

# Coventry High has new student evaluation policy

ANGELENA CHAPMAN  
achapman@ricentral.com

COVENTRY—A brand new policy was passed in Coventry to give clarity to the student evaluations and what happens if a parent disagrees.

It is required by state law that the parent of a child with a disability must have the right “to an independent educational evaluation at public expense if the parent disagrees with an evaluation obtained by the public agency.”

Sue Lyons, Director of Special and Student Services for Coventry Public Schools, said that it happens all the time. Parents already know they have this right, she said, this just leaves less to confusion. It gives the school district a policy to refer back to that also complies with Rhode Island state law.

The policy clearly explains for both school officials and parents what the requirements are for an outside, independent evaluation should a parent disagree with the one obtained by

the school department, or the local public agency as it is referred to in the policy.

The new criteria will ensure that the evaluator is “certified or licensed by the state of Rhode Island in their area or expertise.”

He or she “must be able to develop a comprehensive report that clearly articulates their findings based on assessment data, anecdotal information and student observations, and its relevance within the context of the school setting.”

The evaluator must also “have and demonstrate a working knowledge of all applicable federal and state regulations pertaining to students with disabilities.”

The rate for the evaluation must also be comparable to what the school department pays for a similar evaluation.

The Regulations of the Rhode Island Board of Regents for Elementary and Secondary Education Governing the Education of Children with Disabilities article 300.502 states that the public agency or school must pro-

vide parents with the “agency criteria” should an individual evaluation be requested.

The school department is also able to provide a couple of options to parents where an independent evaluation can be obtained and agency criteria met.

The independent evaluator cannot be employed by the school department where the child is being educated.

If a parent has a strong feeling about where they would like to take their child to be evaluated and if it meets agency criteria, that would definitely be considered, Lyons said. “We always consider what a parent would like,” she said.

A parent may be asked by the school department why he or she disagrees with the initial evaluation, but is not required to give an explanation.

The schools may file a “due process complaint” if they believe their evaluation is appropriate.

A parent is allowed only one independent educational evaluation at public expense when an evaluation is conducted that they disagree with.

Public expense can mean that the school department will pay for the evaluation or that they will work to ensure it is conducted at no expense to the parent.

All of the Rhode Island Board of Regents regulations must be applied to every student.

The school districts are required to have a manual specifically addressing special education, but Lyons is also working to incorporate the policies into the policy manual for all students so everyone will be aware of them.

They will still maintain the special education manual as required by state law.

The first reading of the policy was at the July 27 school committee meeting. After the second reading on August 10, the school committee voted unanimously to adopt the new policy.