

PUBLIC COMMENTS AT ORAL PROCEEDING REGARDING THE CHILDREN FIRST ACT OF 2009

PRESENTED BY MANDY ROGERS, PARENTS UNITED TOGETHER SEPTEMBER 2, 2009

The Children's First Act of 2009 requires each local school district to develop and publish an annual report as prescribed by the State Board of Education. The report shall be published in a newspaper having general circulation in the county and posted on the school district's Web site in a printable format.

Representative Cecil Brown's legislative update states, "The Children First Act of 2009 is probably the most significant education legislation since the adoption of MAEP. The act requires school districts to report key data to their communities on an annual basis. Unfortunately, the Children First Act Annual Report Guidelines do not require any data regarding special education services. In connection with the Children First Act, MDE has prepared a document entitled "**Publication on the Web**" which states it is **highly recommended** that additional information be shared along with the report as printed in the newspaper. One of the categories of **highly recommended** information is to report the number of students in special education. This is just a recommendation not a requirement.

From the view point of parents and advocates for students receiving special education services, the opportunity to review and compare district data regarding special education services can be an important decision making tool when considering educational opportunities available for students receiving special education services. We know special education is not a priority in many school districts and this area of education is often left behind in the development of MDE policies. To provide parents important information on school districts would require little additional effort.

The data we are recommending be included in the annual report is important to parents who have children who are receiving special education services. By having this data readily available, parents who have children who are receiving special education services can access vital information just like parents who have children in regular education classes. The data we ask to be included is data which is already collected, used and maintained by local school districts and the Office of Special Education as required under Section 618 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as amended in 2004.

The data we are recommending be included is required to be made available to the public under the IDEA 2004. However, obtaining this information from the MDE Office of Special Education has proven almost impossible. The excuse given for the unavailability of this information is that the program the MDE OSE uses to submit data to the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs cannot generate the information in a readable format. The name of this program is Edfax. After reviewing office of special education web sites from several other states, we found that other states using Edfax have special education data readily accessible on their web sites.

We are requesting the following information regarding special education services be included in the Annual Report as required under the Children's First Act of 2009:

- 1. The number of students receiving special education services**
- 2. The percentage of students receiving special education services**
- 3. Child identification-Percent of Students with Disabilities by each Disability Category used by MDE**
- 4. Exit from School data to include:**
 - a. percent exiting with a standard high school diploma**
 - b. percent exiting with a Mississippi Occupational Diploma**
 - c. percent exiting with a certificate of achievement**
 - d. percent exiting as drop out**
- 5. Extended School Year Services- Number of students receiving special education services who are served**
- 6. The school's district determination level as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as amended in 2004.**