



The Advocate

Fall
2017

Advocates for Children of New York
Protecting every child's right to learn

www.advocatesforchildren.org

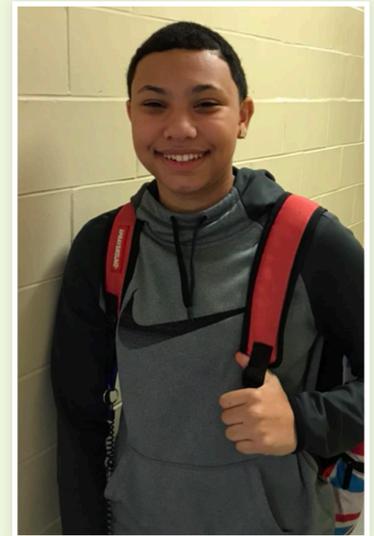
MISSION STATEMENT

Advocates for Children of New York's mission is to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds. AFC achieves this through four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents and professionals, to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and to compel needed education reform.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Corvair's Story

When 14-year-old Corvair's mother, Suarin, first called AFC's Helpline two years ago, she was desperate to find an appropriate school program that could meet Corvair's needs. Corvair, a student with ADHD and significant learning disabilities who had been receiving special education services since elementary school, had long struggled to make academic progress and was being bullied by peers. Instead of providing appropriate services to meet Corvair's learning needs, the school decided to manage Corvair's academic anxiety by "taking all academic pressure away," leaving Corvair to wander the halls for long stretches of time or sit alone listening to audiobooks, rather than complete schoolwork.



As a result, Corvair fell further and further behind while growing increasingly discouraged and disengaged from school. In addition, the school failed to address the bullying, and so shortly after the start of sixth grade—feeling she had no other options—Suarin pulled Corvair out of school and began home-schooling while attempting to find a new placement. When the only school offered by the Department of Education (DOE) was the same one at which Corvair had been bullied and felt unsafe, Advocates for Children intervened, helping Corvair enroll at a private special education school that could provide a smaller, more structured learning environment. With assistance from our pro bono partners at Greenberg Traurig, LLP, we then represented Corvair at an impartial hearing to secure specialized one-on-one reading tutoring to help make up for all the years the DOE failed to provide appropriate instruction.

As Corvair prepared to transition to ninth grade, AFC assisted the family with their high school search. A comprehensive evaluation determined that, given changing social-emotional needs, Corvair would do best in a therapeutic setting that could provide individualized academic remediation as well as emotional and behavioral supports, and so at an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting in August, AFC successfully advocated for a new school placement that could do just that. Upon learning that busing would be set up in time for the first day of school in September, Corvair's mom wrote to their AFC attorney, "Thank you for everything you and your colleagues do for us, not sure where we would be if not for you. You have done so much and beyond... You are by far the absolute best!!"



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Monday–Thursday
10am–4pm

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School Accessibility

Students, parents, and school staff who need accessible school sites have a right to access schools that can meet their mobility, vision, and hearing needs—but finding a school in NYC that meets those needs can be complicated. A school can be:

- **Fully accessible**, meaning that students can use all parts of the building, including the cafeteria, gym, library, science labs, art rooms, etc.;
- **Partially accessible**, meaning that individuals with mobility impairments can enter and exit the building and access relevant programs and at least one restroom, but some parts of the building (for example, some classrooms or public spaces) may not be accessible; or
- **Inaccessible**, meaning there are no accessible bathrooms or classrooms.

There's no consistent standard for partially accessible schools, so for now, the best way to find out if a particular school meets a student's needs is to visit in person. The Department of Education (DOE) is currently in the process of creating Building Accessibility Profiles (BAPs) to provide families with more detailed information, starting with buildings that house high school grades. Visit <http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/OSP/Accessibility.htm> to download a list of fully and partially accessible schools and view BAPs for a limited number of buildings in Districts 1-12 and 31.

In June 2017, the ARISE Coalition (coordinated by Advocates for Children) and Parents for Inclusive Education (PIE) held a panel discussion and speak-out on school accessibility. The panelists, four NYC middle and high school students with physical disabilities, discussed the many challenges that come with trying to find a truly accessible school, including limited choices and the importance of social inclusion. To learn more, go to www.arisecoalition.org/latest-news/category/accessibility.

NEW GUIDES & RESOURCES

Advocates for Children has several new publications for parents and professionals!

- Our **Guide to Manifestation Determination Review (MDR)** covers the rights of students with disabilities facing discipline. It explains what happens at an MDR, how to prepare for the meeting, and what parents can do if they disagree with the school's decision; it's available in English and Spanish at www.advocatesforchildren.org/node/1156.
- Our **Guide for Court-Involved Students** provides an overview of the education rights of young people ages 7 to 21 in New York City who are or were involved in the juvenile or criminal justice system. It includes information about the education rights of youth in community and court-ordered settings (such as juvenile detention, juvenile placement, or Rikers Island), as well as information to help students transition back to school. The guide is available in English and Spanish at www.advocatesforchildren.org/node/1143.
- Our new fact sheet on **Applying for ACCES-VR**, the New York State agency that helps people with disabilities discover and achieve their goals for employment, is available at www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/applying_for_accesvr.pdf.



