



# Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.

The Parent Training and Information Center for the District of Columbia

# AJE UPDATE

Volume 9, Issue 7 • Happy New Year! • January 2010

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## Our Mission

The mission of AJE is to educate parents, youth, and the community about the laws governing public education, specifically for children with special needs. We seek to empower youth and parents to be effective advocates and youth to self advocate to ensure that children receive an appropriate education. It is also our mission to make the public aware of the consequences of institutional negligence of children with or without disabilities to promote school accountability.

## About AJE

AJE is home to the Parent Training and Information Center, the Community Parent Center, the DC Parent Center, and the DC Parent Information Network (DC PIN).

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## AJE Strengthens Family Supports - DC PIN and the FAST Project

AJE, recognizing that families of special needs children need continued support, commits itself to becoming a one-stop Family Support Center. The D.C. Parent Information Network (D.C. PIN) was funded by the D.C. Department of Health to assist families with special health care needs. This project has allowed us to hire family support staff and fully develop the Parent to Parent Program as a Family Navigator Project.

Additionally, we have partnered with the PACER Center's National Family Advocacy and Supports Training (FAST) Project to provide family support leadership training to families of children with disabilities in the United States and territories. This project will work collaboratively with our Family Navigator Program to train families of children with disabilities. The FAST PROJECT is designed to increase their ability to advocate for

family support services and influence systems change.

The FAST Project's four new curricula will address topics relating to Employment, Sexuality and Youth Development, Advocating for Your Family, and Strategies for Systems Change. AJE is proud to be one of the Parent Training and Information Centers selected to participate.

## New OSSE Regulations You Should Know About

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has issued regulations regarding compulsory education and school attendance.

The Compulsory Education and School Attendance regulations went into effect on November 20, 2009. Under these regulations, parents remain required to make sure their school-aged children (ages 5 – 18) attend school (public, public charter, independent, private, or parochial) unless the child already has a high school diploma or its equivalent, or participates in a home schooling program that is consistent with District of Columbia (D.C.) laws and regulations.

The regulations also require schools, D.C. public, public charter, independent, private, or parochial, to keep an accurate daily record of attendance and absences according to the reporting requirement of OSSE.

Schools must also develop and implement procedures that focus on the prevention of unexcused absences (truancy), including interventions to address students' academic and behavioral needs. Further, schools must provide due process procedures to enable parents to appeal any alleged attendance violation decisions made by the school.

Parents should know that any absence, even for some part of the school day, without a valid excuse is considered an unexcused absence. Schools must publish and make available to parents and students the list of valid excused absences.

OSSE expects schools to fully comply with all requirements of these regulations as soon as possible, but no later than the beginning of the 2010 school year.

## DCPS Out of Boundary School Lottery Begins January 28th!

Parents seeking to transfer children from neighborhood schools will have an opportunity starting January 28th. The Out-of-Boundary Lottery is a service offered by DCPS to allow parents to apply for available seats in grades kindergarten through 12 at a school other than their child's assigned school. DCPS gives you the opportunity to apply to up to six schools!

**WHEN:** January 28, 2010-February 28, 2010

**WHERE:** On January 28, 2010, the lottery application will become available on dcps.dc.gov. The lottery application must be completed online; no paper applications will be accepted. If you do not have access to a computer, please contact AJE at (202) 265-1432 or come to our offices for assistance.

**HOW:** Pick up your copy of the 2010-2011 My School Chooser from our offices today. By reviewing the My School Chooser guide, you will be able to explore all the schools available in the D.C. area. Pick up your free copy by stopping by one of our office locations. AJE is here to help you and answer questions so please don't hesitate to call or stop in!

## Relentless

Blessings comes to those that wait, is an expression that can describe how Tonya \* felt as a first time mother at 42. In preparation for her new role, Tonya read and researched everything she could about babies. Despite all of her best laid plans, nothing could prepare her for a child with a disability. Her daughter, Emily\*, has had to endure surgery and countless doctor visits as a result of her disability.

It was not until Tonya was told that Emily's specialty services were being discontinued that she

sought assistance with Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc (AJE).

Several emotions hit Tonya at once but the prevailing one was love for her daughter Emily. Tonya used her love for Emily as the motivation to ask for help. Thanks to AJE's new service, the DC Parent Information Network (DC PIN), Tonya was not alone in navigating through the insurance companies. Armed with her Family Support Worker, Tonya learned about her consumer rights regarding managed health care. She

used her new information to transfer managed health care plans and broker services for Emily in the new program. It is this model of self-advocacy and love that allows Tonya to continue to be effective in making sure that Emily will always have medically necessary services.

To learn more about the DC PIN program and how it can help your family, call Tatisha West at (202) 265-1730. You can also email her at [twest@aje-dc.org](mailto:twest@aje-dc.org) (\*not her real name)

## AJE Surveys Area Parents on DCPS Special Ed Services

In October 2009 AJE distributed surveys to over 100 DC parents in order to help the Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) grade the quality of DCPS's special education system. AJE advocates and attorneys also completed surveys on their experiences with the District's special education process.

