

BUY
PHOTO
REPRINTS
ONLINE

SUBSCRIBE TO
THE GAZETTE
ONLINE
OR IN PRINT

GAZETTENET.com

Daily Hampshire Gazette - Established 1786

Amherst Bulletin

The Recorder

Valley Advocate

Pioneer Valley

Many Hands

Hampshire Life

Sign out

Account

Trouble finding something?

Contact us

Classifieds

news search

Local News State/Region U.S./World Obituaries Sports Business Schools Colleges Politics Opinion Entertainment Health Living Sci/Tech

State audit faults Northampton's special education programs

By CATHERINE BAUM
Staff Writer

Email this page Printer-friendly version

Thursday, January 14, 2010

NORTHAMPTON - School officials will take up an audit citing the School Department's failure to fully implement 43 state requirements in special education, English learner education and civil rights - and the plan to correct the problems - Thursday night at 7 in JFK Middle School.

Six months after the state audited the school district through staff and parent interviews, document reviews and observations, Northampton's Coordinated Program Review showed no commendable ratings and set a Jan. 20 deadline for the city to submit its corrective action plan.

This is a stark contrast to Northampton's last review in 2003, when the school district received six requirements for corrective action and was commended in six other areas.

The news came as a shock to school officials, some of whom believe the report is partially erroneous. Meanwhile, some parents said they have been aware of problems flagged in the report for a while.

"What kills me is this is from the state," Valle Dwight, co-chairwoman of the SPED Parent Advisory Committee, said as she flipped through pages of the report during an interview in her home Monday. "They're very objective. We no longer need to scream and yell that our kids aren't getting what they need, because it's right here."

Specific faults

According to the report, Northampton public schools are lacking in behavioral interventions and restraint training, the capacity to conduct and interpret assessments, and instructional supports such as remedial reading.

The report also faults the city for too often identifying students as special needs based on the availability of programs, placements, services and supports - rather than on individual evaluation of each student's needs.

Further, the district was cited for identifying students who speak limited English as eligible for special education services rather than determining whether a student's lack of progress is a result of a disability or of limited English proficiency.

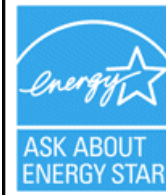
Nearly 22 percent of students in city schools were identified for special education in the 2008 to 2009 school year, compared to nearly 16 percent in the 2003 to 2004 school year.

The report also points to a lack of communication between staff, parents and administration. Only Spanish interpreters are available, so translations for non-English-speaking parents are limited. Interpreters are not always familiar with special education procedures, programs and services.

According to the report, teachers and service providers aren't always aware of their specific responsibilities in a child's individual education plan contract.

And families report they receive these written contracts months after annual team meetings are held to identify each contract's content. In fact, city parent Cate Rowen said she hires note takers to attend

Valley Home Improvement has become the first contractor in western Massachusetts to undertake MassSAVE's Major Renovation pilot program.



VALLEY HOME IMPROVEMENT, INC.
DESIGN BUILD • 584-7522
www.valleyhomeimprovement.com
- KITCHENS • BATHS • ADDITIONS • SUNROOMS -



Popular stories

- Discount supermarket eyes Hadley opening
- Longtime Thornes cafe may bow out
- Teddy Forance goes Hollywood: Local dancer to take the stage during the Academy Awards ceremonies
- Amherst superintendent fires back at critics regarding sick leave
- South Hadley parent sues, alleging harassment after secret recordings came to light

team meetings regarding her 6-year-old son's individual education plan.

"I have a lot of social capital and I have a hard time," said Rowen, an educational researcher at Smith College. "Parents have to hire advocates just to get the basics done."

School Superintendent Isabelina Rodriguez said she takes the report "very seriously" and has been working closely with administration to iron out the next steps. Five specialists have been hired this year for support in math and literacy, she noted, and the department has ongoing efforts in professional development around differentiated instruction.

"We've begun the work, and we need to continue to do more and become more coordinated in our effort," she said.

On the other hand, Rodriguez acknowledged the district has had a hard time hiring a speech therapist to fill the vacancy at the high school, and the speech therapist at the middle school resigned last month.

"Speech therapists, occupational therapists and physical therapists are very hard-to-come-by positions," Rodriguez said. "They're sought after by all sorts of directors - we don't have enough of them out there."

The Parent Advisory Council will discuss the report and the school district's Correction Action Plan Jan. 20 at 7 p.m. at JFK Middle School

Rodriguez maintains that the review may not be based on complete information because at the time of the audit last spring, a transition was under way in the special education office.

"Cuts have not been made at the classroom level, but at the administration level, so sometimes as a result the type of monitoring that's needed suffers," Rodriguez said.

A consultant hired by the district will present a report tonight analyzing the state's audit.

Catherine Baum can be reached at cbaum@gazettenet.com.

Filed Under: [local](#) [news](#) [northampton](#) [schools](#)

Comments

Thu, 01/14/2010 - 07:35 — [liznmike](#)

Correction Action Plan Meeting

Looking forward to this meeting. It's been a long time coming and maybe our kids will get some if not all of what they need/deserve.

In response to Ms. Rodriguez's comment that "Cuts have not been made at the classroom level, but at the administration level, so sometimes as a result the type of monitoring that's needed suffers".

I have one question, how can cuts be made at the classroom level, if the service and/or appropriate service(s) hasn't been there to begin with?

In my opinion, the lack of monitoring is NOT because there have been a few cuts. Lack of monitoring (as well as lack of services/programs) is a District wide problem that has been happening a very LONG time, even as far back as 2003 when the last audit was held.

▪ [reply](#)

Tue, 01/19/2010 - 06:52 — [liznmike](#)

meeting

REMINDER: MEETING WEDNESDAY NIGHT 7pm at JFK MIDDLE SCHOOL TO DISCUSS THE AUDIT IN QUESTION!!! COME ONE COME ALL!! SEE WHAT YOUR CITY HAS BEEN SPENDING MONEY ON AND NOT!!

▪ [reply](#)

Post new comment

Your name:

Catherine Baum

Subject:

Comment: *

Input format

Filtered HTML

- Web page addresses and e-mail addresses turn into links automatically.
- Allowed HTML tags: <a> <i> <code> <cite> <div>
- Lines and paragraphs break automatically.

Full HTML

- Web page addresses and e-mail addresses turn into links automatically.
- Lines and paragraphs break automatically.

unfiltered HTML

[More information about formatting options](#)



[Local News](#) | [State/Region](#) | [U.S./World](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Sports](#) | [Business](#) | [Schools](#) | [Colleges](#) | [Politics](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Health](#) | [Living](#) | [Sci/Tech](#) | [Blogs](#)

[Copyright Notice](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Help Center](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Subscribe to the Gazette](#) | [Advertising](#)

Daily Hampshire Gazette © 2008 All rights reserved