

Walker's report is nothing more than another joke. Thank you Hudson Administration

Link to evaluation by Walker - [Hudson District -wide program eval](#)

Hudson Parent Support Group

Subject: Walker Report and Windmills

Thank you for making the Walker report public on the HPS website in advance of the School Committee meeting this evening. It appears that although I was chastised and ignored often over the past 5 years, I was not tilting at windmills after all. There really are large systemic issues at play.

I submit to you my comments and opinions on the report as a taxpayer, community member, parent of a victim of the special education system in Hudson and will do so with my usual unabashed unfiltered honesty, having lost any interest in rose colored glasses when my son first began wishing he could die rather than attend school in Hudson five years ago.

Pg 10: Quality of IEPs: Of the IEPs that were chosen by Ms. Kilcoyne, how many were representative of students who had an advocate and/or attorney. In our experience, the average family without an advocate or attorney has an inadequate IEP. It would be interesting if someone would ask this question and get the answer.

Pg. 11: Full inclusion statistics indicate that there should not be as large of a performance gap between non-disabled and disabled students IF the IEPs are indeed stellar and followed. Students would be able to make adequate progress and reflect that in testing data. Why is there such a large gap then?

Pg.14: Co-teaching for 5 years at HHS. My son was a victim of 2 years of such a program and the "co-teachers" never communicated with each other and failed to have the same approach when addressing the manifestations of the disability, causing harm to my son emotionally.

Pg 21: Why do we need different spaces identified and maintained IF the goal is to maintain inclusion?

Pg. 22: Reference to "case settlements." Please keep in mind that a case is not settled UNLESS the District has not been providing an appropriate education. This is an important point that shouldn't be glossed over. In addition, case settlements generally require a family to agree to absolve the District of fault and such settlements are generally made to speed the out placement process. IF the District has exemplary IEPs and follows them, why would there be case settlements

Pg. 22: The cost of one out of district placement plus transportation (approx. \$80,000) could support staff of a new program? How can this Math be supported? A new program needs more than 2 staff members!

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Pg 28: Walker has no idea what to do about improving MCAS/ lessening the achievement gap other than do what you are currently doing? Really? What's the plan then?

Pg. 29: 'Many parents have the means to retain legal counsel.' On average, a special education attorney charges \$250-\$375 per hour. On average, it costs a family about \$30,000 to garner an appropriate education for their child with out of district placement. I ask you, what is the median income in Hudson? Do you know how much medication costs for an average ASD child? Do you know how much money is spent on co-payments for therapies, specialists, and medication evals? Do you know how many days a parent needs to take off from work, with a loss in income, to get his/her child to these various appointments? I just picked up my ASD son's medication yesterday and it was \$538. Most ASD children have at least bi-weekly therapy with co-payments. In what reality do many parents have the means to retain legal counsel at the going rate? It is insulting that "Hudson" believes many parents have the means to retain legal counsel. The reality is that few do.

Pg. 32-34: On these pages are clear issues identified that members of the SEPAC Board, had mentioned on numerous occasions to the Administration. Ms. Kilcoyne told me on numerous occasions that she wanted to hear positive stories.

Pg. 35: Social/emotional issues: Please note that autism spectrum disorders contain social/emotional challenges. Therefore, any programs should be started from the early age and grown throughout. IF the District has an adequate ASD program for the younger ages at Mulready & more recently at Farley, why didn't the District foresee that these children would grow up and need supports in the higher grades? There is no cure for autism. This had been brought to the previous Superintendent's attention as well as the current Superintendent and nothing has ever been addressed. Why has the Administration been ignoring this? Dr. Fortuna was the Asst. Supt. Prior to her current role and should have addressing this, again, my opinion.

Pg. 36-37: Therapeutic Intervention Specialist: What would the education and training qualifications be? Walker lists none. Currently a paraprofessional only needs a high school degree and generally has no training in the disability or special education. The amount of damage done by well-meaning yet completely untrained paraprofessionals is staggering. Do we want to go down this road with yet another position?

Pg. 37: How can we be sure the District will not try to use a TIS instead of a behavior specialist with those who are on the autism spectrum? (This is the District that was content with using the term "SPED STAFF" on IEPs rather than a special educator which allowed them to use untrained staff for those with disabilities because any para professional could be considered sped staff.)

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What is the actual percentage of students who have social/emotional issues that ARE NOT related to autism spectrum disorder, as defined in DSM V? Are there really enough students with a sole social/emotional diagnosis not related to autism to justify creating, hiring, and training said TIS? Or should we be focusing on BCBAs? Why didn't Walker address this?

Pg. 38-39: Special educators may not be aware of compliance requirements. Really? And why aren't they if they are trained? Unfortunately, I have found this to be completely true, that they have no idea of compliance issues. How can they effectively administer an IEP if they don't know enough about special education requirements and compliance? Do any of you find this alarming?