Three out of five parents said that the District's early intervention services (for children up to age 3) and educational system were not providing adequate services to children with disabilities and special needs. When asked what areas needed the most improvement, nearly one in three

parents of school-age children said the schools need better teachers. Other responses included free appropriate public education, transportation, individualized education programs (IEPs), and educational evaluations. One in ten said no improvements were needed. Among parents of very young children (0-3), the most common complaint was about individual family service plans (IFSPs).

The staff at AJE sees that the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) has made important strides toward developing a system to ensure that students get the services they need,

but that more work needs to be done to put new policies into practice and to monitor the school district's overall performance in these matters. They also believe that not enough is being done to serve the members of immigrant communities, who sometimes need extra help navigating the special education process.

A review of the 2004 survey's findings can be found here: <http://www.ed.gov/fund/data/report/idea/partbvvltr/index.html>. Check back at this site in the coming months for OSEP's review of this most recent survey.

## Parent-to-Parent Participants Lead Community Outreach Campaign

Advocates for Justice and Education (AJE) completed its 6th Latino Parent-to-Parent Leadership Institute in September 2009. AJE has started a new outreach initiative led by the parents who participated in AJE's Parent-to-Parent Institute in September, in which Parent Leaders will meet once a month to discuss outreach strategies. Our Parent-to-Parent program provides parents with leadership training and a supportive network of peers for families that have children with disabilities. The goal of this program is to encourage and empower the community through training and leadership development, so that parents become effective educational advocates and informed decision makers with respect to their children's education in the District of Columbia.

On November 19, 2009 Caru Echenique, CPRC Director, facilitated the first Parent-to-Parent meeting with Parent Leaders Elizabeth Lopez, Jose Larios, Norma Benavides, Antonia Alarcon, and Edith Vasquez. The meeting focused on outlining outreach strategies to target certain schools (Powell Elementary, Raymond, Lincoln/Bell Multicultural, CentroNia Bilingual, Wilson, Deal, Tubman and Seaton) that have a high



population of Latino children and certain community-based organizations that cater to Latinos. Norma Benavides suggested that we contact principals and social workers that we know and we are familiar with. Jose Larios suggested that each parent should bring another parent to our December meeting.

The Parent Leaders are very excited to launch an outreach campaign that will inform other Latino parents that live in DC and have children with disabilities about AJE services. Ms. Benavides commented, "We need to unite forces and focus on the power of the masses. It is time for a revolution."

The parent leaders will continue to go out in the community and encourage other parents to get involved in AJE activities and empower themselves to become strong advocates for their children's education. AJE's Community Parent Resource Center welcomes all parent

volunteers who wish to support our work in the community. If you are interested please contact us at 202-265-1432.

## Parents, Know Your Child's Transition Plan! Schools are Required to Prepare Students for Post High School

**What is my child going to do after high school?** How are they going to be independent? How will they find a job or continue their education? These are questions that most likely have crossed your mind, especially if you have a child with an IEP in high school. But how are you going to ensure that your student is being prepared to reach their goals? It's time to start putting their transition plans to work and holding schools accountable for what they are required to do; in this case, prepare our students with IEPs to reach their post high school goals.

Most of us have heard that by the time a student is 16 years of age, their Individualized Educational Program (IEP) must include a Transition Plan, or in other words, a plan to help students meet their goals for after high school. **What does that mean schools are required to do?**

To answer this question, I headed to the Office of the State Superintendent of Education's (OSSE's) training on Effective Secondary Transition Goal Writing on December 3, 2009, where the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) and the National Post-School Outcomes Center (NPSO) were presenting. This was the first in a series of five trainings geared towards increasing the quality and compliance of transition plans. DC state district and school personnel also learned more about their role in preparing youth for further education and employment. Although I was greatly outnumbered by school staff and teachers, it is important to remember that OSSE's trainings are free and open to interested members of the community. Here is some of what I learned.

Not only do we want and hope that our students with IEPs have transition plans that will prepare them for further education and employment, but it is actually a requirement under The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In other words, transition plans must meet the regulations in the IDEA in order to be considered compliant.

The District of Columbia has set a goal to have 100% of transition plans meet the regulations in IDEA, in other words, all transition plans must be compliant. This means that the goal is to have measurable, annual IEP goals and transition services that will reasonably enable each student age 16 or older with an IEP to meet their postsecondary goals. Sounds like a great goal, right? Can you guess what that number actually looks like? The last data available placed DC's compliant transition plans at a whopping 39% in 2007-2008. In other words, in 2007-2008 only 39% of transition plans met the requirements to prepare students to meet their postsecondary goals. At the end of the day, although it was clear that DC still has a long way to go to live up to our student's transition needs, it was also clear that we are making steps in the right direction. Don't let your student be caught unprepared, take action to get involved and stay informed!

### A Closer Look at the Transition Plan:

Who actually writes a transition plan for a student with an IEP? The Transition Planning Team should consist of: the parent, the student, at least one regular education teacher, at least one special education teacher, the Local Education Agency representative (DCPS), representative(s) from

outside agencies where appropriate (i.e.: Rehabilitative Services Administration, etc), an individual who can interpret evaluation results, and any other personnel with knowledge of the child (i.e. related service providers, friends, employers). This team should work cooperatively to allow the student to choose a preferred living arrangement, obtain a career, develop independent and community living skills, and access some form of postsecondary education.

