

ACCESSIBILITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN NYC SCHOOLS

Building a Community of Knowledge

Courtesy of Rebecca Kostyuchenko

WHY

To:

- better know your child's needs
- better know your child's rights
- know who to ask and how to ask them
- know the NYC DOE's processes and procedures
- understand the NYC DOE's strengths and weaknesses
- know your child's school's capabilities and limits
- identify opportunities and pitfalls
- make connections that energize your advocacy
- create the best path possible for your child
- model for your child how to create a path and community for themselves

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HOW:

- meet as many people involved your child's world as possible
- be "out" and share your story and struggles
- always ask questions: why, when, what, where, who, how
- when someone presents you with limits, decisions, rules, processes, start asking: what procedure, what regulation, whose authority, how do you contact that person or decision-maker. Then call them and start asking questions again
- even if your child isn't interested in an activity, go and network and gather resources
- read every website, dig around and see what you find
- sign up for every email, notification service, and calendar to get important news in your inbox
- reach out in ways that make others feel comfortable (ask teachers for strategic advice informally, not in IEP meeting)
- be PERSISTENT yet also patient, appreciative and attentive with others; especially with DOE employees
- maintain a notebook that keeps everything in one place: take notes and staple in business cards
- maintain your own "listserv" of useful contacts and reach out when you need help
- ask your school to start an IEP parents group if they don't already have one

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- **Internet “special needs” listservs/Yahoo/Facebook groups which can be:** specific disability OR general; local/regional/national. E.g. Rebecca belongs to Brooklyn Special Kids Yahoo Group (local & general); Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA) Type III (international & hyper-specific); MA Support (national & semi-specific); IEP Assistance Support & More Facebook group (national & general)
- **Disability rights groups:** INCLUDEnyc, Advocates for Children of NY, Center for Independence of the Disabled, ARISE Coalitions, Parents for Inclusive Education (PIE), Disabled in Action
- **Education law attorneys:** usually happy to give you advice to help you avoid need for an attorney
- **Disability specific organizations** (national and local): UCP of NY, NYC Spinal Cord Injury, MDA, CureSMA National, CureSMA Greater Metropolitan Region
- **Local community organizations:** <http://www.adaptivedesign.org>, Extreme Kids & Crew, JCC Manhattan
- **Local community events:** Disability Pride Parade
- **Local/regional support or activity groups for children with disabilities:** physical activities, respite activities, academic activities
- **Summer camps that include your child’s disability**
- **Specific schools that serve children with disabilities**
- **Adaptive sports:** Stride, Wheelchair Sports Federation and Sled Rangers (WSF), NYC Parks Accessible Programs, Power Soccer

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- **Community Education Council (CEC)** and Community Council on Special Education (CCSE) meetings and representatives - they are there to represent parents and families
- **DOE Field Office** - supports the IEP teams and can assist with all atypical requests, both processes and budgets
- **District superintendent** - has power and cares about what happens in their district
- **IEP team** - they know a lot about how the IEP process and the NYC DOE system works
- **School Leadership Team (SLT)** - they know a lot about how your school works and is budgeted and run
- **School PTA** - they know a lot about how your school works and can apply political pressure
- **School principal/vice principal/special education coordinator** - all set the tone and standards at your school and if they see a need, it often will be met by IEP team without question
- **Teachers and therapists** - they know many kids, services, and programs
- **Therapy gym** - the parent/caregiver waiting room is a great place to connect
- **Doctor** - specialists will often know other families dealing with the same issues or condition
- **Equipment providers/orthoptist** - same as doctors

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Recommended Links

What is inclusion? Definition of inclusion: <http://bit.ly/2k4syeG>

The US AG Investigation: Rebecca's Story: <http://nyti.ms/2k4pbEw>

Shared Path to Success is implemented in NYC Schools in 2012 requiring more kids to be included in general education - WHICH MUST INCLUDE KIDS WITH PHYSICAL DIFFERENCES - and we are in the infancy of this program still: <http://nyti.ms/2k4mVNC>

Article about the founding of the Manhattan Children's School program 13 years ago shows that many of the same struggles continue to exist in NYC. It is the only inclusive program that integrates physical and typical as a "program": <http://nyti.ms/2k4xmkn>

Inclusion: an attitude, a practice, and the physical issue of access: <http://nyti.ms/2k4IM8P>

Social inclusion- schools are not fully inclusive without it: <http://bit.ly/2k4AxIz>

Sparking thought on evaluating the physical space in a child's school: <http://bit.ly/2k4tpvK>

Supports that teachers and parents need to think of when thinking of physical disabilities: <http://bit.ly/2k4nmal> (written for college, but applicable)

Understanding reasonable and common teacher perspectives/concerns that parents must be aware of: <http://bit.ly/2k4sVpr>

Article about inclusion in Vermont about the importance of kids with physical and other disabilities being part of the community: <http://nyti.ms/2k4nuHe>

The intersection of disability as a civil rights issue: <http://wapo.st/2k4n1EJ>

MLK Jr.'s principles and steps of nonviolence to make social change - guidelines for effectively advocating for and achieving educational justice for our children: <http://bit.ly/2k4xdx4>

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Getting Help

- **Local Law 27 NYC of 2016** - For more info: <http://on.nyc.gov/2k4evFT>
Important person to be aware of for accessibility issues - He exists and is useful.

Michael Castelblanco, Disability Service Facilitator for NYC DOE -

131 Livingston Room 210, Brooklyn, NY 11201

Tel: (718)935-2487 Email: mcastelblanco@schools.nyc.gov

- **NYC Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities:** www.nyc.gov/mopd

- **NYC Commission on Human Rights:** www.nyc.gov/HumanRights

- **Field Support center contacts lists** - Directors of special education and administrators for special education are key.

For more information, check the link that includes every borough of NYC:
<http://bit.ly/2k4zEzJ>