



Bridgeport Failed to Identify Students in Need of Special Education

By Diane Orson

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The State Department of Education has determined that Bridgeport Public Schools have violated their obligation to students under the Individuals with Disabilities Act.

Edwin Colon of the Center for Children's Advocacy was one of the attorneys who filed a complaint on behalf of six Bridgeport students. He said, "We've seen a pattern of children with disabilities not being referred for evaluation, primarily kids whose attendance, behavior and grades are of concern."

Federal and state law requires schools to identify and evaluate students who may need special education.

Colon described one student who struggled from first grade on. After sixth grade, which he failed the first time around, he was promoted directly to high school, where he failed every course during his freshman year, "...and was repeating his ninth grade year when we became involved," Colon said. "So he's one clear example of many missed opportunities by the district to refer the child, who was determined to be eligible for special education services."

Now that there's been a determination of a pattern of violations, Bridgeport education officials must take corrective action for each of the six students named in the complaint. They must also create procedures across the district to identify and respond to kids who may be eligible for special education services.

This comes as Bridgeport is preparing for a new interim superintendent to lead the school district once Paul Vallas departs.

Earlier this month, Hamden Schools Superintendent Fran Rabinowitz was unanimously approved for the post by Bridgeport's Board of Education. Part of her job will be to help the district find a permanent school chief. Rabinowitz has led Hamden's schools since 2007. Before that, she worked as an Associate Commissioner for the State Department of Education.

After a turbulent time in Bridgeport, Paul Vallas will become Illinois Governor Pat Quinn's running mate in this year's gubernatorial election.