

**Statement of Rachel Burton, Policy Specialist
Regarding the District of Columbia Public Schools Local School Budgets and the
DCPS Planning and Budgeting Process
Before the Committee of the Whole
October 30, 2008**

Good morning, Chairman Gray and Council members. My name is Rachel Burton, and I am the Policy Specialist at The Arc of the District of Columbia, a nonprofit membership organization serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families through supports and advocacy. I am also a resident of Ward 2, and I had the pleasure of serving as a volunteer for DC VOICE's Ready Schools Project this year. I am here today to present DC VOICE's data regarding transfer of student records as well as my work on special education in the District and the implications of untimely record transfers on the budgeting and planning process. We have learned from the executive that the delay in record transfers may be related to the fact that parents had a long window of time to determine where to enroll their children, causing late enrollment and a short amount of time for record transfer. We welcome further dialogue with the executive to help to ensure early enrollment for next year.

The transfer of student records was mixed in this year's consolidation effort. More than half of principals reported problems such as:

- Missing some records, or getting incomplete ones;
- Records going to another school instead of the receiving school; and
- Receiving students from as many as five schools, which may have made records transfers particularly complicated.

The question about records transfers produced the following data:

- 50% of the principals reported that all student records from the closed schools got transferred to the receiving schools; 46% said all records were not received and 4% indicated that the question was not applicable.
- Of the 46% reporting that all student records from the closed schools did not get transferred to the receiving school, special education or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) records constituted the largest reported failure, with 60% of those principals reporting that special education records or IEPs were missing.

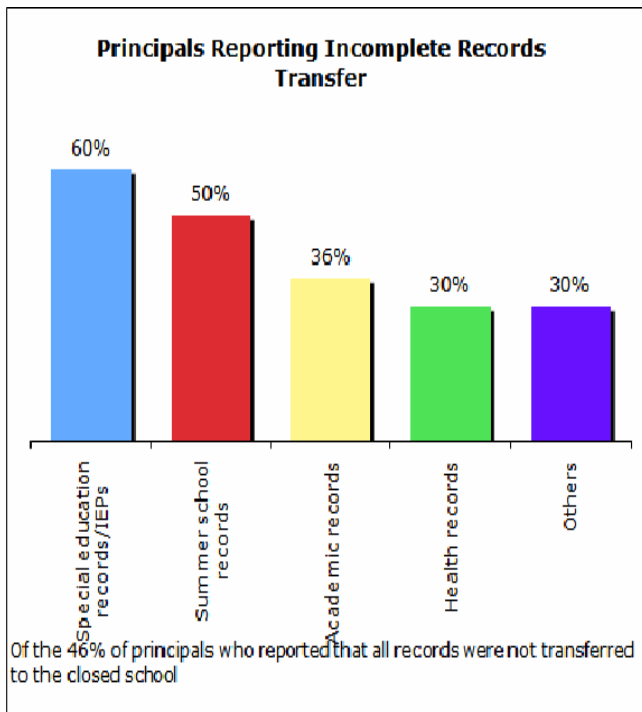
For students receiving special education services, it is vital that their IEP follow them in a timely manner in any and all transitions because continuity of service provision (such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language therapy) best supports students with disabilities. Teachers will be better able to teach and students better able to learn if records are transferred appropriately.

The delay in transferring special education and IEP records also has a significant impact on an individual school's budget and hampers teachers from being able to tailor their lessons appropriately to the learning style and special accommodations of the student. If these records are not transferred in a timely manner, the services that are required in a student's IEP cannot be taken into account in the budget, causing a lack of appropriate funding or an inappropriate number of service providers. For example, one student described to me how he used to be able to walk eight steps—a feat he couldn't be more proud of—and he was destined to walk even farther. But, when his school began to cut back on funding for a physical therapist and he was only able to go to physical therapy one day a week rather than three, his progress regressed, and he is currently using a wheelchair and is only able to take a couple of steps. Luckily, his records weren't misplaced nor sent to the incorrect school, but the story shows that even schools that do receive records in a timely manner may be unable to budget for special education services. I can only imagine this is magnified if records are not transferred prior to school starting, and the student misses his or her opportunity for related services because the principal is unaware of what services, supports, and accommodations the student needs.

Moreover, special education records being transferred appropriately is also important in overall DCPS planning for special education. If we do not know the level of services being provided to each student in each school, it becomes very difficult to determine exemplary programs for special populations. This is a vital piece of information as DCPS and OSSE come together to try to bring students in non-public placements back into the District. Without proper records, planning and budgeting cannot occur to determine the correct placements for students returning to DCPS schools.

Not only do special education records appear to be lost in reorganization, but many other vital records were not transferred in a timely manner, also impacting the planning and budgeting process:

- Summer school records were the next area of records most commonly missing, with 50% reporting these missing.
- Academic records were reported missing by 36% of the principals.
- Health records were reported missing least often, with 32% reporting that they had not been received.
- Finally, addressing a residual category for “other” missing records, 30% reported that other records were missing.



In summary, though health, academic and “other” records appear to have been transferred to the appropriate place the majority of the time, the uncertain transfer of special education and summer schools records raises particular concerns for our most vulnerable students. To ensure success for students in special education and receiving special education services, it is imperative that schools transfer IEP records and special education records in a timely manner so that students continue to receive appropriate supports without interruption and so that schools are able to budget appropriately for special education services. Thank you.