

The Advocate

Summer
2019

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.

Elijah's Story

Elijah is a shy young man with autism and a language-based learning disability who was referred to Advocates for Children when he was seventeen, repeating the tenth grade, and in danger of being held back yet again. Despite years of academic and social-emotional struggles indicating that he was a student on the autism spectrum, Elijah had only recently been diagnosed with this disability. As a result, though he had strong attendance and received a variety of special education services starting in kindergarten, Elijah failed many of his classes, struggled socially, and was not on track to earn a diploma, even though he clearly had the intellectual capacity to do so.

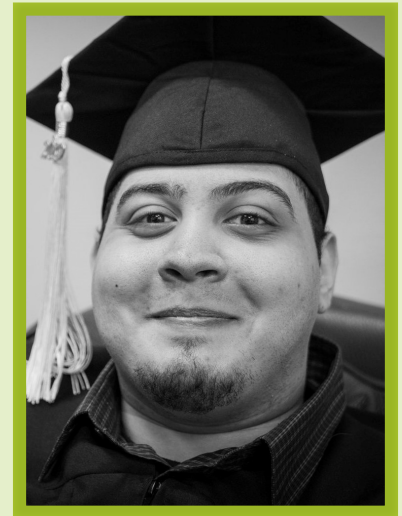


Photo courtesy of Gersh Academy

After a comprehensive evaluation showed that Elijah was performing far below his potential, the New York City Department of Education (DOE) agreed that he needed a new school placement. However, the only schools the DOE offered Elijah either did not have space for a student his age, or only served lower-functioning students and could not provide access to a diploma-track curriculum. Advocates for Children took the case and worked quickly to ensure that Elijah would get the help he needed before he aged out of high school. We successfully secured his placement at Gersh Academy, a small non-public school that specializes in serving students on the autism spectrum. At Gersh, Elijah finally received autism-specific supports to help him develop communication, socialization, and independent living skills, and he thrived in the school's structured, therapeutic setting. He graduated in June with a Regents diploma and is currently exploring vocational training programs as he figures out what's next!

BACK TO SCHOOL!

We've updated our start-of-school question & answer fact sheet for 2019! The fact sheet covers common problems families of students with disabilities face at the beginning of a new school year, from services not being in place to the school bus arriving late. Go to www.advocatesforchildren.org/backtoschool to download the fact sheet in English or Spanish.

For more information on school transportation, check out our most recent Facebook Live session at [http://bit.ly/fblivebusing!](http://bit.ly/fblivebusing)



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NEW GUIDES & RESOURCES

Guide to Preventing & Addressing Bullying in Charter Schools

AFC has a new bullying guidebook, written especially for families of students attending New York City charter schools! The guide, which explains the education rights of students who are bullied or engaged in bullying behavior, is available along with related resources at www.advocatesforchildren.org/who_we_serve/bullying.

Reading Milestones

The last issue of *The Advocate* — our “special edition” on literacy — included a section on reading milestones from pre-K through second grade. That article is now available as a fact sheet, designed to help parents understand what their child should be learning and how to recognize possible warning signs of dyslexia. You can download the fact sheet at <http://bit.ly/readingmilestones>.

New Translations: Resources in Korean and Chinese

- » AFC's fact sheets *High School Graduation Options for Students with Disabilities* and *Appeal Options for Regents Exams* are newly available in Korean, thanks to our partners at Community Inclusion & Development Alliance (CIDA)! You can find the fact sheets at www.advocatesforchildren.org/korean.
- » We also have two new Chinese “know your rights” training videos, created with help from the Chinese-American Planning Council! Both videos provide information on the rights of immigrant students and families in New York City, one with a focus on early childhood education and one with a focus on high school admissions. They are available at www.advocatesforchildren.org/chinese.

