

News

from the SFUSD COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

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Contact the CAC for SpEd:
c/o Open Gate Resource Ctr.
2601 Mission St., #300
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 920-5040
<http://www.sfcacsped.org>
cac_specialed@hotmail.com

The CAC meets monthly, usually on the fourth Thursday of every month (except July and December).

Remaining meetings in 2006-07 are:

Thursday, January 25

Thursday, February 22

Thursday, March 22

Thursday, April 26

Thursday, May 24

Thursday, June 28

Meetings begin at 7:00 p.m. after an informal half-hour of networking starting at 6:30 p.m. Childcare is available if reserved one week in advance. Limited parking is available; enter from 22nd St.

For more information or to join our mailing list, please contact Open Gate at 920-5040 or send an email to cac_specialed@hotmail.com.

The CAC for Special Ed and Why It Matters

by Amy Ottinger, CAC 2nd Vice Chair

Advocating for a child with special needs can feel like a full time job. There are so many things to learn: your child's rights, best teaching practices vs. what may be available in the district, what type of programs are offered at different schools and where to turn if things aren't going smoothly. On top of that, as with any child, we only get to rear them once, and the time goes by quickly. With so much to do and so little time, why would volunteering be a good idea? Because volunteering and working with others who have faced similar challenges allows us to share our experiences and learn from one another.

The Community Advisory Committee for Special Education (CAC for SPED) cannot advise on a child's needs, nor recommend placements, but it is a place where parents can work together with teachers and administrators on new ideas and better communication. The CAC is mandated by California Education Code to advise the administration and the Board of Education on the Local Plan—the "blueprint" of special education services. The committee consists of community members, professionals, district representatives, and parents of children with disabilities, who must make up a majority of the committee.

At the monthly meetings, members make connections with other parents and teachers of children with special needs as well as with

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IDEA 2004 and What It Means for Parents

by Robin Hansen, CAC Vice Chair

IDEA 2004, the newest version of the law that governs special education, now focuses on **outcomes of education**. The law states:

"in order to meet the developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children; and be prepared to lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible."

Here are some questions and tips parents can use to be sure IEPs measure up. Remember, parents are an equal part of the IEP team and you can leave the IEP unsigned until your questions are answered.

Academics

At what grade level is my child in each skill and what proof is shown? Do not rely only on standardized tests. Ask for examples of class work

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Being Your Child's Best Advocate

by Katy Franklin, CAC Committee Chair

In order to be the best advocate you can be for your child, you'll need to know how to:

GET ORGANIZED

Keeping meticulous records is crucial; it will help you to become a more effective coordinator of services. Examples of records you'll want to keep and organize:

- IEP and IFSP records;
- Letters and notes (from teachers, doctors, etc.)
- Medical records and therapists' reports;
- Test results and evaluations;

Get copies of all written information about your child. Keep a journal of events and concerns you have about your child's school program and make notes from conversations and meetings you have with teachers and administrators regarding those concerns.

GET EDUCATED

San Francisco is lucky to have **Support for Families of Children With Disabilities** (SFCDD), a non-profit parent-run organization that offers information and education to families, free of

charge. Call 415-920-5040 to get on their mailing list and find out about workshops and seminars about special education laws, services and the IEP process. They also lend books and toys through the **Open Gate** Family Resource Center. Don't miss the 2007 Information and Resource Conference, for families of children with disabilities, on Saturday, April 21, 2007, from 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m. – at John O'Connell High School, 2355 Folsom Street in San Francisco. All of SFCDD's workshops, seminars and conferences include free childcare and translation services for those who register in advance.

<http://www.supportforfamilies.org>

Searching the Internet to find information is essential for becoming an effective advocate. If you have no computer, the public library has computers that you can use for free, and offers free classes on how to search the Internet. Call any branch for information.

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What IDEA 2004 Means for Parents *Continued from Page 1*

in written expression, math computation and reasoning? How is reading? Decoding words vs. reading comprehension?

Social/Emotional Needs

How does your child get along with peers? Are there behavior problems? If so, ask for an FBA, a Functional Behavioral Analysis. An FBA can determine when and why the behavior occurs. The IEP team should identify what triggers the negative behavior and develop a plan to eliminate it. Is your child sad or angry? Ask for a mental health evaluation to see if counseling is appropriate.

