



**BETSY GOTBAUM**  
PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
*Solving Problems • Protecting New Yorkers*

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## POLICY

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## Reports

### Learning Support Center Survey

#### Introduction

In June of 2002, Mayor Bloomberg gained mayoral control of the former Board of Education. Since then, the Mayor has worked to implement the largest reorganization of New York City's educational system in history. The Department of Education's Children First agenda revamped the organizational structure of the system by creating ten new regional instructional divisions. These ten regions, each with a regional superintendent, will be in charge of 10-12 local instructional superintendents. Each of these local instructional superintendents in turn will supervise 10-12 schools.

A new uniform curriculum will be implemented at approximately 800 of the City's schools this coming 2003-2004 academic year. At the same time, reforms are also planned for New York City's English Language Learners and special needs students. Individual schools will also see new additions to their staff, like the math and reading coaches, and parent coordinators.

To make sense of all these new changes associated with the reorganization, the Department of Education (DOE) has established ten Learning Support Centers (LSCs) and three satellite offices in each of the 10 Instructional Learning Divisions throughout the City. These offices were meant to provide an outlet where parents of New York City public education students could interface with the DOE and have their questions and issues addressed.

With a multitude of new changes being implemented by the Department of Education in a short period, it is vital that parents have access to clear and concise information. It is especially important that the structures established to ensure that parents receive access to information are effectively achieving this goal. In order to determine how well LSCs are serving New York City's parents, the Public Advocate's Office conducted a telephone survey of all ten LSCs and one district office. In order to accommodate the area, the DOE has set up a district office in District 7. This district office was included in our survey because district 7 is the only district where parents would have to travel a long way to reach their designated LSC.

#### Methodology

Five surveyors placed telephone calls to each of the ten regional learning centers and District 7. In total, 55 calls were placed to LSCs. All calls were made between August 5 through August 7.

The following five sets of questions, reflecting possible student scenarios, were asked of staff members who answered calls at each learning support center:

#### **Student New to New York City**

I am new to this neighborhood. Which schools will my children attend?

What kinds of documents will I need to register my child for school?

Does my child's school have after school opportunities? How can I sign him/her up?

Does my child's school have advanced placement classes? How can he/she sign up?

I would like my youngest child to attend pre-kindergarten. How can I get him/her enrolled?

How will my child get to school?

If my child is traveling by bus, I am concerned about his/her safety on the school bus. Who will look out for him/her on the bus?

What free meals are available? How do I sign up?

#### **English Language Learner New to New York City**

I am new to this neighborhood. Which schools will my children attend?

How do I get my children's English language skills assessed?

How do I get their international transcripts evaluated?

What kinds of ELL programs are available for my children? Will their schools have a bilingual program? Do they have an ESL program?

#### **Special Needs Student New to New York City**

I am new to this neighborhood and have a disabled child. Where is my child going to school?

How do I get him/her evaluated?

If necessary, how do I appeal my child's evaluation?

How will my child get to school?

#### **Returning Elementary School Student**

How can I find out whether my child is eligible for supplementary tutoring services?

Does my child's school have after school opportunities? How can I sign him/her up?

What effect will the budget crisis have on class size? Will my child be guaranteed a seat?

Will the new uniform curriculum be taught at my child's school?

What do you know about the new curriculum?

Is my child in a failing school?

Where can I get thorough info on my kid's school? (Test scores, attendance, etc.)

What publications can I get at the LSC?

Who is the parent coordinator at my child's school?

How can I meet with the parent coordinator?

The parent coordinator at my child's school did not satisfactorily address my issues. Where else can I go?

If I want to transfer my child to another school, where should I apply?

### **Returning High School Student without High School Placement**

My child did not get into any of the high schools of her choice. How can I get my child placed?

I do not want her to go to her zoned high school. How can I get my child placed in another high school?

### **Findings**

According to the Department of Education, Learning Support Centers are meant to "address parental or guardian concerns or obtain information about school instruction, transportation, registration, safety, security, facilities, and other school matters." [1] Chancellor Klein has also testified in his June appearance before the New York State Assembly Committee on education that under the new system of learning support centers and district offices "points of access are so much greater for parents."

