screenshot of the website for parents and families*

- In spring 2012 and in collaboration with the Division of Family and Community Engagement (FACE), trainings for parent coordinators providing an overview of the special education reform and what the reform means to their roles in schools and communities. The parent coordinators participated in break-out sessions on using the one-page document for families and supporting parents’ roles as integral members of the IEP team.

### System-wide Capacity Building

The DOE is seeking to build capacity of schools and administrators via professional development provided both centrally and through the Children First Networks (CFN). Generally, professional development is provided at the CFN and/or local level. Given the DOE commitment to the special education reform, along with the need to provide supports for both special and general educators, CFN capacity building is occurring in complement to central’s professional development efforts. Capacity building conducted by Central for schools and administrators includes:

- Starting this May, webinars for school based staff on the topics of:
  - Universal Design for Learning
  - Flexible programming (Using the full continuum of special education services)
  - Positive behavioral supports
  - IEP development
  - Transition
- A web page for DOE employees containing links to various supports documents for educators, including the NYC DOE Flexible Programming Guide for Using the Full Continuum of Special Education Programs and

Services, resources supporting Universal Design for Learning, and resources on positive behavioral supports.

- Teacher focus group sessions in May and June 2012 to discuss and get feedback on the special education reform.
- Training sessions this spring on the special education reform for various school supports including school psychologists and related service providers.

All schools belong to a CFN that provides instructional and operational supports. CFNs are responsible for working with the schools in their networks to ensure that needed professional development is planned and executed. Regarding the special education reform, each CFN has submitted a plan that includes professional development for schools on topics that includes:

- Producing high quality IEPs
- Universal Design for Learning
- Positive behavioral supports
- Flexible programming (Using the full continuum of special education services)

To date, CFNs have scheduled over 400 individual sessions on these topics, with over 180 of them having been completed. Further, each CFN is providing their schools with a programming clinic to work with their IEP mandates and school scheduling.

To support CFNs and Clusters, Central provides support through both capacity building sessions and the addition of staff with special education content expertise. Specifically, this includes:

- A retreat for network instructional and operational staff on the special education reform, held at Teachers College on March 2, 2012. Attended by over 400 participants, including both instructional and operational staff members. The agenda included a panel discussion on Phase 1 of the special education reform, a workshop on flexible programming, and a workshop on aligning school resources to support students with flexibly programmed schedules.
- Thirteen half-day sessions for CFN staff (called "Office Hours") on topics specifically requested by CFNs. Six of the sessions have already been held; the remaining seven are scheduled through May. The topics for these sessions are:
  - Programming along with funding allocations
  - Flexible programming (Using the full continuum of special education services - separate sessions for elementary, middle, and high school)
  - Supporting teachers instructionally
  - Working with families
  - Positive behavioral supports
- Through the Race to the Top grant, every network has an Instructional Coach for Special Education and every cluster has a Senior Instructional Facilitator for Special Education. These positions are staffed with veteran educators who also participate in a professional development institute two full days a month to build their capacity. The coaches are resources to schools to support them in continuing to develop quality IEPs and implement the full continuum of special education services in schools.

- To highlight best practices from Phase 1, and to allow for school leaders to observe classrooms and programs that utilize the full flexibility of the continuum of services, CFNs are arranging for non-Phase 1 schools visits and discussions with Phase 1 schools and staff.

### Budgetary Support for Schools

To align school budget allocations with the goals of the reform on equity of access to schools and high quality IEPs, changes to the Fair Student Funding (FSF) formula have been proposed for consideration by the Panel for Educational Policy. To achieve these goals, the changes to the funding formula will involve:

- Per capita rather than class funding (impacts elementary and middle school grades in schools that were open prior to the 2007-08 school year), regardless of SE service model
- New and increased funding options for students recommended for part-time special education programs, including multi-SETSS, part-time SC and part-time ICT
- To support the transition into general education, funding for students who are declassified

Details of the funding proposal can be found here:

<http://schools.nyc.gov/AboutUs/leadership/PEP/publicnotice/2011-2012/BudgetAllocationFormula2012.htm>.

Please note that the funding methodology for District 75 schools and programs will remain unchanged.

By moving to a per capita funding model, the DOE will be able to align resources to follow the student. When a student is now enrolled at a school, the school will be able to work with their CFN to arrange funding supports to be allocated to school so that the school can making the necessary staffing and support transactions in order to implement the student's IEP.

As we work towards our goal of closing the achievement gap for all students, we will continue and rely on the work of the CCSE to advance student outcomes. Thank you for your time and commitment on behalf of students with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Laura Rodriguez