



May 3, 2010

Dear ARISE Coalition Supporters,

I'm writing to give you an update from the perspective of the ARISE Coalition on the DOE's plans and activities in reforming special education services in NYC.

As I wrote to you a few months ago, the Chancellor and Chief Achievement Officer for Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners (CAO) announced in early February a plan for reform which calls for all public schools in New York City to, "embrace and educate the overwhelming majority of students with disabilities." For more information on the DOE's initial outline of the plan see [here](#). That same week the Coalition released a public statement voicing both our support for the reform, but also some concerns we have about detail and accountability. You can review that statement [here](#). Others have voiced similar enthusiasm and concern. For a take from a NYC public principal you may want to look at Alison Gaines Pell's blog on Inside Schools [here](#).

Since the announcement in February the DOE has have identified 10 networks (Children First Networks 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 18, 19, 20, and Empowerment Network 1.22) and the 260 schools that belong to those networks to serve as the first round of schools in the reform.

Parents and educators in the 260 school should have, by now, received specific notice from their principals of the fact that their schools have already begun working to "refine instructional programs," "strengthen ... systems for analyzing student progress to make necessary adjustments for performance," and focusing on students' long-term educational goals, assuring access for significantly greater numbers students with IEPs to the general education curriculum, and assuring that all students' IEPs include recommendations for services targeted to student achievement and outcomes. It should also be the case that when parents heard from their principals they were given a school-specific outline of what's ahead and how they will be afforded opportunities for input in the process.

Recently members of the ARISE Coalition met with the DOE's CAO, Laura Rodriguez, and her Chief of Staff for an update on the reform's progress. Here are some of the things we learned from them:

- Work has begun. The CAO is meeting with the networks and principals from those networks regularly around issues of enrollment, projections, funding, accountability, and placement, and service provision.
- Training and work in the field is focusing on more flexible use of the Continuum of Special Education Services. To review the full Continuum for yourself visit [the DOE's website here](#).
- In order to build capacity at all levels the DOE is developing a "toolkit" of resources and information for educators and administrators.
- They are working with some talented educators at the Teachers College Inclusive Classrooms Project on developing modules for staff development.

Members of the Coalition expressed a number of concerns at this last meeting. For example we sought assurances from the DOE that:

- Students with disabilities, including those who continue to require smaller, self-contained settings, but who may not require services in District 75, will continue to be served, and will be served well.
- Parents interested in having their children's needs met at a school with particular expertise will have access to that school.
- A standardized system of supports and services, such as assistive technology supports and services, should be in place before a student with significant needs arrives at a local school, so the school will be ready to provide services immediately.
- The DOE will consider as it moves forward how best to address instances where, because of pre-existing antagonism between families and schools, it is in no one's interests for the student to remain at a community school, regardless of any improvements made as a part of the reform.

The DOE has committed to more meetings with the Coalition as they move forward in the implementation of this significant reform. As always, we want to be sure we represent New York's City's public school parents, and that we address your concerns in those conversations. So, as always, please contact me if you believe there are stories related to this reform we should be aware of.

Thanks for your on-going support and involvement.

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