

DETROIT NATIVE SUN

DPSCD's special education cited for non-compliance, facing lawsuits for abuse and neglect complaints



By Valerie D. Lockhart
SUN EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Detroit Public Schools Community District, the state's largest school district has been cited for its special education program not following Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education's requirements. The district had until December 1 to correct violations and submit a corrective action plan.

The district is also not in compliance with the U.S. Department of Education's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a law that makes available free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. It also violated Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a federal law designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance.

Over 7,800 students are enrolled in DPSCD's Special Education Program. The Exceptional Student Education program oversees services offered in six center-based facilities - Charles R. Drew Transition Center, Essential Skills Transition Program at Diann Banks, Jerry L. White Center, Keidan Special Education Center, Moses Field Center, and Turning Point Academy at Fleming.

Violations cited include failure to perform or follow Individualized Education Program (IEP) evaluations, students not being put in their proper placement, and students not receiving specialized services such as physical, speech, and occupational therapy.

Aliyah Moore, an education activist and parent, has been requesting services listed in her daughter's IEP be provided since the beginning of the school year. The district is required respond within 15 days of the request.

"(My daughter) was feeling overwhelmed, especially with history, note-taking, and math. Her basic accommodation wasn't happening until I sent an email to the head of the ESE department and compliance. Her resource teacher is still not doing what she should, but they have set up a Microsoft Teams meeting with me on Dec. 2," she said.

In the 2023-2024 school year, the district spent \$41 million on special education which included \$28M taken from the general fund.

The district currently spends \$49 million on special education services.

Possible penalties that could be imposed on the district for continual non-compliance include losing federal funding and facing lawsuits from parents.

Several lawsuits have already been filed on behalf of parents against the district for abuse and neglect of special education students.

Spectrum Legal Services, 24100 Southfield Road, Suite 203 in Southfield, MI, is handling the complaints. They have received calls from over 25 families seeking assistance.

"If the district continues to violate the rights of children with special needs, we will consider filing a class action lawsuit on their behalf," Attorney Michael Fortner, a civil rights attorney, said. "We're the voice for children who are unable to speak. All children deserve the right to an education."

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) can also impose sanctions if the district is unable to show that corrective action has been taken.

"OCR may: (1) initiate administrative proceedings to terminate Department of Education financial assistance to the recipient; or (2) refer the case to the Department of Justice for judicial proceedings," the DOE notes on its website.

DPSCD blames its failure to comply with a personnel shortage.

"There is a national critical shortage impacting our ability to provide continuous specialized services in select areas to students requiring school-based ancillary support. School districts nationwide report challenges recruiting and hiring support services, including school social workers, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and physical therapists," Lohren Nzoma, Assistant Superintendent Office of Exceptional Student Education, wrote in a letter initially dated November 17, 2023, and re-communicated on January 25, 2024, to parents.

The same letter states that a meeting with parents was reportedly held on February 24, 2023, on Microsoft Teams. Yet, there is a conflict in the dates of communication, and no mention of such letter nor the violations during any of the Detroit School Board's open session meetings.

The district has reportedly been in non-compliance since Dr. Nikolai Vitti took office as superintendent in 2017. He says that its failure to comply is due to insufficient funding.

"Despite increases in Special Education funding, DPSCD will still have to use \$28M from the general fund to cover Special Education costs this fiscal year not covered by local, county, state, or federal categorical funds. This translates into a tax on general education students of approximately \$620/student," Dr. Vitti wrote in a letter dated September 26, 2023, to Gov. Governor Gretchen Whitmer; Lieutenant Governor Garlin Gilchrist; and other political leaders.

"Excuses will no longer be tolerated," Fortner said. "The district has had since 2017 to correct the problem, and they're still not in compliance. They fire whistleblowers who speak out, so the abuse and neglect continue. It's past time for the state to stop putting the district in time out and to hit them where it hurts - their pockets. If the money is not being spent on the children, where is it going? Follow the money and it will lead you to the real culprits."

To join a potential class action lawsuit, parents should call (248) 538-7200.

(StatePoint) Even a short vacation from school can cause learning loss and leave kids feeling behind when they return to the classroom. Fortunately, there are many ways to keep minds active during the holiday break, some of which will reinforce the concepts they are learning in school. Here are a few of them:

Vacation Reading: Whether you're traveling for the holidays or sticking close to home, curling up with a book is a great way to spend some of the inevitable down time. At the start of the break, hit up the library so everyone in the family will have plenty to read on subjects of interest to them. You might also consider giving at least one title to each gift recipient on your list this year to emphasize the idea that books can be treasured objects.

Online Math Tools: Casio's suite of engaging education resources can help ensure students keep up their skills during the holidays. From calculating slopes and finding derivatives to evaluating inferences and predications based on data, the resource includes exercises for every area of mathematical focus, including calculus, geometry and statistics.

Historical Day Trip: Take a day trip to a historic site to bring the past to life. Whether you visit a battlefield, the home of a notable figure, or a historically preserved city center, your trip will provoke discussion and keep minds engaged. If taking a

Helping students with disabilities pay for college



(StatePoint) Every student deserves a fair shot. Fortunately, opportunities exist to help people with disabilities pursue the education and training they need to succeed in their chosen career path.

Since 2017, Wells Fargo has partnered with Scholarship America to award 253 renewable scholarships to students with disabilities. Recently renamed "The Stacey Milbern Scholarship" after the pioneering activist, the scholarships open doors to new opportunities and foster greater accessibility for all.

Stacey Milbern was a Korean American activist who helped create the disability justice movement and advocated for fair treatment of all disabled people. Born with congenital muscular dystrophy, a genetic degenerative disease, Milbern eventually became reliant on a scooter, a tracheostomy tube and a ventilator. Despite living with challenges, she found the strength to dedicate herself to disability justice from a young age. While she was still a student, she worked to have disability history added to the school curriculum and raised awareness of disability rights through her blog and other outreach efforts. In adulthood, she founded the Disability Justice Culture Club, helped organize protests, and worked to meet the needs of disabled and unhoused people during the early days of the pandemic. She also brought her unique perspective to corporate America, serving as Wells Fargo's accommodations management consultant, and was an impact producer for the Netflix documentary "Crip Camp: A Dis-

ability Revolution," which centers on the lives and voices of disabled Americans. In 2025, Stacey's legacy will be celebrated by the U.S. Mint along with Ida B. Wells, Dr. Vera Rubin, and other honorees as part of the American Women Quarters Program.

"Milbern passed away in 2020, but her achievements are honored in many ways, including in the Wells Fargo Stacey Milbern Scholarship. Wells Fargo was honored to receive an Irving Innovation Award from Scholarship America for its decision to rename our scholarship after her, and it serves as a testament to her legacy in advancing accessibility to education for students with disabilities," says Andrew Holbrook, chief accessibility officer for Diverse Segments, Representation and Inclusion at Wells Fargo.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

This holiday season, balancing educational and healthy activities with fun and relaxation can help ensure your students return to school focused, engaged and ready to start a brand new semester.

