

BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of:

PARENT ON BEHALF OF STUDENT,

v.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY OFFICE OF
EDUCATION EARLY START.

OAH CASE NO. 2013010169

ORDER OF DETERMINATION OF
SUFFICIENCY OF DUE PROCESS
COMPLAINT

On January 8, 2013, Student filed a Due Process Hearing Request¹ (complaint) with the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), naming the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE). On January 17, 2013, SCCOE filed a Notice of Insufficiency (NOI) as to Student's complaint. On January 22, 2013, OAH granted in part and denied in part SCCOE's NOI as Issue 1 as to behavior, health, and academic assessments and Issues 2 and 3 of Student's complaint were insufficiently pled. The order gave Student 14 days to file an amended complaint.

Student filed an amended complaint on February 5, 2013. SCCOE filed an NOI as to the amended complaint on February 15, 2013.

APPLICABLE LAW

The named parties to a due process hearing request have the right to challenge the sufficiency of the complaint.² The complaint is deemed sufficient unless a party notifies the Office of Administrative Hearings and the other party in writing within 15 days of receiving the complaint that the party believes the complaint has not met the notice requirements.³ 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) and Education Code section 56502, subdivision (c)(1).

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); Ed. Code 56502, subd. § (d)(1).

³ 20 U.S.C. § 1415(c)(2)(C); Ed. Code, § 56502, subd. (d)(1).

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.⁴ 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.⁵

The complaint provides enough information when it provides “an awareness and understanding of the issues forming the basis of the complaint.”⁶ 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.⁷ Whether the complaint is sufficient is a matter within the sound discretion of the Administrative Law Judge.⁸

DISCUSSION

Student’s amended complaint contains four issues for hearing regarding SCCOE’s alleged failure to adequately assess his unique needs, failing to provide adequate educational goals and services, and not producing requested educational records. As to Issue 1, Student’s amended complaint contains an adequate narrative regarding his educational struggles and needs, and SCCOE’s purported failure to provide occupational therapy (OT), assistive technology (AT) and health assessments. However, the amended complaint does not allege sufficient facts that SCCOE needed to assess Student’s behavior and academic needs. While

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

⁵ See, H.R.Rep. No. 108-77, 1st Sess. (2003), p. 115; Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, 1st Sess. (2003), pp. 34-35.

⁶ Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, *supra*, at p. 34.

⁷ *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.].

⁸ 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).

the last paragraph in Issue 1 succinctly ties the factual allegations as to OT, AT and health assessment to the alleged violation, no such explanation exists as to SCCOE's need to conduct assessment as to Student's behavior and academic needs. Accordingly, Student alleges sufficient facts in Issue 1 to support claims regarding OT, AT and health assessments to put SCCOE on notice, and therefore these claims are sufficient. However Student does not allege sufficient facts in Issue 1 as to behavior and academic assessments.

As to Issue 2, the amended complaint contains sufficient allegations that SCCOE failed to provide him with adequate goals and services to meet his unique needs. Student's amended complaint sets forth adequately Student's areas of need that SCCOE goals failed to address and the services required. Accordingly, Student alleges sufficient facts supporting this issue to put SCCOE on notice, and therefore this claim is sufficient.

As to Issue 3, the amended complaint contains sufficient allegations that SCCOE failed to conduct an adequate functional analysis assessment and developed an inadequate behavior support plan that did not meet Student's unique needs. Accordingly, Student alleges sufficient facts supporting these claims to put SCCOE on notice, and therefore Issue 3 is sufficient.

As to Issue 4, the amended complaint contains sufficient allegations that SCCOE failed to produce to Parent a complete copy of Student's educational records and that this significantly impeded Parent's ability to participate in Student's educational decision making process. Accordingly, Student alleges sufficient facts supporting these claims to put SCCOE on notice, and therefore this claim is sufficient.

Therefore, Issue 1 as to the OT, AT and health assessments and Issues 2 through 4 are sufficiently pled to put SCCOE on notice as to the basis of Student's claims. However, Issue 1 as to behavior academic assessment is not sufficiently pled.

Student's proposed resolution is that SCCOE fund independent educational evaluations, a private placement, compensatory education and reasonable goals and production of education records. 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 resolution stated in Student's amended 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. Issue 1 as to the OT, AT and health assessments and Issues 2 through 4 of Student's amended complaint are sufficient under title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A)(ii).

2. Issue 1 as to the behavior and academic assessments of Student's amended complaint are insufficiently pled under title 20 United States Code section 1415(c)(2)(D).

3. Student shall be permitted to file a second amended complaint under title 20 United States Code section 1415(c)(2)(E)(i)(II).⁹

4. The second amended complaint shall comply with the requirements of title 20 United States Code section 1415 (b)(7)(A)(ii), and shall be filed not later than 14 days from the date of this order.

5. If Student fails to file a timely second amended complaint, the hearing shall proceed only on Issue 1 as to the OT, AT and health assessments and Issues 2 through 4 in Student's amended complaint.

Dated: February 21, 2013

/s/

PETER PAUL CASTILLO
Administrative Law Judge
Office of Administrative Hearings

⁹ The filing of an amended complaint will restart the applicable timelines for a due process hearing.