



evanston citizens for appropriate special education

Spring 2008 Newsletter

Thank you for your interest in CASE. The following is a summary of our recent activities and plans for the near future. We are having a positive impact on the special education system in District 65 as evidenced by the response of the school board, the rapid growth of CASE membership, comments from staff and parents, and media support.

DISTRICT 65 BOARD MEETING

May 12, 2008

HIGHLIGHTS

Parents, teachers and staff filled the boardroom Monday evening to talk about special education services in District 65. But first, Director of Special Services Geneva Oatman and her staff presented their report on the status of special services. The board members responded with several questions, including some that parents had shared with them since the April 21 board meeting. After 2 ½ hours, parents were invited to speak.

More than a dozen parents, many wearing CASE stickers, spoke passionately about their personal experiences and concerns:

- Poor service delivery including placement of vulnerable children with emotional disorders in the same self-contained classrooms as severely aggressive, conduct disordered students.
- Difficult transitions and disrupted continuity for children following classroom services that have moved to different buildings.
- The effective Options program at King Lab phasing out as kids are placed at Kingsley for Diagnostic Kindergarten services.
- Many examples of non-compliance with legally mandated regulations including re-writing a “lost” IEP without parent participation and back-dating it to the original IEP date; placing a child in a BD classroom without prior assessment of

behavioral problems; refusing to provide aides or therapeutic placements in violation of a Free Appropriate Public Education.

- Children inappropriately placed in self-contained special education classrooms in response to behavior problems.
- Inadequate and inconsistent professional development, including virtually no training around childhood mental illness.
- Lack of response by Ms. Oatman to eight emails and phone calls from a PTA Special Services Parent Liaison.
- Exclusion of parents from the process and a strong sense of dismissal and defensiveness from the Administration.
- Failure of the Administration to meet goals outlined by the Board in 2006.
- Fear of retribution on the part of parents and staff, and the need for a safe and receptive climate for discussion.

Unfortunately, Board President Mary Erickson held parents to a strict three minute time limit so many parents did not complete their statements. After public comments were concluded and the Board continued their discussion, some parents stayed until after midnight to make some follow-up comments and to understand what specific actions the Board will take:

- The Board will look into creating a survey to assess parent satisfaction with special services in District 65.
- The Board asked the Administration to provide them with information regarding the numbers of children with IEP's, their diagnostic labels, their placements, and data on the implementation of their services. It was unclear whether the Administration agreed to provide this information.
- The Board asked to be informed when the Administration makes a decision to move a self-contained program to another building in order to advocate for stability for the children.

Plans for the near future:

1. CASE achieved a major success in rallying the community to speak publicly. We still have a lot of work to do to get the word out to the 1000+ families who have children with special needs in the district.
2. We are working on building connections with other organizations serving families in Evanston to broaden our base of support.
3. We will continue to work with the Board to help them understand the issues and to create a mechanism for holding the administration accountable for their failing policies.
4. We are developing ways to keep our message in the public arena through the media, and printed brochures and flyers.

Thank you again for your interest in CASE. If you haven't visited the website in a while, check out the new content. We would like to continue to expand our membership, so please forward this information to others who would be interested. Let us know how you think we are doing. info@evanstoncase.org

Sincerely,

Cari Levin, LCSW
Founding Director Evanston CASE