

GLEN ROCK SPECIAL EDUCATION PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL
Glen Rock, NJ
glenrocksepac@gmail.com

November 3, 2021

By email:

Dr. Jennifer MacKay (mackayj@glenrocknj.org)
Dr. Brett Charleston (charlestonb@glenrocknj.org)
Glen Rock Public Schools
620 Harristown Road
Glen Rock, NJ 07452

Re: Dual Use Classrooms for Special Education Students

Dear Drs. MacKay and Charleston:

We are writing as the leadership of Glen Rock's Special Education Parent Advisory Council to raise an ongoing concern that impacts elementary age special education students, who are placed in pullout resource rooms for some of their subjects in accordance with each student's Individualized Education Plan.

We are aware that the District has already been conducting these pullout resource room classes in dual use classrooms, even before submitting its application for permission from the Bergen County Superintendent to do so. It is our understanding that the District is conducting two different classes at the same time and in the same, shared space. This means that there are different subjects that are being taught (for example Math and Reading), and also that there are different grades in the same classroom.

A review of the application that the District submitted to the County shows the following:

- At Coleman School, Room 4 is being used to teach between 4 and 8 students ESL and Reading at the same time. Only a 5' tall bookcase is used to partially section off the room. Based on the application, it appears that two teachers are providing instruction at the same time.
- Also at Coleman School, Room 16 is being used to teach between 4 and 10 students in two different Special Education classes simultaneously. Only a 6' bookcase and adjoining portable partition are used to partially section off the room. Based on the application, it appears that two teachers are providing instruction at the same time.
- At Hamilton School, Room 107 is being used to teach between 3 and 9 students Special Education and ESL simultaneously. There are two 7' dividers used to partially partition the room. Based on the application, it appears that two teachers are providing instruction at the same time.

- At Central School, Room 103 is being used to teach 9 students two different Special Education classes simultaneously. One 6' double-sided bookcase is used to partially partition the room. Based on the application, it appears that two teachers are providing instruction at the same time.
- At Central School, Room 210 is being used to teach 10 students two different Special Education classes simultaneously. One 6' portable partition and book case are used to partially partition the room. Based on the application, it appears that two teachers are providing instruction at the same time.

Conducting two different classes at the same time is wholly inappropriate. Some children are placed in a pull-out resource room for certain subjects because they are too easily distracted in the general education classroom. They need more individualized instruction from a special education teacher. This is supposed to be the least restrictive environment (“LRE”).

A dual use classroom is not the LRE, as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (“IDA”). As you know, the IDA requires that special education students be educated to the maximum extent possible with children who do not have disabilities. Removal of children from a regular education classroom should occur only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes or other natural environments with the use of supplementary aids cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Students should be placed with their peers for as much of the learning day as possible.

Pursuant to N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.6(d), “pull-out replacement resource programs are programs of specialized instruction organized around a *single subject* and are provided to students with disabilities by an appropriately certified teacher of students with disabilities” (emphasis added).

The District, however, is removing disabled students from their general education classroom and placing them in a dual use classroom where more than a single subject is being taught simultaneously. It is undoubtedly more distracting for special education students, as it would be for anyone, to be in a dual use classroom, because there are two different subjects, being taught by two different teachers, often with additional teaching assistants or aides, for students of different ages. Placing children that need a resource room for focus and attention related learning challenges in a dual use classroom is clearly counter-productive.

Parents and guardians have shared with us that their children in dual use classrooms find it distracting to hear another teacher’s class. For example, a pull out math student that took a test in a dual use classroom had difficulty concentrating on the test because a lesson was being taught on the other side of the room while the math test was being administered. That child would have been better off in the general education class where all the students were quietly taking a test, rather than in a classroom in which a different subject was being taught.

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Another child in a third grade class reported that his teacher asked him to keep his voice down so as not to disturb the first grade students on the other side of the classroom.

This is an ongoing issue and is intolerable. A District as wealthy as Glen Rock, which apparently has resources to meet any need in the District, should be able to provide individual classroom space for the neediest of the District's students. Special education students that need pull out instruction should be in a setting where only one subject is being taught to that group of students.

In the past, we lobbied for collaborative classes in the elementary schools, only to have been turned down. Once our children reached the Middle School, however, they were placed in collaborative classes. No one explained to us why a collaborative classroom in 6th grade was appropriate, but a collaborative class in 5th grade was inappropriate. In fact, having more collaborative classes may alleviate the need for additional classroom space.

Certainly, there can be some creativity in scheduling and room usage, as well as additional collaborative classes, so that our special education students are not placed in a substandard instructional space. If there is no existing space available, then the District should immediately bring in temporary additional space while a more permanent solution is found. Glen Rock's special education students deserve better.

Sincerely,

Glen Rock Special Education Parent Advisory Council

/s/ Orlee Goldfeld, Esq.

/s/ Catherine Laiosa, MD, PhD

/s/ Nicole Redmond, LDTC

/s/ Phyllis Simon, OTD, OTR/L, FNAP

/s/ Carolyn Stallone, MBA, CSM, ICP

Special Education Parent/Guardian Signatories:

Anna Cherkasov
Hilary Cohen
Patricia Fitzgibbon
Sarah Goldberg
Deborah Haas

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Special Education Parent/Guardian Signatories (continued):

Audrey Halpern
Edward Hawkins
Sarah Hawkins
Kevin Hsu
Kathleen Long
Janice McCarthy
Erin McNulty
Michelle Nolan
A. Patricia Tisak
Mara Trager
Michelle White

CC: Mr. Louis DeLisio, Bergen County Superintendent of Schools
(bergen@doe.nj.gov)
Glen Rock Board of Education
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