You can learn more about your child's rights in school in just 5 to 7 minutes with AFC's Blackboard Bulletin podcast! Episodes are available in both English and Spanish at <http://soundcloud.com/advocatesforchildren>.

Back to School Questions & Answers for Families of Students with Disabilities in New York City

My child is supposed to receive assistive technology (AT) or related services (OT, PT, counseling, etc.). Who do I contact to make certain that happens?

Your child has a right to receive all the services on his/her IEP, and all schools should be able to provide related services and AT. If your child is not actually receiving these services at the start of the school year, first try to work with your school (your child's teacher, the parent coordinator, and the school's principal). You can also reach out to the Family Support Coordinator at your Superintendent's office (for contact information, see <http://schools.nyc.gov/superintendents>). If you are still having trouble resolving the matter, contact the DOE's Special Education Hotline at (718) 935-2007 or email RelatedServices@schools.nyc.gov. If the school cannot provide a service, school staff should work with their Field Support Center (FSC) to identify a provider at a contract agency. If that doesn't work, the FSC will issue a Related Services Authorization (RSA), which is a voucher that allows you to go to an independent provider for related services.

What if my child needs a self-contained class (small class in a District 75 or district school) and still doesn't have a school placement?

You may be entitled to a P-I letter (also called a "Nickerson" letter) that allows you to place your child in a state-approved non-public school that can provide the program on your child's IEP for one school year at DOE expense. This is complicated, so please see Advocates for Children's Guide to Special Education for more details; the guide is available in English, Spanish, Arabic, Bengali, and Chinese at www.advocatesforchildren.org/get_help/guides and resources. You can also call our Helpline for assistance: (866) 427-6033, Monday-Thursday, 10am-4pm.

Check out our start-of-school fact sheet for answers to these and other frequently asked questions, available in English and Spanish at <http://bit.ly/bksch12017>.

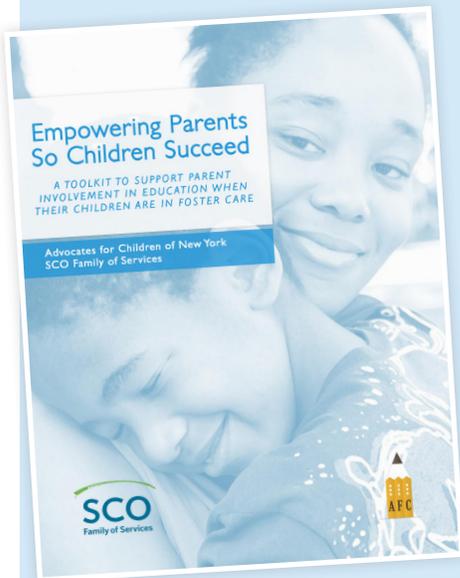
FEATURED

Empowering Parents of Students in Foster Care

For the past three years, Advocates for Children's Project Achieve—our project focused on students involved in the child welfare system—has been partnering with SCO Family of Services, a social services provider, to build the agency's capacity to address the education-related needs of the children they serve. As part of this ongoing partnership, AFC and SCO have been working to develop best practices and create resources to help foster care agencies engage and empower parents to take an active role in their children's education when they are apart and be better prepared for when their children return home. This September, we jointly released a new report, *Empowering Parents So Children Succeed*, which provides recommendations for child welfare agencies as well as an easy-to-use toolkit to support parent involvement in education when their children are in foster care.

"Parent engagement can have a dramatic impact on a child's education, and the recommendations contained in the report demonstrate that more can be done to fully engage parents in their children's education while in foster care," says Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children. "These recommendations provide a road map for involving parents who have often felt excluded and focus on shared education planning and decision-making, with parents serving as both advocates for their children and partners with schools and foster care agencies."

To download a copy of the report and toolkit, go to www.advocatesforchildren.org/parent_toolkit.



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Or email us at info@advocatesforchildren.org

We can speak to you in your language.

TO MAKE A DONATION

If you would like to make a donation to support our work, please send your gift to:

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Or visit us online at

www.advocatesforchildren.org.

Questions about donating? Contact Linda at lyassky@afcnyc.org or (212) 822-9512.

FREE ONSITE WORKSHOPS

To schedule a training at your school or organization, contact Joanne at jbuccellato@afcnyc.org or (212) 822-9505.

KEEP IN TOUCH!

Sign up for our monthly Blackboard Bulletin and other email updates at <http://bit.ly/AFCsignup>.

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