

**Commission for Accessibility
Meeting Minutes
Monday, October 16, 2023**

Meeting Via Zoom

In Attendance: Christine Santori, Maureen Culhane, Michael Landrigan, Kate White, Tony Phillips, Don Ciota

Call to Order: 5:05PM

Town of Ridgefield Guidelines Booklet

Hyperlink to Ridgefield Guidelines Booklet:

https://www.ridgefieldct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif4916/f/uploads/town_of_ridgefield_bcc_handbook_-_final_11.3.22_0.pdf

Note: A Motion was made during this meeting and appears below.

Public Comment:

Maureen gave updates on ADA Compliance regarding restaurants on Main Street. Michael inquired about progress on the transition plan and specifically on the walkway near the Rec Center. Tony stated there is \$75K set aside yearly in the town budget to fund ADA projects. A suggestion was made for a request to increase this amount, possibly by the addition of an escalator clause, which would seek to keep funding current with inflation.

Discussion of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

This law was passed in 1975 and followed the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. IDEA specifically mandates a free appropriate public education for eligible children with disabilities, while also providing for related services to those children. The objective of this Act is to ensure a national policy of equality of opportunity and related services.

At the state level, the Connecticut State Board of Education believes that all students, including students with exceptionalities, are unique and influenced by cultural, linguistic, intellectual, psychological, health and economic factors.

The Contrast of Gifted & Talented Programs in CT with the Mandates of the Idea Act:

The State of Connecticut requires that each board of education provide referral, identification and evaluation services only for gifted and talented children enrolled in grades kindergarten to twelve. The referral may come from any source including the teacher, administrator, parent, guardian, or child.

Under current regulations, public school districts in Connecticut are required to identify gifted and talented students, K-12. The process for identifying these students is decided upon by school district personnel. School districts are NOT mandated to provide services to students

CT Resources for Special Education :

The state website lists the contact information for the Bureau of Special Education. It is listed here as a convenience to the public. Questions, concerns, or inquiries that may not be addressed at the local level, may be answered by this department.

To Contact the Bureau of Special Education

[BSE Photo Staff Directory](#)

**Connecticut State Department of Education
Bureau of Special Education
P.O. Box 2219
Hartford, CT 06145-2219
(860) 713-6910, Fax (860) 713-7051**

Bryan Klimkiewicz, Special Education Division Director

MOTION: To allow the chair to prepare an article for publication on the subject of IDEA and how this Act mandated educational opportunities on a national basis for children with disabilities.

PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.



It Takes a Village

Commission for Accessibility Chair, Don Ciota, talks about raising a child with Special Needs. [Read his story.](#)

It Takes a Village

Commission for Accessibility Chair talks about raising a Child with Special Needs

Congress states: Disability is a natural part of Human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.

Raising a child with or without special needs requires love, dedication, fortitude, resourcefulness and courage. In addition to these and other necessary traits, families with a special needs child need to devote an over-abundance of time over many years or a lifetime to the specific nature of disability. The Commission for Accessibility has made a goal of informing the community of the rights under the law that exist to promote accessibility. In doing so the aim is to communicate to those with a disability and their families, that through legislation society recognizes and provides for accommodation. This paper will focus on one in particular, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

As a parent of a developmentally disabled child, now an adult, I recall the elation we felt at every milestone accomplished. Such progress was often very slow and it was never clear what goals would be reached. Things that non-handicapped children of the same age were able to do in the normal developmental process, were much slower in coming, if at all, and required much patience, time, and hands-on repetition. What made a difference in the life of this child was the law that was passed just a few years before she was born. IDEA is a law that requires a free appropriate education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.



Pictured here:
Hope, daughter of Don
Ciota, Chair of the
Commission for
Accessibility.

IDEA is the law of the land. It provides the solid foundation for providing educational and allied services to children with disabilities. Here in Ridgefield, the community is most fortunate to have an informed and dedicated schools administration headed by Superintendent Susie Da Silva, and Assistant Superintendent, Elizabeth Hannaway. In a meeting with them in my role as chairman of the Ridgefield Commission for Accessibility, I have found them to be sensitive and most cooperative in ensuring compliance with accessibility for the disabled.

The students who require special services, their families, and all of the community who are concerned about the high aims of this legislation, should rest assured that no speaker, in whatever position, can undo what has been set in place by Congress, and most capably overseen by the Ridgefield Schools professional administration. And legislation passed by Congress can only be undone by the Supreme Court or modified by Congress itself.

In addition to working with school special services, it might be helpful for parents of children with disabilities to communicate with one another to share information and concerns. Parents of younger students could benefit from the knowledge of parents with older students. Parents of older children willing to share experiences, could provide personal testimony that could help new parents navigate for their child. In addition, to the Facebook page, "Ridgefield Special Needs Families," it might be helpful to establish a system-wide parent group, whose focus is upon special needs, meeting on a periodic basis to share information, ideas, and encouragement.

In sum, parents of children with disabilities have much to rely upon in the protection afforded special services in Ridgefield. The professional administration of the system is well-prepared to implement all mandates required by law. And finally, IDEA itself, is a civil rights law as well as an educational law, making its adherence subject to federal and state oversight.

My daughter benefited from such programs from pre-K through high school and is now in her 22nd year of employment in a competitive-market job with the same employer.

Adjourn: 6:10 PM

2023 Meeting Dates: (Mondays at 5:00PM)

Nov 13

Dec 11

Until further notice these meetings will continue via Zoom.

Minutes prepared by Don Ciota, Chairman