FEATURED PARTNERSHIPS



AFC's Project Achieve, which is dedicated to serving students involved in the child welfare system, has a particularly unique model: we partner intensively with one foster care agency over a period of several years, sharing our expertise and building the agency's capacity to advocate for the educational needs of children in their care. Project Achieve staff spend three to five years on site at our partner agency, conducting intake and consulting on individual cases, training agency staff, and building internal systems so that once we leave, agencies have the tools and knowledge to address school-related problems as a regular part of their work. Last summer, Project Achieve started a new collaboration with our latest partner, Good Shepherd Services in the Bronx!

“Working with Project Achieve is refreshing because I know what appropriate education should be for our children. I feel more confident doing my job because I know I'm doing it the right way.”

— Carolyn,
Education Specialist

We were also very excited to launch a brand-new Education Collaborative last fall to support a wider group of professionals working in the field of child welfare. The Collaborative provides a space for peer learning and information-sharing, bringing together education specialists from sixteen of the City's foster care agencies on a monthly basis; the group shares resources and best practices, trouble-shoots challenging cases, develops a cohesive voice on policy issues, and provides members with a network of support. So far we've discussed topics like arranging transportation, improving school attendance, and helping students access tutoring and summer programs. We're looking forward to building on our success and continuing to learn from one another in the coming school year!

Protecting the Rights of Students with Disabilities Attending Charter Schools

Last fall, Advocates for Children, along with pro bono co-counsel Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, filed a complaint against Success Academy Charter Schools and the New York City Department of Education (DOE) for failing to comply with federal and state civil rights laws protecting students with disabilities. In February, the State Education Department (NYSED) issued a strong decision agreeing with our allegations — that Success Academy changed students' placements without following procedures required to protect the rights of students with disabilities and their parents and also refused to comply with administrative hearing orders in special education cases. NYSED's decision, which requires Success and the DOE to take corrective action, makes clear that while charter schools have more autonomy than other public schools, they do not get to decide which special education laws to follow. Visit www.advocatesforchildren.org/node/1338 to read the complaint and the decision.



Three months into the school year, Mishel was suddenly demoted from 7th to 6th grade and moved to a different type of special education classroom, in violation of her and her parents' rights. After AFC successfully sued for summer tutoring and intensive reading remediation to help Mishel catch up on the months of 7th grade instruction she missed, she and her mother were part of our state complaint to ensure that no other student would have to go through the same ordeal. We helped Mishel enroll in a new middle school last September, and we are so proud of her for persevering and graduating from 8th grade on time! Read more of Mishel's story at www.advocatesforchildren.org/who_we_are_afc/success_stories/mishel.

DID YOU KNOW?

Kindergarten through sixth grade students living in homeless shelters have the right to yellow bus service!

New York City recently made the right to busing for K-6 students in shelter an official legal requirement — not just a matter of practice — by changing the Chancellor's Regulations. This rule makes it much easier for students to continue attending the school they attended before becoming homeless, even if their family is placed in a shelter far from their neighborhood. If you have questions or need assistance arranging transportation for a student experiencing homelessness, please call AFC's NYS-TEACHS Infoline at 800-388-2014 or visit www.nysteachs.org.

CELEBRATING AFC STAFF



LEFT: AFC Parent Center Director Lilliana Díaz-Pedrosa (20 years at AFC), Executive Director Kim Sweet (12 years), and Senior Advocate and PTIC Co-Director Ana Espada (30 years).

RIGHT: AFC Deputy Director Matthew Lenaghan (20 years at AFC) and Ana.

This spring, we celebrated the workiversaries of 17 staff members who have each been at Advocates for Children for more than a decade! The star of the evening was Senior Advocate and PTIC Co-Director Ana Espada, who has been helping New York City students at suspension hearings for 30 years. Go to <http://bit.ly/afcfrank> to watch a video message from a client from 1989, Frank Valverde, who explains how Ana helped him get his education back on track, saying "I would not be where I am today if I did not meet you on that day."

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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 Ivette at igreenblatt@afcnyc.org or (212) 822-9529.

FREE ONSITE WORKSHOPS

To schedule a training at your school or organization, email workshops@afcnyc.org.

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