

# Has Your Child Been Affected by the Special Education Staffing Cuts in Chicago?

On Wednesday, October 4<sup>th</sup>, Judge Robert Gettleman held a status hearing to hear from the attorneys for the parents who brought the original *Corey H.* lawsuit. The hearing was held to determine if the attorneys had presented **enough evidence of harm** from the special education staffing cuts to compel the judge to direct CPS **to restore the cuts**. Judge Gettleman denied the motion to restore the cuts, but made it clear that he is concerned with the potential impact that such a huge reduction in staff will have on services to children with disabilities.

Kathleen Gibbons, an attorney for the Chicago Public Schools, confirmed that nearly **750 special education staff positions** (170 teachers and 580 paraprofessionals) **had been cut**, after some cuts made this summer were restored. She **continues to claim**, however, that CPS is fully complying with the IEPs of all children in special education and that these staffing cuts have not affected services to children. Gibbons made a commitment in court, that **all IEP violations** that are brought to the attention of CPS **will quickly be corrected**, and services and staff will be restored.

Parents should **hold Kathleen Gibbons to her word**. We are encouraging all parents who have been negatively affected by the cuts to **write directly to Ms. Gibbons** to ask for needed changes.

Parent should send a letter to Ms. Gibbons documenting the effect of these cuts on your child's services. You should send a letter if:

- The school is not providing all of the services that are written into your child's IEP
- The school has refused to include services that your child needs in his or her IEP within the last year (such as a one-on-one aide). In some schools, the staff has told parents that one-on-one services are no longer available, while these services are continuing to be provided in other schools.

Please note that **1500 minutes** makes up an entire school week. Some students who have previously received a full time aide (1500 minutes) have seen a decrease in the number of minutes that are written into the IEP, or the IEP does not indicate the number of minutes for paraprofessional support. If your child needs a full time aide, all 1500 minutes should be accounted for in the IEP.

If your child needs an **instructional aide** (for example, assistance with curriculum modification or with staying focused on instructional tasks), be sure that the specific areas and skills in which your child needs support are written out in the IEP. Some students who have previously had instructional aides are now **being assigned less-qualified paraprofessionals** (for example, child welfare attendants or bus aides). If your child needs instructional support, he or she should be working with a "Special Education Classroom Assistant," who is qualified to provide these services.

When you write to Ms. Gibbons, you should include the following information in your letter:

- Your child's name, grade and/or age, and school
- Your name, phone number and address
- How the school has violated your child's right to a free appropriate public education
- How you want the problem to be corrected

Remind Ms. Gibbons of Chicago's **legal obligation** to meet your child's needs, and of her commitment in court to **correct each and every IEP violation** that has resulted from the staffing cuts.

Parents should address letters directly to:

**Kathleen Gibbons**  
Law Department  
Chicago Public Schools  
125 South Clark Street, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Chicago, IL 60603  
Fax: 773-553-1701

\*If possible, you should **fax** your letter. Also, don't forget to **keep a dated copy** of the letter for your own records and a receipt documenting the date when you sent the letter. You can do this by either sending the letter by certified or registered mail, by hand delivering the letter and getting a receipt or date stamp, or printing out a dated record that shows when the letter was faxed.

Parents should also fax or mail copies of this letter ("cc the letter") to the **five** people listed below:

- **Kathleen Yannias**—Ms. Yannias is the court-appointed monitor who is responsible for ensuring that CPS is complying with the *Corey H.* Settlement Agreement. Please send letters to Ms. Yannias by fax, or mail to:

**Kathleen Yannias**  
Corey H. Monitor  
c/o American Bar Foundation  
750 North Lake Shore Drive, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Chicago, IL 60610  
Fax: 312-988-6611

- **Renee Grant-Mitchell**—Ms. Grant-Mitchell is the Chief Specialized Services Officer for Chicago Public Schools. Send letters to:

**Renee Grant-Mitchell**  
Chief Officer, Specialized Services  
Chicago Public Schools  
125 South Clark Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Chicago, IL 60603  
Fax: 773-553-1801

- **Respicio Vazquez**—Mr. Vazquez is an attorney for the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) who is working on the *Corey H.* Case. Send letters to:

**Respicio R. Vazquez, Esq.**  
Franczek Sullivan  
300 S. Wacker Drive, Suite 3400  
Chicago, IL 60606  
Fax: 312- 986-9192

- **John Elson**—Mr. Elson is one of the plaintiff's attorneys in the *Corey H.* lawsuit. Send letters to:

**John Elson**  
Bluhm Legal Clinic  
Northwestern University School of Law  
357 East Chicago Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60611-3069  
**Fax:** 312-503-8977

- **Designs for Change**—We are working to document each individual student and/or family that has been affected by the cuts. We would like to get parents, educators and advocates from across the city **working together** to speak out against the cuts. Please send a copy of your letter to:

**Laura Rhyner**  
Designs for Change  
814 S. Western Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60612  
**Fax:** 312-236-7927

Please note that we will keep your letter confidential unless you wish to become publicly involved in the campaign to restore the special education cuts in Chicago. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact Laura Rhyner at Designs for Change, 312-236-7252, ext. 242.