Future Planning

Consider the current levels of performance of your child. Is she behind? How far? How is she going to catch up to her peers? If the current placement is moving at a slowed pace or a shorter day, will she fall further behind? For children with learning and language disorders and high-functioning autism,

achieving and maintaining grade level should **always** be the goal. Studies have shown that even some children with cognitive impairments like Down Syndrome can achieve 5th grade reading levels. Request after-school or summer tutoring if your child is behind. Discuss strategies for closing achievement gaps with the IEP team.

If your child is entering high school, be aware that attending a Special Day Class for Language Arts in high school could mean that your child will not meet the admission requirements for the California State University system. Also ask the team about your child's chances for passing the high school exit exam (CAHSEE). How successful are the other special education students from that school at passing the CAHSEE? To comply with IDEA 2004, school officials should be doing everything they can to help your child maximize future opportunities.

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The CAC for Special Ed and Why It Matters *Continued from Page 1*

district administrators and policy makers. Regular attendance allows members to keep up with changes in district policies and impending legislation. The CAC also helps form a collaborative working environment in offering training to the community.

This past year has been busy and productive. We have implemented a strategic plan that sets out goals for the future. We also prepared and presented our annual report to the Board of Education. Both of these documents are available on our new website: www.sfcacsped.org. Key players from the district have spoken at our monthly meetings, including Myong Leigh, SFUSD's Senior Chief of Policy and Operations, and Pam Macy, head of Designated Instruction and Services. We have Ky Vu, from the district's office of State and Federally-Funded Programs, scheduled for January 25 and Vernon Billy, the district's legislative advocate in Sacramento, for March 22. We have also added an informal half-hour to our meetings, from 6:30-7:00,

where individuals can chat with parent members of the CAC to share concerns and learn more about the committee.

This year has also been a year of transition for the CAC membership. Four new members have joined and all have stepped up to board positions and committee chairs, joining a core group of long-time members. As with any volunteer organization, the more members there are, the more the workload can be shared and the more that can be accomplished. We hope to continue to see new faces at the meetings—held on the fourth Thursday of each month (except July and December) at Open Gate, 2601 Mission Street, Suite 300, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Childcare and translation services for those meetings can be reserved by calling Open Gate at 920-5040 one week in advance; parents of children with disabilities can apply for a \$50 stipend for attending the monthly meetings. Go to www.cafec.org for details.

Being Your Child's Best Advocate *Continued from Page 2*

The **Procedural Safeguards** service from the California Department of Education provides information regarding educational rights. Call 800-926-0648 or go to <http://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/>

California Special Education Programs: A Composite of Laws Book. Parents of children with a disability may get an English-language copy of this book mailed to them at no charge. To get it, call 800-995-4099.

GET IT IN WRITING

If SFUSD denies your child a service or accommodation that you have requested -- always ask them (in writing) to provide you with "**Prior Written Notice.**" This notice should include:

- (1) a description of the action proposed or refused by them;
- (2) an explanation of why they proposed or refused to take the action;
- (3) a description of any other options that they considered and the reasons why those options were rejected;

- (4) a description of each evaluation procedure, test, record, or report they used as a basis for the proposed or refused action;
- (5) a description of any other factors that are relevant to their refusal.

Learn about District policies: If a district employee tells you that something you request for your child is "against district policy," ask for that policy in writing.

GET HELP

If you anticipate a disagreement, it is a good idea to have an advocate to help you. Do not wait until the last minute to secure an advocate's services. Try to sign up several months before your child's IEP date.

Protection & Advocacy

A nonprofit disability rights organization.
1-800-776-5746 <http://www.pai-ca.org>

Community Alliance for Special Education

An advocacy group and legal resource for families with children in special education. 415-431-2285
<http://www.caseadvocacy.org>

Problem-Solving Strategies For Parents

by Carol Kocivar, SFUSD Ombudsperson

Special Education law creates a partnership between parents and the school to work together to help students with disabilities. With any partnership, communication may break down. It is in the best interest of your child to resolve problems as early as possible, and to seek resolution at the school site whenever possible.

