



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services

FROM: Leslie M. Averna, Acting Associate Commissioner *LMA*

SUBJECT: Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services Up-date *update #1*

DATE: September 30, 1996

As many of you know, over the course of the last few months there have been a number of changes within the Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services. I have met with the Special Education Advisory Council, the Executive Board of CONNCASE and representatives of CAPSEF to share information about some of these changes, but have not communicated directly with each of you. This letter, therefore, will serve to apprise you of some of these changes.

1. After many years of nurturing the development and growth of the bureau as its Chief, Dr. Tom Gillung was asked by Commissioner Sergi to assist the City of Hartford in assessing and improving its services and programs to students with disabilities. While staff were saddened to have him leave the bureau, Tom welcomed this new challenge and the opportunities it afforded him. I am currently serving as acting chief, until the process for hiring a new bureau chief is completed. Recruitment of potential candidates is completed and interviews will be scheduled for early October. The expectation is that the new chief will come on board by December 1, 1996. I have asked CONNCASE, CAPSEF, the Special Education Advisory Council, the Disabilities Council and CAPSS to nominate representatives to sit on the interview committee.
2. In response to the many concerns expressed to me, the Commissioner and staff about the status of special education in the state, bureau staff and I have been engaged in a self-analysis. The self-analysis is to clarify these concerns and to suggest a remedy that results in improved services to students with special needs. The specific concerns that we have heard revolve around the issues of due process, the escalating costs of special education, state agency placements, the high prevalence rate of special education students, the need for alternate strategies for accommodating the learning needs of all students and a compliance system that focuses on procedural aspects and not the quality of programs and the achievement of students.

To date we have collected data; examined the legislative mandates, both state and federal; outlined current policy and procedures; raised issues of concern; and drafted comprehensive reports in the areas of due process, surrogate parents, pupil services, program review, costs, curriculum and instruction, private school approvals, inter/intra agency projects, state agency placements and technical assistance. We have conducted, disseminated and compiled responses to a written survey, and conducted a series of eight statewide focus groups, to seek input from all constituent groups. We are in the process of summarizing our recommendations, and will be making a presentation to the State Board of Education at its November 6, 1996 meeting. It is our plan to make legislative recommendations, set priorities and outline a plan of work for a reorganized bureau that will guide the work of staff over the course of the next five years. When the report is completed, I will send a copy to each of you.

3. As the first step in addressing the areas of concern, we are implementing changes in the due process system effective November 1, 1996. The names of thirteen hearing officers are being presented to the State Board of Education in October for appointment. Each will be required to participate in a series of monthly training sessions that will focus on rules of evidence, special education case law and regulations, hearing officer jurisdiction, managing the hearing, defining issues, conducting a prehearing conference, preparing a hearing decision, researching law and policies through the LRP-Net and discussing relevant special education issues. Each will be evaluated on a yearly basis. Each will conduct prehearing conferences by telephone and handle all requests regarding scheduling, communicating with the parties, etc. The due process unit has developed job descriptions for hearing officers, procedures for operation of the system, an evaluation instrument and a training plan. I have assigned James Papillo, Esquire, to manage this system in its entirety. He will be monitoring these changes to ensure the implementation of a more efficient and effective system that benefits all involved parties. We will be using a written survey to solicit the input of all parties at the conclusion of a hearing to monitor our progress in this regard.
4. It is our ultimate goal to provide more consistent services to districts in a more organized way. The relationship between mediations, hearings, complaints, compliance, the IDEA application, prevalence rate, placements, costs, CMT exemption rate and student achievement will be analyzed using available data. We expect these elements to form the basis for a user-friendly, participatory technical assistance process which, through a team approach with LEA staff, will improve the teaching and learning process.

For the current school year, I have asked staff to devote their time to: the development activities of finalizing draft guidelines and policy directives; the innovative activities of completing the self-analysis, developing a workplan; the maintenance activities of program reviews, private school approvals, mediations, phone technical assistance; and outlining and disseminating innovative practices that can be replicated statewide. This means that bureau staff will not be available to provide individualized training workshops to districts or to provide individualized technical assistance, but will be using their time to develop the tools necessary for you to improve the teaching and learning process.

We are collectively committed to providing leadership and direction in the field of special education and pupil services and to hiring a bureau chief who shares this vision. We look forward to our continued work with you, as we strive to optimize our capacity and streamline our activities, with the resultant product of improved achievement for the students we serve. I will keep you informed of additional changes as they occur.

cc: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education  
Bureau Staff

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