



IN THIS ISSUE

DC School Lottery.....	2
Standardized Testing.....	3
Healthcare Transition.....	3
New Website.....	4

OUR MISSION

Advocates for Justice and Education seeks to empower families, youth, and the community to be effective advocates to ensure that children and youth, particularly those who have special needs, receive access to appropriate education and health services.

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“Children with special needs, need parents with special skills!”

POLICY UPDATES

Truancy Referral Temporary Amendment Act of 2015 Extended for the 2015-2016 School Year

On November 23, 2015, Mayor Bowser approved the Truancy Referral Temporary Amendment Act of 2015 for the entire 2015-2016 school year. The legislation which was previously introduced by Councilmen Mendelson and Grosso clarifies that a school may define the term unexcused absence to mean that the student missed the entire day of school. This is only for the 2015-2016 school year.

The Council took this action because the Attendance Accountability Amendment Act of 2013 requires all DC public and charter schools to refer students ages 14 through 17 to Court Social Services Division after the student has accrued 15 unexcused absences within a school year. The statute never defined “unexcused absence” and, as a result, students who were tardy were often marked absent and classified as truant. To read the legislation and see how your Councilmember voted [click here](#).

Every Student Succeeds Act Signed Into Law

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed into law on Thursday, December 10, 2015 by President Obama. The law is the seventh reauthorization of the landmark civil rights legislation entitled the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The ESEA signed by President Lyndon Johnson provided education funding to states and attempted to ensure that every student in the nation had access to an education. In 2001, Congress became increasingly concerned by the growing achievement gaps that left poor and minority students in failing schools, and developed a system of testing and accountability to fix it through the authorization of a bill called No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

ESSA is an attempt to address the shortcomings of NCLB namely over testing and sanctions for failing schools. Many advocates remain concerned about the lack of federal oversight in the legislation. One noteworthy feature is the inclusion of discipline and school climate reform provisions to promote positive and inclusive school climates and discipline practices so that all students can truly succeed. To read more about ESSA and the discipline and school-reform provisions [click here](#).

MY SCHOOL DC COMMON LOTTERY

Is your child in need of a new school placement for the 2016-2017 school year? Families residing in the District of Columbia can take advantage of the My School DC Common Lottery to maximize their choices of the city's many public school options. You can apply for a new school through the lottery application process if you want your child to attend a participating public charter school, an out-of-boundary K-12 DC public school (DCPS), a PK-3 or PK-4 program at any DCPS (including your in-boundary), or a DCPS selective city-wide high school (9-12). Students who are eligible for special education services can also apply to any DCPS or public charter school participating in the Common Lottery.

Each student can apply to up to 12 schools. On each student's application, a family must list schools in preferred order. The lottery will match students with the schools they want based on several factors, including the number of available seats, siblings seeking enrollment, proximity to child's home, and school ranking. Not all DC public and public charter schools are participating in the lottery. You can find a list of participating schools and their profiles at www.myschooldc.org.

You will NOT need to submit an application if your child will attend a "right-to-attend" DCPS school for grades K-12. There are two types of right-to-attend schools: in-boundary schools (neighborhood school) and feeder-pattern schools. To apply, visit www.myschooldc.org. For assistance with the application process, contact AJE at (202) 678-8060. Below are important lottery dates for the 2016-2017 school year.

- February 1, 2016: Application deadline for grades 9-12.
- March 1, 2016: Application deadline for grades PK3-8.
- April 1, 2016: The lottery results are released. Your results will be mailed to the address on your lottery application. You may also view your results online if you created an online account during the application process.
- May 2, 2016: Deadline to enroll your child into one of your approved school choices.

PRE-K PROGRAM EXPANSION IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



In November 2015, Pre-K programs in the District of Columbia were expanded to offer free Pre-K options at community-based organizations (CBOs) in addition to the Pre-K programs already available at District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and Public Charter Schools. The Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program funded by the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) seeks to achieve universal Pre-K in the District of Columbia by providing families with free Pre-K options through a selection of participating community-based organizations in the District. Twenty-two CBOs will operate Pre-K programs during the 2016-2017 school year.

The application process for a Pre-K program at a participating CBO is separate from the My School DC Common Lottery application. Parents who wish to apply for a Pre-K seat for their child at a participating community-based organization must contact the organization directly. The applications are accepted on a first come, first serve basis until seats are filled. The student must turn 3 years of age by September 30, 2016, to be eligible. Families must be prepared to provide supporting documentation to verify their child's age and proof of residency in the District of Columbia. A checklist of supporting documentation and more information about the Pre-K program expansion can be found at www.osse.dc.gov.

For assistance with locating a Pre-K program at a community-based organization, contact us at (202) 678-8060.

HOW TO PREPARE YOUR CHILD FOR STANDARDIZED TESTING



This spring, students in the District of Columbia will take the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment to assess whether students are on track to being successful in college and careers. This computer-based assessment which is aligned to the Common Core standards will require preparation for students to perform well. First, contact your child's school to obtain the testing schedule. During the weeks leading up to the test, begin to talk with your child about the importance of giving their best effort during testing.

The night before the test:

- Make sure your child goes to bed on time. Keep your routine the same.
- Mention the test to your child to show that you're interested, but not so much that you make your child anxious.

The morning of the test:

- Plan ahead. Get-up early. Avoid rushing. Prepare a healthy breakfast.
- Be positive. Reassure your child that you know that they will do their best and that is what counts.

After the test:

- Talk to your child about how they felt about the test. Make sure you acknowledge their efforts.
- If your child is old enough, discuss what they think they can do differently to prepare for the exam.

PREPARING YOUTH FOR SUCCESSFUL HEALTHCARE TRANSITION

In order for young people to have a smooth transition from pediatric to adult primary care, they must play an active role in their transition process. Below are simple tips to help prepare youth for a smooth healthcare transition.

1. **Early Engagement.** Consider starting the engagement process early by having your teenager contact the doctor's office to schedule their next appointment, with your assistance. Prior to the call, you can conduct a mock telephone interview to help your child to anticipate what questions may be asked during the conversation.
2. **Information Sharing.** Share information with your child so that they're informed of their medical needs including their medical history, diagnoses and medications. Inform your teen where they can locate their medical records and how to request them. Teaching your teen how to access their health records is an important skill that they will need when they transition into adult-life. These records will also be useful during their college career to obtain certain accommodations.
3. **Preparation for Transition.** At the age of majority (18 years old), all legal rights transfers to your teen to make their own decisions, including special education and the healthcare decisions. Parents and their teens can engage in Supportive Decision-Making, an approach to help people with disabilities make their own decisions, while receiving any help they need to do so. Parents should work with their child and the pediatrician to develop a transition plan that will address their child's healthcare needs for a smooth transition from pediatric to adult care.
4. **Support.** Let your teen know that you are there to support them during their transition. Validate their feelings that it is a scary time in their life to make decisions about their medical and healthcare needs on their own, and other life events that may come along the road. It is important to consistently remind your child that you're available to provide assistance during their transition process.

AJE BUZZ: NEW YEAR, NEW LOOK!

We recently updated our website! Our new website has a vibrant new look, useful features and is easy to navigate! Whether you're looking for current news stories effecting children and families, policy updates, local resources, and much more, you can find it all on our new site. Check us out at www.aje-dc.org. Below is a sneak peek!



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