Pg. 39: I don't understand why, after the past 2 years of hearing School Committee meetings that our co-teaching models are wonderful, that we are now hearing that the District knows they aren't. It has been insulting to hear how wonderful the co-teaching has been when I saw my son regress as a result of the very problems Walker has outlined in the current co-teaching model in the District.

Pg. 44: Top of the list of 'some of the lacking professional development areas are: best practices for instructing students with disabilities.' Wouldn't this be a no-brainer? Why hasn't this been addressed? Would you want your regular education students taught by someone who didn't know best practices for teaching them? Do you see how alarming this is? Also on the list is that they need training in specific disabilities. I can't re-count the number of times I had to explain autism and anxiety to supposedly knowledgeable personnel.

Pg. 48: 'Confusion regarding what determines eligibility.' Given that the basic tenets of special education are outlined in special education law, it is very concerning that staff currently is confused. How can this be? Who has been training staff and why are they confused? Where has been the oversight? These are individuals who are part of the team process and are denying needed services to students.

Pg. 49: Entrance and Exit Criteria. How can there be entrance and exit criteria other than that which is defined by special education law? There are clear laws which already define what constitutes the need to put a student on an IEP and what the requirements are. Perhaps Walker should have included that. (See <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/,root,regs,300,D,300%252E306>,) As far as Exit Criteria, that would have to be individual. How can one determine across the board what the exit criteria is for special education? It needs to be part of the team process, not a pre-determined criterion. This is also covered by special education law and I feel it is disingenuous for Walker to suggest otherwise.

Pg. 52: Training of para professionals. One of the constant complaints I have heard from not only my own children, but other children, special education and regular education, is that para professionals and teachers spend an inordinate amount of time

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on their phones using social media and texting, rather than using it for professional purposes. One of my children told me that his English teacher told the class that she had downloaded a new game to play on her smart phone on one of the half day professional days.

Pg. 53: Reference is made to "available services." Please keep in mind that ANY service that a special education student requires MUST become an available service without delay. The law is specific that while you might be able to list what is currently available, you are not allowed to deny services to a student because you do not have staff. The District must meet ALL needs outlined in the IEP and by the team. School staff should be aware that they cannot state that 'we don't offer that' as an answer.

Pg. 54: Supervision. I have been harping on this issue for years to no avail. Will this really be addressed or will it be more happy talk?

Pg. 55: 'No school would go more than 12 school days between dates for evaluation team meetings.' This is very interesting given Walker Partnerships' resume of experience. The law states that the District MUST conduct a team meeting within 10 days of receiving an evaluation report from a parent. Therefore, from the outset of the advice, the District would be violating the law.

Pg. 55: In order to stagger annual team meetings, the District would have to have the cooperation of parents because IEPs are for one year and there is no allowance in the law to change dates for the District's convenience. Goals in an IEP are for one year. If my son was supposed to achieve a goal in one year, would I want to wait an extra 2-3 months to discuss whether or not he achieved it? Would I want to wait an extra 2-3 months to discuss other goals we might want to explore? If I wait that 2-3 months, that is a large chunk of instructional time lost to my son, 1/3 of a school year to be precise. Is that fair to the child, to limit his potential for administrative ease? . Is special education supposed to be about the child's potential or not?

Pg. 56: The Walker report is indicating here that the Dir of Student Services has been working for the past 2 years in a vacuum. It was understood when she was hired, from her job description and the interview process, that she had the expertise to have this in place shortly after beginning her contract. This is unsettling to say the least.

In closing, I reiterate my opinion that it is too bad that parents and the PAC in particular, have been seemingly dismissed when they have brought these exact problems to the Administration's attention and that each School Committee meeting is full of praise for how proud we should all be. Yes, there are good things in our District. However, they just don't happen to be for our disabled students. And if we aren't properly serving the students with disabilities, how Hudson Proud should we be?

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The Walker Report is riddled with inaccuracies and begs so many questions. It states:

- That they interviewed the former SEPAC Chair. I was the SEPAC Chair for several years and they did not interview me.
- That the District can develop criteria for entering and exiting special education. Special Education laws determine the criteria and the District cannot alter that.
- That the District can change annual meetings to fit their schedules. They cannot without breaking the law.
- That the District can hold evaluation team meetings every 12 days to fit their schedules. They cannot do this without breaking the law.
- That the District (Insert information on Assistive Technology that was BS)
- That Hudson believes many families in town can afford a lawyer to fight for a fair IEP and placement. How many of us can spend \$20-30,000 on a lawyer?
- That training is lacking. What happens on all of those professional days then? Are our employees really that untrained that we have so many half-days and professional days and they STILL don't know how to teach those with disabilities?
- That the District should start a SPAG. The District should have a SEPAC, as required by law, not develop another group that circumvents the law.

Read about all that Walker found to be lacking in Hudson. What has been going on for the past 2 years? Where is the commitment to our children? Will Hudson even adopt any of the LEGAL options that Walker suggests? How long will our children continue to fail why Hudson has Administrative meetings and focus groups to decide what to do with this report?

Pay attention because your child's success depends on their action and/or inaction.