



## Mom's complaint alleges Bridgeport special ed services are lacking

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BRIDGEPORT — Bridgeport mom Dametria Codrington said she grew concerned last year that her son wasn't getting the support he needed for his disability.

"I'm thinking my son is okay, and everything is good with him," she said. "And then everything really started to come out during COVID."

Codrington's son, 14, whose name she asked not be published for privacy reasons, has ADHD and a suspected learning disability, and qualifies under federal law for school-based supports and services. The eighth grader's individualized education plan, or IEP, mandates 7 1/2 hours a week of specialized instruction in language arts and math to help him make educational progress.

While he was learning from home, Codrington said she noticed her son's special education teacher at Wilbur Cross School wasn't logging online for class. Then, after schools had been open for a few weeks in the fall, Codrington's son again told her that his teacher had been absent.

Codrington tried to reach school administrators several times throughout the fall without success, she said. She didn't receive notice about inconsistency in service, she added, until the school assigned a new case manager in December — allegedly a year after the absences began.

Now, Codrington is part of a complaint filed with the state alleging Bridgeport Public Schools denied special education services to their children with disabilities.

**Alongside the Center for Children's Advocacy and Connecticut Legal Services, parents point to staffing problems and a failure to inform them of curtailed services. The systemic complaint is the third of its kind to be filed against Bridgeport's special education department in eight years.**

"The Bridgeport Public Schools is committed and remains committed to providing all appropriate services to those students with special needs and high quality and quantified stars to deliver those critical services," Superintendent Michael Testani told Hearst Connecticut Media in a written statement.

In the complaint, Codrington alleges that her son didn't receive specialized instruction from a certified special education teacher for about 12 weeks last school year — including time that predated the pandemic — and at least 8 weeks this school year. It also said that he hasn't received any "push-in support," or in-classroom assistance, for at least the past two school years, despite these services being mandated by his IEP. The family's advocate said these problems are ongoing.

"No one's working with him," said Codrington. "I don't have money to pay for tutor — I can't afford those things. So I work with him."

The district has a shortage of 19 special education certified staff, according to the complaint, "which has resulted in a direct failure to provide IEP-mandated services to those students entitled to receive it." This amounts to hundreds of hours of lost instruction, they write, as long-term and frequent teacher absences have impaired their education.

"If they're not doing their job, as a parent I'm going to try my best and try to help," said Codrington. "But I'm not a teacher... I have to Google and YouTube things to help him." Other teachers at the school tried to help too, she said, giving her work to do with her son. But her son still struggled to grasp the material and hasn't made progress in math for a few years.

**“If you look at his IEP, he was not making progress on the vast majority of his goals and objectives” which breaks the law for students with disabilities, said Kathryn Meyer from the Center for Children’s Advocacy. “The legal standard is educational progress in a way that’s useful and meaningful.”**

State data show that the number of children with disabilities in Bridgeport has increased significantly while that of staff has not. The district saw a 22 percent increase in students with disabilities from 2015-16 to 2019-20, while certified teacher and paraprofessional totals decreased over the same time period.

“Unfortunately, I live around that area, so he has to attend that school,” said Codrington. “If I had the funds to put him in a school that I know he will get a better education and be treated well, he would be there.”

Since she first became aware of the teacher absences, Codrington said she had to balance advocating for her son and maintaining a good relationship with the school.

“In the beginning, I didn’t want to push, push, push, because I didn’t want him to be targeted in school,” she said, but she later changed her mind: “I want to get the help that he needs so when he gets to high school, he doesn’t give up.

*[ctinsider.com/news/ctpost/article/Mom-s-complaint-alleges-Bridgeport-special-ed-16047050.php](https://ctinsider.com/news/ctpost/article/Mom-s-complaint-alleges-Bridgeport-special-ed-16047050.php)*