

# CONNECTIONS



*A Quarterly Newsletter  
From the Parent Network of the Capital Region*

**FALL 2013**

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*The mission of the Parent Network of the Capital Region is to provide parents with the knowledge, skills, and resources to facilitate productive relationships with their school districts ensuring an appropriate education for their child. These services are offered free-of-charge.*

## Common Core Learning Standards and Students with Disabilities

*By: Elizabeth DeLibero, PNCR Director*

The provision of 'Least Restrictive Environment' ensures that students with disabilities are, to the greatest extent possible, educated alongside their non-disabled peers. This means access to the general education curriculum and high standards for students with disabilities. In New York State this means that most students with disabilities will be participating in instruction based on the Common Core Learning Standards.

Many parents have questions about the Common Core Learning Standards and how they impact their child with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Some of these questions have been related to modifications and accommodations for students with disabilities. The Common Core learning standards do not change a

modifications of their educational instruction and testing as documented on their IEP. Let's be clear about the difference between an accommodation and a modification.

**Accommodations** are adjustments made in how a student with a disability is taught or tested. Accommodations do not change what the student is taught or what he is expected to know. Common examples of accommodations are: highlighted textbooks, extension of time for a student who writes slowly, or seating close to the teacher.

**Modifications** change the level of instruction provided or tested. Modifications create a different standard for the student receiving them. The most common modifications

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# Diploma Options for Students with Disabilities

By: Mary Fornabia, Special Education Resource Specialist

Beginning with the 2013-2014 school year, the New York State Board of Regents has approved a new exiting credential for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities will be able to earn a **New York State, (NYS) Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Commencement Credential**. This credential will recognize each individual student's preparation and skills for post-school employment. Where in the past, many students graduated with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) diploma, this credential provides a **more meaningful** substitute for these students. For students with disabilities who are exiting with a regular high school diploma, it provides them with the **additional** opportunity to exit school with a credential that also recognizes the students' word readiness skills.

Also, beginning this school year, the New York State Individualized Education Program (IEP) diploma will be replaced with a **Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential** for students with severe disabilities who are eligible to take the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA).

For more detailed information on these credentials go to: [www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/gradrequire.html](http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/gradrequire.html)



## **SAFETY NET OPTION**

Only students with a disability who are aiming to exit with a local high school diploma (not a regents diploma), are eligible for the **Compensatory Safety Net Option**. The student is eligible for the compensatory safety net option if he/she meets ALL the following requirements:

- is classified as a student with a disability and has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), or was declassified in grade eight or later and the committee on special education recommended that the student

continues to be eligible to graduate with a local diploma through the safety net options: or

- has a Section 504 Plan Accommodation Plan and is recommended for the safety net on his/her Section 504 Plan.
- The Student earned at least a score of 55 on both English language arts and Math Regents examinations that are required for graduation.
- The student earned a score of 65 or higher on one or more required Regents examinations to compensate, on a one to one basis, for each required Regents examination in which he or she received a score of 45-54.
- The student earned a passing grade, as determined by the school, in the subject area of the required Regents examinations in which he or she received a score of 45-54.
- The student has an attendance rate that was deemed to be satisfactory, based on the school district or school's attendance policy, during the school year in which he or she received a score of 45-54 on the required Regents examination.
- The student is relying only on Regents examination scores and not the Regents Competency Test, to obtain a local diploma.

For more information please refer to these very helpful websites.

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/part100/pages/1005.html#assessment>,

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/localdiplomaoptions-may2011.htm>

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/safetynet-compensatoryoption.html>

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# The Afterschool Meltdown

By: Adene Karhan, Special Education Resource Specialist

While emotional meltdowns at the end of a school year can be puzzling and frustrating to parents, it is helpful to keep in mind that behavior is a form of communication. Ideally we would like our children to communicate their feelings through words, but some children either lack the verbal skills to express themselves or are simply so overwhelmed by their emotions that they are unable to articulate them verbally. Instead, what parents may see is a child who sulks, pouts, cries, yells, or even acts out physically.