While the law establishes formal methods for dispute resolution, SFUSD has established a system of internal, less formal resolution, which you are encouraged to use whenever you believe a problem is developing:

- 1. Discuss the problem with your child's classroom teacher and/or other school staff member who knows your child's needs.** This can include your child's resource teacher, counselor, or other specialist helping your child. You may also speak with the special education content specialist assigned to your school.
- 2. Review your child's IEP and determine if the plan is being implemented.** Does it need to change to meet any changing needs of your child? You may request a new IEP any time. A meeting must be held within 30 days of your request.
- 3. If there is no resolution, discuss the problem with the school principal.**
- 4. If there is no resolution, call Special Education or the appropriate Assistant Superintendent (see box).**
- 5. If there still is no resolution, call the Ombudsperson, Carol Kocivar.** The ombudsperson can help resolve your issue and also provide an informal mediation called a "Solutions Panel." In this session, a trained impartial third party can help restore communication, foster discussion, and help negotiations so that a dispute can be resolved fairly and equitably. The essence of this Solutions Panel is allowing people to talk directly to each other about their differences.
- 6. Federal and state law provide several mechanisms for resolving issues with the local school district.** Any parent, citizen, or

organization may use the complaint processes described below when there is a belief that the District is not following special education laws or regulations. In addition, parents may file for mediation or due process, also described below:

The **Uniform Compliance Complaint** – This is a formal complaint that is filed with the Uniform Complaint Compliance Officer, Office of Equity Assurance, 555 Franklin St, Room 306, San Francisco, CA 94102. Information can be obtained by calling the Office of Equity Assurance at 415-355-7323.

A complaint can be filed directly with the **California Department of Education**. An investigation and final report must be completed within 60 days of CDE receiving the complaint unless an extension is granted. This complaint should be filed with the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, Procedural Safeguards Referral Service, 1430 N. Street, Suite 2401, Sacramento, CA 95814-5901.

Mediation Only and Due Process Hearings – Mediation or Due Process are procedures to use when there is a disagreement between the parents and the education agency regarding assessment, identification, or placement of a student. To obtain more information about filing for mediation only or a due process hearing, contact: Office of Administrative Hearings, Special Education Unit, 1102 Q Street, 4th Floor, Sacramento, CA 95814; phone (916) 263-0880.

Contacting Special Education

Phone	355-7735
Online	www.sfusd.edu (look for Special Education under "Departments")
Carol Kocivar, Ombudsperson	355-7710

Assistant Superintendents

Child Development	750-8599
Elementary School	241-6310
Middle School	241-6607
High School	241-6478
County/Community Schools	241-6232

Upcoming Events

JANUARY

- 20** Site Council Summit. Learn how to give input on how to spend your school's special education funds. For more information, contact Parent Relations at 241-6185.
- 25** Monthly CAC meeting. Guest speaker: Ky Vu, State and Federal Programs, SFUSD

FEBRUARY

This month, your school will be holding community meetings on setting goals and priorities for next year's Academic Plan. Contact your principal to participate.

- 22** Monthly CAC meeting

MARCH

- 22** Monthly CAC meeting. Guest speaker: Vernon Billy, the district's legislative advocate in Sacramento

APRIL

- 21** Support for Families Annual Resource Fair
26 Monthly CAC meeting

What IDEA 2004 Means for Parents

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Before the IEP, Get Prepared

Go to the California Department of Education web site and print out the content standards for your child's grade (located at <http://tinyurl.com/y9me28>). Remind the IEP team that your child is supposed to access the general curriculum. Put all requests in writing.

Print the statistics of achievement of Special Education vs. General Education for your particular school or the proposed placement. Show them to the team. If the team suggests a new placement for your child, under Federal law ("No Child Left Behind") you do not have to consider any placement with a lower state score than the school you are already in.

Purchase the books "From Emotions to Advocacy" and "Special Education Law" by Pete Wright or borrow them from Open Gate's library. These books will help you understand the law and help your child. Many educators are simply too busy teaching to keep up with the law. This is your turn to teach them!

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MEMBERS FOR 2006-07

Wanyee Francis Babitsky, CHAIR

Robin Hansen, 1ST VICE CHAIR

Amy Ottinger, 2ND VICE CHAIR

Janet Christensen, SECRETARY

Shelley Forrest, PARLIAMENTARIAN

Linda Tung, CHAIR EMERITUS

Katy Franklin, COMMITTEE CHAIR

Rachel Norton

Carol Kocivar

Yun Kwong Wong

POSTAGE

MAILING LABEL

California law requires all school districts to participate in and support a Community Advisory Committee for Special Education allowing parents, teachers and interested community members to advise districts on local special education programs. Anyone can participate. In San Francisco, the Committee generally meets on the fourth Thursday of the month, except July and December. Call 920-5040 or visit <http://www.sfcacsped.org> for more information.

Thank you to Special Education Director Deborah McKnight and SELPA Director David Wax for assisting the all-volunteer committee with this mailing.