Board of Education | City of Chicago

SEAC Committee Meeting Written Comments
October 15, 2026

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October 15, 2026, SEAC Committee Comments
Received between Tuesday, October 13th and Friday, October 16th Submitted via Written Comments Form

1	I believe cameras in special needs classrooms would be a student safety and accountability initiative, especially for children who are nonverbal, have communication difficulties, or cannot easily report mistreatment.

ATTACHMENTS

Public Comment to the Chicago Board of Education Special Education Advisory Committee

Submitted by a Grandmother and Permanent Guardian of a CPS Student with Disabilities
Chicago, Illinois

To the Chicago Board of Education Special Education Advisory Committee:

I am the grandmother and permanent guardian of a Chicago Public Schools student with disabilities, significant communication needs, and an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

I am submitting this written comment because as this committee begins its work, I hope you will look beyond budgets, staffing formulas, compliance reports, and districtwide statistics and examine what children with disabilities and their families actually experience.

Behind every special education number is a child.

My grandson's educational journey has required years of advocacy. During his time in CPS, I experienced firsthand what happens when a child with significant disabilities does not consistently receive the services and supports necessary for him to access his education. At different points in his educational journey, he missed substantial amounts of occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech services, social work services, and instruction.

His educational situation became serious enough that I participated in mediation with CPS and compensatory education was ultimately awarded. I will respect the confidentiality of that process and will not disclose confidential terms of any agreement. However, I believe there is an important systemic issue the Board should examine.

Awarding compensatory education and being able to access compensatory education are two very different things.

Families with limited financial resources may face significant barriers locating providers, arranging transportation, finding services that accommodate a child's disabilities, working around school and employment schedules, and navigating reimbursement or payment requirements. A remedy can exist on paper while remaining practically inaccessible to the child it was intended to help.

When compensatory services have an expiration date, those barriers become even more consequential. A family may successfully establish that a child was denied services, receive compensatory education intended to make that child whole, struggle to access those services through no lack of effort, and eventually see the opportunity expire.

I respectfully ask the Committee to examine whether CPS compensatory education procedures unintentionally disadvantage low-income families and families caring for children with significant disabilities. If a remedy cannot realistically be accessed by the family for whom it was created, the Board should ask whether that remedy is truly equitable.

I am also asking the Committee to examine how CPS handles serious incidents involving students with disabilities and how parents obtain incident documentation.

Several years ago, my grandson experienced a serious incident at a CPS school. When I sought the incident report, I was directed by the school's dean to obtain it through the district's law office. I did not receive that report until approximately a year after the incident, and when I finally received it, portions had been redacted.

I understand and respect the need to protect the privacy of other students. However, the incident involving my grandson did not involve another student. That left me with an important unanswered question: **What information required redaction, and what was the legal or policy basis for withholding it from the guardian of the child involved?**

Parents and guardians should not have to spend months - or a year - trying to obtain basic documentation concerning a serious incident involving their own child.

When the student has significant communication limitations, access to accurate and timely documentation becomes even more important. A child who cannot independently explain exactly what happened depends upon the adults and institutions responsible for him to maintain transparent, accurate records and to provide his guardian with appropriate information.

What concerns me even more is that I cannot simply dismiss my experience as something that happened nearly four years ago.

In January of this year, I became aware of another family whose child attended the same school and whose parent has encountered concerns that, in important respects, reminded me of what my family experienced years earlier. I will not identify that child or disclose that family's private circumstances because their story belongs to them. I am encouraging that parent to communicate her own experience directly to the Board.

But the similarity raises a serious question: If families are encountering substantially similar problems at the same school years apart, has the underlying problem actually been corrected?

That is exactly why meaningful oversight matters.

My grandson is now placed in a therapeutic school where his educational, communication, sensory, physical, and developmental needs can be addressed in a more appropriate environment. I transport him to and from school myself because I am committed to ensuring that he receives the education we fought so hard to obtain.

I did not spend years advocating because I wanted special treatment for my grandson. I advocated because I wanted him to receive what his disability, his IEP, and the law said he was entitled to receive.

That experience is also why current discussions concerning CPS budgets and staffing are deeply concerning to me.

When special education teachers, SECAs, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, social workers, case managers, and other support personnel are stretched too thin, children with disabilities can experience the consequences immediately.

An IEP may promise specialized instruction, therapy, communication support, supervision, or individual assistance. But those words only have meaning when qualified people are actually available to provide those services.

I am particularly concerned about cluster classrooms. These classrooms must not become overcrowded substitutes for general education classrooms because the district is experiencing financial or staffing difficulties. Children with significant disabilities may require smaller environments, individualized instruction, additional supervision, communication assistance, sensory supports, and appropriately trained personnel.

I respectfully ask this Committee to monitor not simply what CPS says it provides, but what individual children actually receive.

Please examine whether students receive every service and minute required by their IEPs; whether cluster classrooms are appropriately staffed; whether schools have sufficient SECAs and special education teachers;

whether shortages of related-service providers result in missed therapy; how quickly missed services are identified and communicated to parents; how compensatory education is made genuinely accessible to families regardless of income; and whether parents receive timely, complete and appropriately explained documentation when serious incidents involve their children.

I also urge CPS to consider transparent public reporting regarding special education vacancies and missed services. Parents should not discover months later that their child has accumulated significant amounts of missed instruction or therapy.

My grandson's experience taught me that parents and caregivers can be forced to become investigators, record keepers, advocates, and experts in special education procedures simply to determine whether their child is receiving what an IEP already requires.

But I continually think about the families who do not know special education law. I think about parents who cannot attend every meeting, families without reliable transportation, caregivers working multiple jobs, families who cannot afford to pay for services upfront, and parents who do not know whom to contact when something goes wrong.

A child's rights should not depend upon how much money a family has, how well a parent understands special education law, or how relentlessly a caregiver is able to fight.

Those children deserve protection too.

As this Special Education Advisory Committee begins its work, I respectfully ask you to make the lived experiences of students and families central to your oversight. Listen to parents and caregivers. Examine what is happening inside individual schools and classrooms. Follow complaints beyond the paperwork. Determine whether remedies actually reach children. And when the same kinds of concerns appear years apart, ask why.

A budget is a financial document.
An IEP is a commitment to a child.
A remedy should actually remedy the harm.
And accountability should lead to change.

Please protect those principles for every child with a disability in Chicago Public Schools.

Thank you for considering my comments and for your work on behalf of Chicago's students with disabilities.

Respectfully,

A Grandmother and Permanent Guardian of a CPS Student with Disabilities
Chicago, Illinois