

BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of:

PARENT ON BEHALF OF STUDENT,

v.

SANTA CRUZ CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT.

OAH CASE NO. 2015020154

ORDER OF DETERMINATION OF
SUFFICIENCY OF DUE PROCESS
COMPLAINT

On January 29, 2015, Parents on behalf of Student (Student) filed a Due Process Hearing Request¹ (complaint) naming Santa Cruz School District (District).

On February 9, 2015, District 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 IDEA and the relative informality of the due process hearings authorized by it.⁶ Whether the complaint is sufficient is a matter within the sound discretion of the Administrative Law Judge.⁷

DISCUSSION

Student’s complaint identifies the student, his residence, and his school of current attendance. The complaint has a detailed description of the problem Student has with the District’s offer of a free and appropriate public education. The single issue raised in the complaint cites the offer made at the November 20, 2014 Individualized Education Plan meeting and sets out the inadequacies Student finds therein. He objects to his placement at Soquel High School and the assignment of a one-to-one aide for three months. Student has provided a five-item list of proposed remedies, consisting of his retained placement at Stanbridge Academy, reimbursement for tuition, “equitable remedies,” designation as the prevailing party, and attorney’s fees. The complaint contains all necessary elements.

The factual allegations are sufficient to put the District on notice of the issues forming the basis of the complaint. Student’s complaint identifies the issues and adequate related facts about the problem to permit District to respond to the complaint and participate in a resolution session and mediation. In particular, the relief sought by Student makes it clear that the change of placement proposed by the November 20, 2014 offer is the issue to be decided here.

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).

Therefore, Student's statement of the claim is sufficient.

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: February 10, 2015

/s/
CHRIS BUTCHKO
Administrative Law Judge
Office of Administrative Hearings