With the current system's army of LSCs, Chancellor's Hotline, and district offices, the Department of Education seems to be providing an increased number of outlets for parents to call. However, based on our finding, these centers only serve as points of access, not points of information, with some providing simply incorrect answers.

The Public Advocate's survey made the following findings:

81.8 percent of the surveyed sites referred questions concerning supplementary educational services elsewhere.

Of the eleven sites surveyed concerning the availability of supplementary educational services, ten of the sites did not know the answer and only one LSC (Region 10) was able to provide the answer.

Nine (81.8%) of these sites referred the surveyor to check on the DOE's website or to call the Chancellor's hotline. When told

that the surveyor did not have internet access, two of the surveyed sites (LSC 4 and 5) said that all of their information was from the DOE website and that their internet was not working.

None of the surveyed sites had information on questions concerning after school programs and referred the surveyor elsewhere.

Calls were made to eleven survey sites concerning the availability of after school programs at a particular school. All of the survey sites referred the surveyor to check on the DOE's website, call the school or the Chancellor's hotline.

63.6 percent of the surveyed sites referred questions concerning the new Uniform Curriculum elsewhere.

Of the eleven sites surveyed concerning the implementation of a new uniform curriculum at a particular school, eight of the sites did not know the answer. Seven (63.6%) referred the surveyor to check on the DOE's website, call the school or the Chancellor's hotline. Three of the sites incorrectly informed the surveyor that the uniform curriculum was going to be taught in all public schools.

When asked details on the curriculum, five of the sites said they did not have any information, and the remaining other six referred the surveyor to the DOE website or the Chancellor's hotline.

63.6 percent of the surveyed sites referred questions concerning the performance status of schools elsewhere.

Of the eleven sites surveyed on whether a particular school was "failing" or not, eight did not know the answer and seven (63.6%) referred the surveyor to check on the DOE's website, call the school or the Chancellor's hotline. Only three were able to provide an answer.

All of the surveyed sites stated they did not have any publications.

All eleven sites surveyed on the availability of publications at the survey sites replied they did not have anything. Three of the sites recommended that the surveyor go to the public library, check online, or read the PTA newsletter.

All the surveyed sites referred questions concerning parent coordinators elsewhere.

All eleven sites surveyed on who the parent coordinators were at particular schools could not answer and referred the surveyor to the individual schools.

18 percent of the surveyed sites told the surveyor requesting a transfer referred the caller elsewhere or could not provide any assistance.

Of the eleven sites surveyed on school transfers, nine (81.8%) asked the surveyor to come to the sites in person, so they could

assist them. One of the two remaining centers referred the surveyor to the Director of Student Placement or Regional Parent Coordinator; the other said they could not help.

All of the surveyed sites referred questions concerning documentation required of new students to register for school elsewhere.

Of the eleven calls made to the survey sites concerning the kinds of documentation required for new students to register in New York City public schools, none knew the answer and all referred the surveyor to check at the schools.

All of the surveyed sites referred questions concerning regarding the availability of Pre-Kindergarten programs elsewhere.

Of the eleven calls made to the survey sites concerning the availability of pre-kindergarten, none knew the answer and all referred the surveyor to check at the schools.

All of the surveyed sites referred questions regarding free meal programs elsewhere.

Of the eleven calls made to the survey sites concerning the availability of free meals in the schools, none knew the answer and all referred the surveyor to check at the schools.

66.6 percent of the surveyed sites reached referred questions concerning English language assessment of recently arrived immigrant children elsewhere.

Of the eleven sites surveyed concerning English language assessment of recently arrived immigrant children, we were able to reach nine. Six (66.6%) of the sites reached referred the surveyor to neighborhood schools; one site incorrectly replied that no test was necessary; another was unsure who administered the tests; and the other remaining center asked the surveyor to come to the LSC for an interview.

Surveyed sites gave varying answers on questions regarding the evaluation of international transcripts for immigrant children.

Calls were made to eleven survey sites concerning the evaluation of international transcripts for recently arrived immigrant children. We were able to reach nine of the sites. Four of the sites identified a neighborhood school, and told the surveyor to bring transcripts to that school for evaluation. However, three of the other sites incorrectly told the surveyor that the transcripts had to be translated into English before coming to school. One site informed the surveyor that the transcripts did not need to be translated, and that the parent could do it verbally. One site told surveyor to come to the LSC.