So what are transition plans required to look like on paper? Post high school goals must be updated each year, and must be based on a transition test that is appropriate for the student's age. The plan must also include services, as well as any classes, that will reasonably enable the student to meet their post high school goals. The student must be invited to any meetings about their transition plan, and if appropriate, representatives from other agencies should also be invited. These other agencies can include potential employers, adult service representatives, postsecondary education representatives, etc., however, the parent or student if 18 or older must give their consent for outside agencies to attend any transition meeting.

Want to know more? The information above and much more about transition and related data can be found online at the websites for NPSO ([www.psocenter.org](http://www.psocenter.org)) and NSTTAC ([www.nsttacc.org](http://www.nsttacc.org)). A full calendar of OSSE's trainings can be viewed online at <http://osse.dc.gov/seo/cwp/view,a,1222,Q,563881,PM,1.asp>. The next training in this series will be held on January 26, 2010. Contact AJE for further assistance.

## On-The-Job Training for Youth with Disability Mentoring Days

On November 2, 2009, Advocates for Justice and Education (AJE) had the pleasure of hosting a student for Disability Mentoring Days. The student was a 19 year-old who attends St. Coletta School. Throughout the day, she shadowed and interviewed various staff people, including a Staff Attorney, Receptionist, Educational Support Specialist, and Project Director. She participated in discussions about workplace etiquette, learned duties of a receptionist, shared ideas for the Youth2Youth group, and even rated AJE's staff for cleanest office and best office attire! Below, she shares her experiences at AJE for Disability Mentoring Days.

Hello, at the invitation of Ms. Sylvia Gravitt [Project Director for the D.C. Parent Center and Transition Advocacy Project], I recently visited the Washington, D.C. offices of Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc. When I arrived, I introduced myself, and everyone greeted me. Some of the things I did there are:

- helped someone with the copy machine;
- learned how to make name tags;

- helped make awards;
- had lunch with advocates and told them that, in the future, I would like to become a nurse;
- talked with people on the phone about their problems at different schools;
- gave my opinion about the youth group greeting; and
- worked on the computer.

I definitely look forward to an opportunity to visit Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc. again. I sincerely enjoyed helping out and appreciated the opportunity to learn and experience new things.

If you are a youth interested in participating in Disability Mentoring Days or an organization interested in hosting youth for upcoming Disability Mentoring Days, please contact Mathew McCollough, Communications Manager at the Office of Disability Rights at 202.727.6744 or [mccollough@dc.gov](mailto:mccollough@dc.gov)



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## Children with Special Needs, need Parents with Special Skills!

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### What Should You Know About Interventions in Student Discipline?

Student discipline in school is one of the critical issues that is a subject of endless debate among members of school community. The types of unacceptable behaviors; the interventions necessary to avoid those behaviors; and the nature and effectiveness of penalties are some of the controversial elements of the whole debate.

In 2009, the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) has been working hard to draft a consolidated student discipline policy that updates Chapter 25 of Title V of the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations (DCMR). This article discusses the interventions that are included in the DCPS student discipline rules.

The DCPS student discipline rulemaking obliges schools in section 2500.6 to apply interventions to students who commit certain types of disciplinary violations. These interventions are: anger management; attendance intervention plans; behavior contract; behavior log/behavior progress report; behavior redirection; community service; conflict resolution; crime awareness/prevention programs; diverse instructional strategies; in-school program restructuring (schedule change); individual or group counseling; intervention by guidance counselor or mental health professional;



mediation, including teacher/student mediation and multi-party dispute resolution; mentoring; parent conference; parent observation of student; peer court; positive feedback for appropriate behavior; positive behavior supports; problem solving conferences; referral to community based organizations; referral to substance abuse counseling service; rehabilitative programs; restitution; social skills instruction; student support team meeting; and other appropriate intervention strategies. The section gives room to schools to adopt other appropriate intervention strategies that fit the situation. Schools are also bound to apply interventions at all stages of the disciplinary process.

Which of the misbehaviors deserve interventions is a very challenging question. A simple answer to this problem could be to use intervention across the board; i.e., intervention for all sorts of violations. However, it is debatable if using only interventions will be effective in the absence of punishments for grave violations. The rulemaking divides misbehaviors into five tiers based on the seriousness of the violations and the disciplinary consequences. The discipline rules recommend the use of the above interventions only for the first three tiers of behaviors.

The disciplinary rules mandate different organs of DCPS to use the abovementioned interventions. Classroom teachers are authorized to use verbal redirection or reprimand; teacher/student conference; teacher/parent conference and behavior contract. Also, school administration is empowered to get involved and use interventions for tier II and III misconducts. The interventions school administrators are mandated to implement are: administrator/student conference; administrator/parent conference and behavior contract. However, the disciplinary rulemakings do not indicate when and how schools should implement the rest of the interventions that are mentioned above.