BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of: PARENT ON BEHALF OF STUDENT, v. NORWALK-LA MIRADA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT.	OAH Case No. 2018050331 ORDER OF DETERMINATION OF SUFFICIENCY OF DUE PROCESS COMPLAINT

On May 7, 2018, Student filed a due process hearing request[1] (complaint) with the Office of Administrative Hearings naming Norwalk-La Mirada Unified School District. On May 17, 2018, Norwalk-La Mirada filed a notice of insufficiency 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. (20 U.S.C. § 1415(b) & (c).) 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 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. (20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(7)(A)(ii)(III) & (IV).) These requirements prevent vague and confusing complaints, and promote fairness by providing the named parties with sufficient information to know how to prepare for the hearing and how to participate in resolution sessions and mediation. (See H.R.Rep. No. 108-77, 1st Sess. (2003), p. 115; Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, 1st Sess. (2003), pp. 34-35.)

The complaint provides enough information when it provides "an awareness and understanding of the issues forming the basis of the complaint." (Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, *supra*, at p. 34.) The pleading requirements should be liberally construed in light of the

[1] A request for a due process hearing under Education Code section 56502 is the due process complaint notice required under title 20 U.S.C. section 1415(b)(7)(A).

broad remedial purposes of the IDEA and the relative informality of the due process hearings it authorizes. (*Alexandra R. ex rel. Burke v. Brookline School Dist.* (D.N.H., Sept. 10, 2009, CIV. 06-CV-0215-JL) 2009 WL 2957991[nonpub. opn.]; *Escambia County Bd. 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, 8:04CV2657T24EAJ) 2005 WL 2850076 [nonpub. opn.]; but cf. *M.S.-G v. Lenape Regional High School Dist. Bd. of Educ.* (3d Cir. 2009) 306 Fed.Appx. 772, 775 [nonpub. opn.].) Whether the complaint is sufficient is a matter within the sound discretion of the Administrative Law Judge. (*Assistance to States for the Educ. of Children with Disabilities & Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities* (Aug. 14, 2006) 71 FR 46,540-46541, 46699.)

DISCUSSION

The facts alleged in Student's complaint are sufficient to put Norwalk-La Mirada on notice of the issues forming the basis of the complaint. Student's first issue refers to IEP's dated October 21, 2016, and November 17, 2016, and then lists six problems with those individualized education programs. While the "problems" are sparsely worded, they are, nonetheless, legally sufficient. The complaint then refers to IEP's dated October 10, 2017, and November 1, 2017, and relates nine additional "problems." Again although they are sparsely worded, they are legally sufficient. The issues can be further clarified during the prehearing conference currently calendared for June 25, 2018.

Student's complaint identifies the issues and adequate related facts about the problem to permit Norwalk-La Mirada to respond to the complaint (which it did contemporaneously when it filed the notice of insufficiency), and participate in a resolution session and, if requested by the parties, mediation. Therefore, Student's statement of the fifteen claims 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: May 21, 2018

DocuSigned by:
Rebecca Freie
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REBECCA FREIE
Administrative Law Judge
Office of Administrative Hearings