Here are some things to consider as you address your child's behavior:

- Does your child ride on a bus? If so, is there something about the bus ride that could be triggering the behavior (noise, another student bullying the child, a bus driver who yells?) Consider asking the bus driver to monitor the child's behavior for signs of distress. If possible, ask the child about the bus experience.
- Is your child hungry or thirsty? Children who have difficulty regulating emotions may also have difficulty regulating their body in other ways, including recognizing when they need to eat or drink. Blood sugar levels, lack of proper hydration, and other factors can have a tremendous impact on a child's overall mood.
- Is your child overheated? In addition to having difficulty recognizing hunger and thirst, some children also have difficulty interpreting other bodily signals, such as body temperature. If this is the case, you may need to cue your child to take a few moments to assess body temperature. During times of emotional distress, some children respond very well to a shower or bath.
- Does your child need to have a little bit of quiet alone time after school to recharge before interacting with other family members? Throughout the school day, children are forced to engage in hundreds of social interactions, and this requires a great deal of thought and energy. Some children may need to replenish some of this energy by

spending some quiet time alone at the end of the day.

- Is it possible that another student is bullying your child? Talk to your child about his/her interactions with other children and ask specifically whether there are other children that are saying or doing anything that bothers him/her.
- Consider providing your child with some unstructured "free time" before requiring him/her to complete homework. The school day is very structured, and your child may benefit from having a half hour to engage in an unstructured activity.
- Is the child's behavior related to a medication that he/she is taking? This is important information to share with the prescribing doctor.



Throughout the school year, if you continue to face meltdowns from your child at the end of the school day, bring the issue to the attention of the teacher. Although the behavior is happening at home, the teacher may be able to provide some valuable insight about the behavior that he/she is observing during the school day, and this information may shed some light on the behavior being witnessed at home.

## Common Core - continued

are those made to the general education curriculum for a student with a cognitive disability. When used, curriculum modifications should be written specifically in the student's IEP and not left to interpretation by different individuals.

Many instructional accommodations provide important information in making decisions regarding testing accommodations. However, not all accommodations used during instruction are appropriate (or allowed) for use during State assessments. Example: The use of word banks for classroom assignments are not allowed for State Assessments. However, many testing accommodations remain appropriate. Examples include additional time to complete assessments (usually time and a half or double time), alternate location, and questions read to student (non-reading tests only).

The content of the state tests in ELA and Math cannot be modified. This has always been the case. Parents of children with disabilities may be concerned when they see that their child did not fare well on one of these state assessments. It is important to understand that these tests are not an indicator of how well their child is doing in school towards meeting their IEP goals. They are also not diagnostic in nature and do not tell us how a child learns, or where their strengths and weaknesses lie.

While the common core learning standards are an important guide for educators, they are by no means a 'script' that teachers must implement for all students. So, it is important that families are aware of this while developing their child's IEP with the Committee of Special Education (CSE) so that they can assure that appropriate instructional and test accommodations and modifications are clearly listed on the student's IEP.

More detailed information on accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities can be found at:

<http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/policy/testaccess/guidance.htm>

For information on Least Restrictive Environment go to:

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/lre.osers.memo.idea.htm>

From the Common Core State Standards website: <http://www.corestandards.org/assets/application-to-students-with-disabilities.pdf>

Common Core – Implications for Students Receiving Special Education: <http://www.leadered.com/pdf/Special%20Ed%20&%20CCSS%20white%20paper.pdf>

## UPCOMING PNCR EVENTS

### **Helping Parents and School Districts Become More Effective Partners: Special Education Mediation: A Collaborative Option for Resolving Disputes**

Wednesday, November 6, 2013  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Hudson, NY

### **Special Education Record Keeping Workshop**

Wednesday, November 13, 2013  
10:00am-12:00pm  
Saratoga Springs, NY

### **AT in the IEP**

Monday, November 18, 2013  
9:30am-12:30pm  
Latham, NY

### **Homework Help for Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities**

Thursday, November 21, 2013  
10:00am-11:30am  
Latham, NY

### **Understanding Bullying Risks for Children with Disabilities**

Tuesday, December 10, 2013  
6:30pm-8:00pm  
Latham, NY  
OR

Thursday, December 19, 2013  
10:30am-12:00pm  
Latham, NY

Please visit "Upcoming Events" on our homepage at [www.pncrny.org](http://www.pncrny.org) for complete program descriptions and to register for these events.

