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## CRITICAL MASS | Oxnard School District hit with multiple lawsuits over special ed services

Sep 26, 2016 | David Michael Courtland, News,  
Oxnard | | ★★★★★



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Oxnard School District officials got slapped with multiple lawsuits from angry and frustrated parents of special education students at Wednesday's school board meeting.

The 14 complaints are for failure to conduct evaluations of children with special needs and to



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provide appropriate services to them, explained attorney Janeen Steel of the Learning Rights Law Center.

“This is the largest number of complaints (against a school district) that I know of in the state,” said Steel, who is working with the parents and civil rights attorney Shawna Parks.

The complaints are mainly that children are falling behind in school because they have not been tested for learning disabilities or given the help they need after they have been tested. Another concern is that translation services have not been provided for Spanish-speaking students, whose parents are worried because their children are not learning English.

Parks said these types of complaints aren’t unusual. The issue is that district officials have let the problem become much worse than she and Steel have generally encountered. “The difference here is the scope and the depth of the problem,” Parks said. “The delay is definitely extreme for these types of cases.”

Many of the cases involved students who had been falling further and further behind for years, including one hearing-disabled boy in sixth grade who is still reading at a second grade level. “That really struck us as unusual, how long these kids have been going without services,” Parks said, adding that district officials have had more than enough warning that there was a problem. “There were plenty of red flags such as test scores to let the



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district know that they should have been doing more,” Parks said.

The delay has not only affected students but staff, as special education administrators who complained appeared to have been placed on leave for political reasons. “I felt frustrated, because my life has been advocating for kids and I don’t know how to play politics,” said one former district administrator who asked not to be named for fear of retaliation.

“There is no accountability,” the former administrator continued, adding that he had told Oxnard School District Superintendent Cesar Morales not to ignore special education parents. “He said he doesn’t work for them, he works for the school board.”

Longtime Oxnard School District special education teacher Cynthia Garcia said Tuesday, Sept. 20, that she was demoted to support staff for helping the Spanish-speaking families of special education students make their complaints. “Right now I’m out on health leave because of the stress,” said Garcia, a 31-year OSD employee.

Retaliation against advocates was one of the complaints made by protestors at OSD’s June 1 meeting, when parents of special education students demanded Morales’ resignation. Even so, Morales recently relayed that he is satisfied that OSD is doing all it can to work with those parents and resolve their complaints.

“I’m not concerned at this point, the school board is in support of the direction of the district,” Morales

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said. "I understand their frustration, but I also understand we're moving forward as we work to provide the best education for our kids."

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