36 percent of the surveyed sites could either not be reached or were unable to provide definitive answers to queries concerning the availability of Bilingual programs for English Language Learners.

Calls were made to eleven survey sites concerning the availability of bilingual programs for English Language Learners and we were able to reach nine of the sites. Seven (77.7%) of the sites reached were able to identify neighborhoods schools and provide definitive answers to whether these schools had bilingual programs. Two of the sites did not know the answer to our query.

36 percent of the surveyed sites could either not be reached or provide definitive answers to queries concerning the availability of ESL programs for English Language Learners.

Calls were made to eleven survey sites concerning the availability of bilingual programs for English Language Learners and we were able to reach nine of these sites. Seven (77.7%) of the sites reached were able to identify neighborhoods schools and answer whether these schools had ESL programs. Two of the sites did not know the answer to our query.

Surveyed sites could not provide definitive answers to queries concerning the placement of high school students.

Calls were made to eleven survey sites requesting help in the placement of a high school student. We were able to reach six of the sites, left a message for three, and disconnected by two. Of the six sites we were able to reach, two referred the surveyor to the Chancellor's hotline; two informed the surveyor that the student must go to the zoned school; one asked the surveyor to come to the LSC; one incorrectly informed the surveyor that the student had to go to the school listed on the report card.

When surveyor told the sites that the student did not wish to attend a zoned school, only two of the sites were willing to work with the surveyor to place the student; the others insisted that they must attend the zoned schools.

Surveyed sites provided varying answers to queries concerning the evaluations of special needs students.

Calls were made to eleven survey sites concerning the process of special needs evaluations. We were able to reach nine of the sites. Even though Mayor Bloomberg's Special Education reforms signal the end of special needs evaluations conducted at the district level, five of the sites continued to refer the surveyor to the no longer functioning district Committee on Special Education (CSEs). The other three sites informed the surveyor that the evaluations would be conducted at the school. One remaining site referred the surveyor to the Special Education Office at DOE's central office.

Only 11.1 percent of the surveyed sites reached provided clear answers to queries concerning the appeals process for special needs evaluations.

Calls were made to eleven survey sites concerning the process of special needs evaluations. We were able to reach nine of the sites. Only one (11.1%) of the surveyed sites reached explained the process clearly. Four of the sites reached referred the surveyor to the no longer functioning district CSEs; one site referred the surveyor to the Special Education Office at

DOE's central office; one site informed the surveyor that the child could not be placed in special education classes if the parent does not sign the consent form and that then there is nothing to appeal; and one site told the surveyor to ask the school for help.

63.6 percent of the surveyed centers could either not be reached or were unable to provide accurate answers on the provision of transportation for special education students.

Calls were made to eleven survey sites concerning the provision of transportation for special education students. We were able to reach nine of the sites. Only three (33.3%) of the sites reached were able to give accurate answers on how transportation is provided. Four (44.4%) of the sites reached referred the surveyor to the no longer functioning district CSEs, while another site referred the surveyor to a school. One remaining site did not know the answer.

66.6 percent of the surveyed sites reached could not provide answers concerning safety provisions on school buses.

Calls were made to eleven survey sites concerning safety provisions on school buses. We were able to reach nine of the sites. Six (66.6%) of the sites reached did not know the answer, while the remaining three (33.3%) sites replied that there would be matrons on the bus.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Based on our survey, Learning Support Centers, for the most part, were unable to resolve or provide any new information to surveyors when contacted by phone. One occasion, after being put on hold for 45 minutes, the LSC was still unable to provide any information to the caller and referred him/her elsewhere. At a time when parents are facing an array of changes implemented by the Department of Education, LSCs cannot just simply refer parents elsewhere. Not only do LSCs refer callers elsewhere in many of the cases, but also they were found to provide incorrect information on several occasions. These centers serve as the frontline source of information for parents and the public. If the LSCs themselves are not well informed about the many changes taking over at the DOE, how will parents get the answers they need?

Rather than waiting until the days or weeks before school starts, training for LSC staff should have begun earlier in the school year, and must be ongoing as reforms continue. Most of all, it is imperative that workers at these centers are provided with the latest and most accurate information on DOE's reform efforts and its implementation processes.

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