

Ideas....Policies....Programs....Solutions

David Rubel Associates

I am pleased to post this third issue of my newsletter. It describes up and running projects in 2014. Four new projects are making improvements in the private and parochial school system. I am very grateful to the Sephardic Community Federation and Teach-NYS for engaging my services in each of these endeavors. Nothing would have been accomplished without the leadership and active direct involvement of Sam Sutton, president of the Sephardic Community Federation. Each of the projects described here began during discussions with Sam. I am also indebted to the parents, teachers, school leaders and advocates that volunteered to give me hours of valuable information, insight and feedback.

This year our work is now also bringing direct benefits to public school children. ChalkBeatNY website, the daily hub of reporting on all things New York City Department of Education (NYC-DOE), ran an [article](#) about a 38 page report I first wrote in 2013 and updated last year. The report documents a new NYC-DOE trend of top ranked high schools admitting more special education students. It also discusses various practices that schools can implement to ensure that the policy is successful. I see this as the beginning of more efforts at bringing unnoticed issues concerning the NYC-DOE school system to the attention of the public.

Sincerely,

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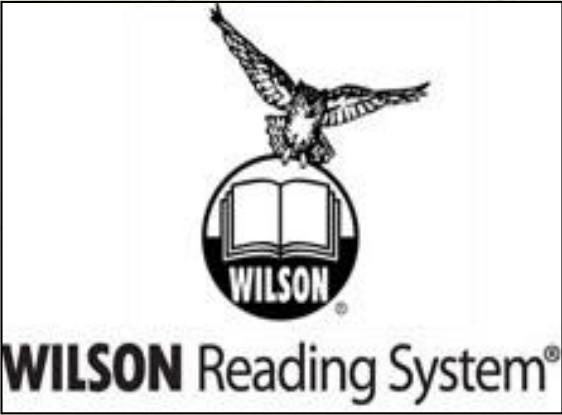
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1. Making the Promise of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) a Reality for Special Ed Private School Children

<p>Problem</p>	<p>Children receiving special education services in private schools should also be able to benefit from Least Restrictive Education and the inclusion model. Right now they cannot. One of the biggest changes in special education is the movement to Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that a child with a learning disability should be educated alongside their mainstream peers, to the greatest extent appropriate. The Federal Government and New York State have made Least Restrictive Environment the foundation for the body of laws that govern the delivery of special education services. The inclusion classroom is one of the main LRE models. In an inclusion classroom, there are usually two teachers, two thirds of the children are mainstream and one third have an IEP. The movement to inclusion in the public schools began over 25 years ago. The academic research community as well as thousands of teachers are in agreement that, with careful planning and appropriate resources, the inclusion model works. While thousands of school districts across the country have transformed their special education programs to include the inclusion classroom, one large section of the population has not been able to benefit- parentally placed students in private schools.</p> <p>A full menu of publicly funded special education services are provided to parentally placed private school children in New York City. However, only one instructional model is used- pull out Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS) also known as resource room. The parentally placed private school children continue to receive services with an instructional model that have been deemed ineffective for the vast majority of public school special education children.</p>
<p>Solution</p>	<p>In the fall of 2013, on behalf of two clients, TeachNYS and the Sephardic Community Federation, DRA wrote to the US Department of Education (US-DOE) regarding permissibility of using public funds for the inclusion classroom model in a private school. In addition to preparing a ten page concept paper, DRA also arranged for a meeting of senior Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the Office of Nonpublic Education (ONPE) program and legal staff at the US-DOE. At a meeting on Feb. 6, 2014, Sam Sutton, SCF president and David Rubel presented their findings regarding using Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) dollars to allow inclusion or push in model in a private school regular classroom. The outcome was that the US-DOE agreed that the issue was very important with national ramifications since any change would affect schools districts in all 50 states and territories. The US-DOE issued its official guidance letter to SCF and TeachNYS on 9-29-14. The guidance letter found no conflict with Federal law and encouraged the two organizations to consult with local and state education officials regarding which models could be used in a private school classroom. Our research of relevant NYSED government regulations, guidance letters and program descriptions did not find any language that restricted these models from being used in a private school. Instead, we found that state law and guidance require that inclusion classroom instruction models should be available to parentally placed children in private schools.</p> 
<p>Status and Results</p>	<p>Since receiving the US-DOE Policy Guidance Letter, SCF and TeachNYS has been in discussions with our religious schools colleagues, third party vendors service providers, private schools and elected officials about the inclusion class room model and US-Department of Education letter. We have received very strong interest and helpful feedback regarding moving forward on creating a publicly funded inclusion classroom model in the private school classroom. We are now presenting the issue to the New York City-Department of Education.</p>


