



DCASE

District of Columbia
Association for Special Education

A rising tide lifts all boats

711-A Edgewood Street NE
Washington, DC 20017
202-615-3070 | info@dcase.org
www.dcase.org

DCASE at Work, 2007-09

In our first two years of operation, the **District of Columbia Association for Special Education**:

Worked to improve special education for all DC students with special needs –

- **Entered into** a substantial multi-year contract with District of Columbia Public Schools. The **DCASE/Blackman-Jones Assessment Project** is ending the wait for mandated assessments for hundreds of DC special education students by implementing and completing backlogged assessments, empowering member schools to do their own assessments, and helping clean up student data long known to be inaccurate. DCASE created a custom database and a monitoring system to closely track assessment progress and timelines, and established a dedicated project office in space provided by one of our member schools. Significant progress has already been achieved in the short time since inception of the project, and a solid model is now in place upon which future relationships can be built. In addition, the project has contributed to DCASE's growing visibility in the DC education and special education communities, and specifically in connection with Blackman-Jones.

Project Status, as of December 4, 2009

In CY 2009:

- 13 DCASE member schools (over 60%) were actively participating in the Assessment Project
- a total of 245 assessments were completed, including 32 in the first week of December alone
- 162 data reconciliations were completed

In addition:

- DCASE now holds a weekly meeting with DCPS staff responsible for assessments and data, increasing collaboration to clean up critical data
 - the Assessment Project's Director has been given administrative status access to the Assessments Quickbase database, allowing DCASE to input timely corrected data and solving concerns about up-to-date data.
- **Worked** closely on the new Special Education Data System being implemented by OSSE. Our goal is to ensure that all members would be able to use the system with the minimal amount of disruption to every day operations and maximum support during implementation.
 - **Organized** and hosted a series of Focus Groups with DCASE member schools, OSSE, and DCPS to explore topics related to revising policy, such as the delivery of related services, IEP development, and transition. These sessions were open to any other interested parties

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to join in. The discussions focused on best practices and increased understanding of the way in which our member schools serve students and their families.

- **Opened** discussions with DCPS and other child-serving agencies to identify ways to establish co-located special education programs and other types of collaborations with members in DC. Discussions continue at regularly scheduled meetings with OSSE and DCPS administrators.
- **Testified** before the DC Council on the proposed legislation to amend the *Placement of Students with Disabilities in Nonpublic Schools Amendment Act of 2006*. While DCASE supports the prohibition against aversive interventions as outlined in the legislation, we commented on the need to broaden the scope of the legislation to include all entities that serve students with special needs, not just the nonpublic, as well as advocated that any oversight involving control and sanction must include due process for the entity controlled.
- **Began planning** our first regional Conference – **Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Forum: Working Toward a Long Term Collaboration**, scheduled for **March 12, 2010** at The University of the District of Columbia David A. Clarke School of Law. Richard Nyankori, DCPS Deputy Chancellor for Special Education, and Tamera Lewis, OSSE Assistant Superintendent for Special Education, are scheduled to participate. This conference will be the start of a series of meetings with pertinent stakeholders to discuss this “hot” topic in a more collaborative and informational manner and setting, advancing DCASE’s efforts to improve educational services and access for DC’s students with special needs.
- **Was selected** to serve on the State Advisory Panel, the Citywide Transition Group, and the Interagency Coordinating Council. Participating in these groups is further enabling DCASE to work toward ensuring that the needs of the students we serve are being heard.

Worked with public and school officials and related organizations –

- **Fostered a good working relationship with** both DCPS’s Office of Special Education (OSE) and **the new Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE)**, resulting in ongoing open communication and a productive participatory role for DCASE. We attend monthly OSSE and DCPS meetings and have contributed input on critical topics, including: monitoring, rate setting, placement in nonpublic settings, and use of EasyIEP. Meetings with key officials have also included the Deputy Chancellor for Special Education; Victor Reinoso, Deputy Mayor for Education; and others involved in Mayor Fenty’s educational reform efforts. In these meetings we have been able to advance for discussion the timely issues that affect our members and the District students they serve.
- **Gained recognition** by DCPS and OSSE as a trustworthy and knowledgeable first contact with respect to issues, responses, and improved communication with all non-public special education schools.

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Worked with and on behalf of members —

- **Arranged** for special guests such as Dr. Richard Nyankori, Deputy Chancellor for Special Education, to attend DCASE membership meetings and foster dialogue between DCASE member schools and key public leaders and education officials. These meetings have resulted in our members having the most current information on the changes within DCPS and the progress of the transition to OSSE of key responsibilities concerning the District students our member schools serve.
- **Testified** before the OSSE on the proposed changes to new regulations for nonpublic schools. The regulations outline: a new process and requirements for obtaining and renewing Certificates of Approval; future monitoring and oversight responsibilities; and the expanded role of the new state entity.
- **Represented** the questions and concerns of members with respect to emerging issues and proposed regulations to ensure they are well informed and able to serve their District students.

Worked to build and improve the DCASE organization —

- **Established** statements on Ethical Practices to which DCASE members are committed, Equitable Principles for Special Education Rate-Setting, and Principles of Co-location; all these can be seen on the DCASE website. These documents have been shared with administrators in OSSE (Office of the State Superintendent for Education) and DCPS. The purpose is to clearly define the roles and responsibilities for future partnership possibilities and to avoid the pitfalls that have plagued such partnerships in the past.

To learn more, please contact DCASE.

[UPDATE December 2009]