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# Strategies to Make Homework Time Less Stressful

*Adapted from Families Together for People with Disabilities' "ABCs of Homework: A Parent's Guide to Helping Children be Successful in School"*



It's that time of year again when the nightly homework struggles between parents and their children resume. For many children, homework can be a difficult task. Many parents, educators and researchers have questioned whether homework actually improves a child's learning directly but what is clear is that homework teaches children important study skills that will become essential to them as they move up the educational ladder. It also teaches them about responsibility and meeting deadlines, two skills that will be critical to surviving the adult world of work. Knowing these things to be true doesn't make it any easier when you are faced with a child who struggles to complete his homework each evening or who forgets to even bring it home!

Here are a few ideas that can help make homework time less frustrating, argumentative and tense for both parents and students:

**Develop a plan:** you and your child should work together to develop a homework plan that includes the time and place where your child will work on their homework. Take into consideration your child's limits and preferences. Some children need time to unwind when they get home from school so an after-dinner timeframe might work best. Other children might prefer to work on their homework as soon as they get home so they can focus on other activities for the remainder of the evening. As much as possible, try to stick to that consistent time that you agree upon. Coming up with an ideal place for your child to work on homework is equally important. Don't automatically banish him to that lonely desk in his bedroom upstairs, away from the rest of the family (unless this is what they prefer). Children spend their day in school around many other kids with lots of commotion and activity going on. You may find that the kitchen table following dinner is an ideal place for them to work. While

the hustle and bustle of family activity going on in the background may be beneficial to some students, the sounds of the family watching television in the next room while they are in the kitchen doing homework could be distracting, frustrating and downright anger-provoking. All family members should respect the designated "homework" time. Discussing what your daily expectations for homework completion, resolving homework issues (i.e.: what your child should do if they are having difficulty) are with your child is also an important part of the plan.

**Use an agenda:** it's a good idea for even the youngest of students to use some sort of tool to organize their homework assignments. A very simple agenda, which simply lists what their homework assignments are and when they are due is a good way for young students to begin learning the skills of organization, planning and prioritizing. Older students will want to keep more details in their agenda such as when the assignment was given, what materials will be used, if it is a group project, who the team members are, etc. Many schools now provide students with agendas. If your child does not receive one from the school a simple notebook for younger students or possibly a day planner for older students will suffice.

**Have necessary materials on-hand:** consider creating a homework "toolbox" with all of the essential supplies your child will need to do homework. The toolbox could include duplicates that were on your child's back-to-school supply list. Depending on the age of your child, throw other essentials like pencil sharpeners, calculators, rulers, glue, etc. in the box as well. Keep the box stocked and nearby the designated homework area so "I can't find a pencil" can no longer be used as an excuse for why homework doesn't get done.

**Know when to say enough is enough:** if your child is truly struggling with a particular homework problem or question that he just doesn't understand or can't resolve, don't spend time arguing about it as this will most likely only end in increased stress and frustration for both of you. Attach a note to your child's teacher explaining that despite your child's best and true effort, they were unable to complete the assignment because (provide reason). If your child is older, encourage them to discuss their difficulty with the teacher directly.

**Offer encouragement and praise:** words of praise and encouragement from a parent can go a long way to keeping a child engaged and motivated where homework

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## Parent Member No Longer Required at CPSE Meetings

In August, section 4410 of New York State Education Law was amended, effective July 31, 2013, by [Chapter 213 of the Laws of 2013](#) in relation to committee on preschool special education (CPSE) membership.

The amendment provides that the additional parent member of the CPSE would only be a required member of the CPSE meeting **if requested** by the parent or a member of the CPSE in writing at least 72 hours prior to the meeting. The parents must receive proper written notice of their right to have an additional parent member attend any meeting of the CPSE along with a statement, prepared by the New York State Education Department (NYSED), explaining the role of having the additional parent attend the meeting.

An additional parent member is a parent of a child with a disability residing in the school district or a neighboring school district and whose child is enrolled in a preschool or elementary level education program.

NYSED has revised the State's required [Committee on Preschool Special Education Meeting Notice Form](#) to include the statement.

## *Homework Strategies-continued*

is concerned. If your child is really struggling, you may want to consider devising a reward system for getting through the work. Celebrate homework successes with your child. Consider doing something extra special for or with your child when they accomplish a particularly difficult task or overcome a major obstacle. This will provide further reinforcement for them to continue their hard work.

Finally, as a parent, it is your job to help your child build the strategies they need to do the work, not how to do the work. Starting early to help your child build good homework skills will go a long way toward laying the foundation for academic success down the road.

**VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT  
WWW.PNCRNY.ORG!**