2. NYC Yeshiva School Teachers line up to become Wilson Language[®] (Orton-Gillingham) Certified Reading Specialists

<p>Problem</p>	<p>When a child cannot master basic reading skills, self-esteem plummets, school becomes a miserable place and parents are overwhelmed with concern over what to do. On a national level, estimates are that between 10 to 25% of all children are struggling readers with at least 15% as having some form of moderate to severe dyslexia. For the NYC yeshiva population, this means that around 15,000 students will need help with a serious and systematic reading intervention. Approximately 6,000 New York City yeshivas students receive special education services for a learning disability. These students are entitled to free one to one or small group tutoring by licensed teachers. We had received anecdotal information from school principals, classroom teachers and special education parent advocates in almost all of the yeshiva neighborhoods that there was serious dissatisfaction with the annual progress students were making. After several years of professional weekly help, students were still reading several grades below their actual grade level. Hearing this complaint in one neighborhood raised a concern, hearing the same complaint in Williamsburg, Boro Park, Flatbush and Queens meant that something must be done.</p> <p>The most commonly recommended intervention for a child struggling to master reading foundation skills is Orton-Gillingham. Orton-Gillingham (OG) is a reading intervention that is based on a child (or adult) learning in a multi-sensory system with sight, sound, touch and hearing. Private schools receive Federal funding for teacher professional development and training. However, there weren't any OG Professional Development programs available for the NYC yeshivas (or other private schools). We also looked to see how other school districts with a large yeshiva student population were using their Federal Professional Development dollars. For example, in Monsey, almost all is spent on training classroom teachers in an OG based program. Also, numerous school districts use their Title I and Title II Part A funds to train teachers to become certified in OG.</p>
<p>Solution</p>	<p>There are numerous proprietary programs for struggling readers including children with dyslexia. The challenge was to select the program that would best serve yeshiva children. DRA worked closely with Sam Sutton, president of SCF and Yosef Kanosky, TeachNYS Director of Government Relations, to select an OG based program. After studying the leading OG programs, their documented effectiveness (including evidence from the Florida Center for Reading Research at Florida State University and the US-DOE Institute for Education Sciences What Works Clearinghouse), and interviews with reading specialists, our team selected the Wilson Reading System (WRS). Based on Orton-Gillingham principles, WRS is a highly-structured remedial program that directly teaches the structure of the language to students and adults who have been unable to learn with other teaching strategies, or who may require multisensory language instruction. This step-by-step program gives teachers the tools and confidence they need to work with even the most challenged reader—and their confidence and expertise grows exponentially by attending classes, achieving certification, and taking advantage of Wilson Academy's extensive online resources and support. The Wilson Reading System has wide use with over 17,000 teachers already certified and practicing in schools across the country.</p> <div data-bbox="932 1117 1490 1528" style="text-align: right;">  </div> <p>Working together with partner organizations, the Jewish Education Project and Agudath Israel, and the New York City Department of Education Division of Non-Public Schools, the Wilson Reading Level 1 Certification program was offered to yeshiva schools and teachers, free of charge. To achieve certification, teachers have to commit to a 120 hours of training and practicum.</p>
<p>Status And Results</p>	<p>In the first year of offering the Wilson Reading program, 17 teachers signed up and successfully completed all requirements for certification. In the second year, 60 teachers applied and 40 were admitted. A third year is now scheduled. The interest in the program comes from across City yeshiva school networks. As each teacher becomes Wilson Certified, it means that several struggling readers are now going to get the professional intervention they need. To meet the needs of all struggling readers in the yeshiva schools, our goal is to see several hundred yeshiva teachers become Wilson certified.</p>

3. New Education Resources Website for New York City-State Parents of Private School Students

<i>Problem</i>	<p>Private school parents deserve to have a simple and clear resource to provide essential information about publicly funded education resources for their child. While parents of public school children have several excellent websites to use, there was nothing for parents of children attending private schools especially the religious schools in New York City and State. Parents need a very user friendly website that can answer their questions and easily direct them to reliable professionally prepared information. Especially important is for parents to better understand how government programs work and can benefit their children.</p>	
<i>Solution</i>	<p>At the request of TeachNYS and the Orthodox Union (OU), DRA developed the first and only government funded education resources website for private school parents. While our target market are the parents of the 125,000 children attending yeshivas and day schools in New York State, almost all of the information is equally important to all parents of a private school child (including the Catholic, Islamic, Greek Orthodox, Lutheran and Independent schools). The website covers learning differences, how to access NYC-DOE services, IDEA and Title I, High School and Common Core. The Parents Education Resource Center website is under the auspices of the Orthodox Union and TeachNYS.</p>	

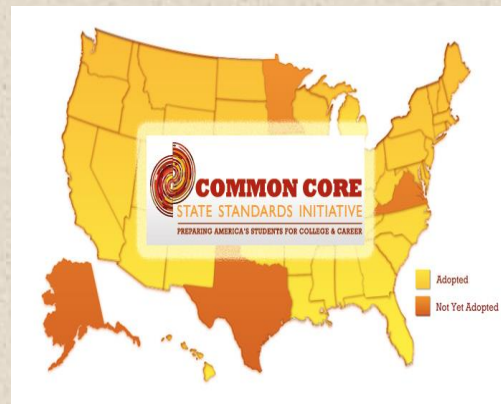
4. Special Ed Teachers Working in Private Schools Can Now Benefit from Title II Part A Funded Professional Development Training

