

BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of:

PARENT ON BEHALF OF STUDENT,

v.

SANTA MONICA-MALIBU UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT.

OAH Case No. 2014050758

ORDER OF DETERMINATION OF
SUFFICIENCY OF DUE PROCESS
COMPLAINT

On May 14, 2014, Parent, on behalf of Student, filed a Due Process Hearing Request¹ (complaint) with the Office of Administrative Hearings naming the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District. On May 28, 2014, District, through its legal counsel, filed a Notice of Insufficiency (NOI) as to Student's complaint.

APPLICABLE LAW

The named parties to a due process hearing request have the right to challenge the sufficiency of the complaint.² The party filing the complaint is not entitled to a hearing unless the complaint meets the requirements of title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A).

A complaint is sufficient if it contains: (1) a description of the nature of the problem of the child relating to the proposed initiation or change concerning the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child, or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the child; (2) facts relating to the problem; and (3) a proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to the party at the time.³ These requirements prevent vague and confusing complaints, and promote fairness by providing the

¹ A request for a due process hearing under Education Code section 56502 is the due process complaint notice required under title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A).

² 20 U.S.C. § 1415(b) & (c).

³ 20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(7)(A)(ii)(III) & (IV).

named parties with sufficient information to know how to prepare for the hearing and how to participate in resolution sessions and mediation.⁴

The complaint provides enough information when it provides “an awareness and understanding of the issues forming the basis of the complaint.”⁵ The pleading requirements should be liberally construed in light of the broad remedial purposes of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the relative informality of the due process hearings it authorizes.⁶ Whether the complaint is sufficient is a matter within the sound discretion of the Administrative Law Judge.⁷

DISCUSSION

Student’s complaint contains six issues for hearing, which all involve District’s alleged replacement of a behavioral aide with an educational aide, who is not adequate to provide Student with a FAPE. Issues 1, 2, 3, 5, and 6, are in fact the same issue as to Student’s need for a behavioral aide to make meaningful educational progress. Each issue contains separate factual contentions why Student requires a behavioral aide to receive a FAPE.⁸ Therefore, Student alleged sufficient facts to put District on notice as to this issue for hearing.

Regarding Issue 4, Student alleges that District violated his procedural rights by removing his behavioral aid without Parent’s written consent, which denied him an educational benefit and prevented Parent from meaningfully participating in the educational

⁴ See, H.R.Rep. No. 108-77, 1st Sess. (2003), p. 115; Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, 1st Sess. (2003), pp. 34-35.

⁵ Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, *supra*, at p. 34.

⁶ *Alexandra R. v. Brookline School Dist.* (D.N.H., Sept. 10, 2009, No. 06-cv-0215-JL) 2009 WL 2957991 at p.3 [nonpub. opn.]; *Escambia County Board of Educ. v. Benton* (S.D.Ala. 2005) 406 F. Supp.2d 1248, 1259-1260; *Sammons v. Polk County School Bd.* (M.D. Fla., Oct. 28, 2005, No. 8:04CV2657T24EAJ) 2005 WL 2850076 at p. 3[nonpub. opn.] ; but cf. *M.S.-G. v. Lenape Regional High School Dist.* (3d Cir. 2009) 306 Fed.Appx. 772, at p. 3[nonpub. opn.].

⁷ Assistance to States for the Education of Children With Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children With Disabilities, 71 Fed.Reg. 46540-46541, 46699 (Aug. 14, 2006).

⁸ If Student wants to allege other areas of special education services he requires, other than a behavioral aide, Student will need to make a motion to amend his complaint pursuant to title 20 United States Code section 1415(c)(2)(E)(i)(II), which will restart the applicable timelines for a due process hearing.

decision making process. Student alleges sufficient facts regarding that a behavioral aide was part of his last agreed educational program to put District on notice as to this issue for hearing.

Student's proposed resolution is that District provide Student with a behavioral aide. A complaint is required to include proposed resolutions to the problem, to the extent known and available to the party at the time. (20 U.S.C. §1415(b)(7)(A)(ii)(IV).) The proposed resolutions stated in Student's complaint are well-defined requests that meet the statutorily required standard of stating a resolution to the extent known and available to Student at the time.

ORDER

1. The complaint is sufficient under title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A)(ii).
2. All mediation, prehearing conference, and hearing dates in this matter are confirmed.

DATE: May 28, 2014

/s/
PETER PAUL CASTILLO
Administrative Law Judge
Office of Administrative Hearings