

Dear Windward Families,

We are writing to share a Windward School policy change that will impact families working with attorneys to pursue tuition reimbursement in Westchester, Connecticut, New Jersey, and other suburban school districts.

As our primary focus is educating our students and keeping our teachers in the classroom, participation from our CSE Office in the impartial hearing process has historically been considered on a case-by-case basis. Over the last few years, requests for Windward to participate in impartial hearings have steadily increased. More importantly, as litigation in the suburban cases has become increasingly contentious, the school districts' attorneys have begun to focus more on challenging the credibility of Windward witnesses as opposed to focusing on merits of the suit for reimbursement. After careful consideration, we have decided that in lieu of having Windward employees testify directly in these cases, we can more effectively support suburban families in their reimbursement lawsuits by providing detailed documentation that represents how Windward addresses your children's needs.

So, to reiterate, as of September 2022, we will no longer be participating as witnesses in the impartial hearing process involving school districts in Connecticut, New Jersey, and Westchester County (neither via affidavit nor live testimony). We expect that our new approach will generate outcomes that are more fortuitous for the families involved and allow our CSE Office to effectively support more families in the process of seeking reimbursement. We are fortunate to have a CSE Department dedicated to helping families participate in IEP meetings, which allows families to best position themselves to advocate for the appropriate supports for their children, especially at the point of transition from Windward into a mainstream school environment. Our CSE Department is also committed to helping families keep documentation with their school districts to ensure that their children have the accommodations they deserve to demonstrate their true academic strengths. And again, we will continue to provide you with individualized documentation that we believe will objectively and effectively explain for impartial hearings the specific program your child is receiving, how their needs are being addressed, and the progress they are making.

This update can be communicated with your attorneys as they work on filing your cases for the coming year. We feel that expert witnesses, such as clinicians and educational consultants, may be better able to testify on your family's behalf, and we encourage you to speak to your attorney about this option.

Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,
Jamie Williamson
Head of School