<i>Problem</i>	<p>While they are entrusted with a very important activity, special ed teachers working in private schools fell through the cracks of free professional development opportunities. Known as P3's, this group of licensed teachers provide remedial education services to children with an IEP in private schools. They are paid on a subcontract consultant basis by the NYC-Department of Education. The NYC-DOE policy did not allow this group of teachers to participate in government funded professional development activities because they were consultants and not employees of either the private school or the DOE. Considering the important place professional development has for a teacher's growth and effectiveness, this policy had a very negative impact on teachers and the students they were being paid to help.</p>	
<i>Solution</i>	<p>We found a solution. DRA was hired to study the Title II Part A regulations which is the Federal source of professional development funds for both public and private schools. Based on the analysis, a request for guidance was sent to the Federal Department of Education. DRA along with SCF president Sam Sutton also went to Washington to discuss this issue (along with four other policy issues). The US-DOE responded with a letter with clear guidance that the teachers are allowed to fully participate in any school based Title II part A funded professional development. The letter means that any private school can now include the P3 teachers in the professional development (the same rule can be applied to any school district). A private school can also use its Title II Part A funds just for a program targeted to teachers with special education students.</p>	
<i>Status And Results</i>	<p>DRA is now working to develop a series of professional development specifically designed for the P3 teachers. These workshops include helping P3 teachers with adapting their instructional services to the Common Core Standards and what are the specific challenges for a child with an IEP to succeed with the Common Core. It also means that P3 teachers working in a yeshiva school can now participate in the new Wilson Reading certification program described in second section newsletter.</p>	

5. Helping New York Yeshiva Schools Succeed with the Common Core Standards

Problem

When the first Common Core based NYS English Language Arts (ELA) and Math tests were administered in the spring of 2013, yeshiva students in grades 3 to 8, like their public school counterparts, saw a huge drop in test scores. Most yeshiva schools face the same hurdle of adapting their classrooms to the Common Core Standards as their public school counterparts. The only difference is that they have fewer resources available to them. When New York State adopted the Common Core Standards, the decision covered all grades from Pre-K to 12. While, there is no state or local legal requirement for private schools to also adopt Common Core Standards, most still did. The reason is because many private schools administer the NYS Regents Exams and confer a NYS Regents Diploma. In New York City, at least 60% of yeshiva high school youth attend high schools that administer the Regents Exams.



Experts around the country are describing the Common Core as the most fundamental restructuring of American Education in the past sixty years. Public school districts are spending millions of dollars on professional development for their teachers. As an example, California passed a bond to spend \$ per student for schools to use for Common Core. The challenge is how the yeshivas, already struggling with rising costs, can successfully transition their classrooms to the Common Core. The new Common Core Regents Exams are scheduled to be the only test option by spring of 2016. With a small window of time left, Unless there is another deadline extension by NYSED, the schools only have a small window of time to prepare their students for new Regents Exams.

Solution

Since yeshiva schools are all basically in the same boat regarding the Common Core based Regents Exams, the most sensible strategy is to minimize the leg work of figuring out what resources are currently available, most useful and free. DRA was commissioned to study the landscape of the Common Core and come up with workable solutions for the yeshiva schools. DRA conducted interviews with public school teachers and principals to see how the Common Core was being implemented in the NYC-DOE schools including what is realistic number of weekly hours a teacher should devote to restructuring their curriculum and classroom to align with Common Core. How can yeshiva teachers, with most paid much less than their public school counterparts make the transition to Common Core? The good news is that the New York State Education Department (NYSED) in 2012 funded several well regarded education companies to produce new Common Core based curriculum, modules, units and lesson plans, student workbooks for grades K to 12. Each unit also has a midpoint and end assessment to administer to see how well students are learning and mastering the materials. *Public and Private schools can use these materials for free.* The materials can be used as the sole classroom curriculum or they can offer a pacing guide for teachers that want to use their own curriculum (or a combination of both). The grade by grade curriculum offer numerous entry points for a teacher to adapt their existing curriculum to the Common Core Standards. DRA prepared a 30 page working paper covering all aspects of Common Core implementation for yeshiva schools. The working paper was condensed into a [14 page Guide](#) with a road map of free professional development was widely distributed to the New York City yeshivas. The other strategy is to follow the lead of the public schools and direct funds to increasing Common Core professional development opportunities for yeshiva teachers.



The work of David Rubel Associates has been reported on in US News and World Report, The New York Times, New York Daily News, New York Newsday, El Diario, City Limits Magazine, Chronicle of Philanthropy, Hamodia, ChalkbeatNY, Tablet Magazine and numerous blogsites.