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Dr. Matthew Wanzenberg
Wanzenberg and Associates
Wednesday April 23, 2025
6:00p-6:45p

OVERVIEW OF TONIGHT'S PRESENTATION

- 1.) Overview of our practice and how we support families
 - 2.) Summary of Citywide Assessment Team process and “rules of the road”
 - 3.) Important resources, timelines, and considerations for best effect
 - 4.) Time permitting, Q&A (please send them in chat for Jessica)
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- **For starters, an important request and disclosure.**
 - This presentation is limited to the evaluative process. Support plans, services, and supports vary greatly based on individual needs, and are best discussed directly and confidentially in a free consultation/intake.
 - For those who are interested in scheduling a free consultation, our client intake packet is available [here](#).
 - After 4/23/25, all resources discussed herein (including a recording of the presentation), are available online at www.iepguardians.org under *Presentations* or <http://bit.ly/4m1reET>
 - All resources will be provided to Jessica Trumbull (GEMS-Chicago) for distribution as well

Who we are and what we do...

For 17 years, the staff at Wanzenberg and Associates are professionals within the special education field who seek to guard and improve services for students of all exceptionalities. We are experienced special education teachers and administrators who have operated on both sides of the table between parents and schools.

Our goals as an organization are to:

- 1. Serve as a policy ombudsman and watchdog over our clients' educational programs**
- 2. Empower families of students with disabilities to realize reasonable self determination in the IEP process**
- 3. Increase a school's ability to maximize educational benefit for students with disabilities**
- 4. Assist school districts in the development of a more equitable and accessible model of service delivery**

Who we are and what we do...

Types of services we provide to families and students:

- Free initial consultation (between 30-45 minutes, typically). Returned client packet required
- **Advocacy and guidance in all school matters, but particular expertise in special needs populations: including but not limited to identification, problem solving, monitoring interventions, development of placement options, development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs, or special education) and Section 504 plans (general education accommodations only plans)**
- Representation at meetings
- Guidance behind the scenes (limited non-representation agreements)
- Executive functioning support (direct service to student)
- Parent training and empowerment
- Other consultative duties (expert witness, college support for students with disabilities, dispute resolution)

What are CPS's responsibilities to families of children with known or suspected disabilities?

- All public school districts are required to assume *Child Find* (age 5-21 *inclusive*) responsibilities for all children who reside or are schooled privately within the boundaries of CPS School District 299.
- Not every referral for evaluation is necessarily approved / *deemed necessary* (you have rights if you disagree).
- If the school district agrees an evaluation is in *deemed necessary*, this includes a comprehensive evaluation, free of cost to determine if the child has a disability, and —if eligible— these disabilities require specialized services (IEP) or accommodations (504).
- All evaluations include at least a special education teacher (typically serves as leader of the process, or LEA), school psychologist, and school nurse (for required hearing and vision screenings).
- Evaluations are always multidisciplinary and can and typically do include social workers, speech and language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, vision and mobility specialists, hearing itinerants, and other specialized evaluative staff.
- Typically and by state and federal law, **referrals for initial evaluation, child evaluation, and —if eligible— development of support plans** take up to 75 school days.
- CPS does things differently than most school districts (i.e., selective windows of time, typically all in one meetings in one day for 2-6 hours, student present, can break meetings up into multiple days, expedite findings and eligibility).
- There are five distinct steps to the evaluation process (and a sixth if the child is found eligible): Referral, decision to evaluate communicated to parent, domain meeting, child evaluation, eligibility discussion, and —if eligible— development of the initial plan (IEP or Section 504 Plan).

Who might benefit from or require a referral to CPS Citywide Assessment team?



- Children who have a history of requiring specialized supports due to an established disability (clinical or educationally rendered): **[RE-EVALUATION]**
- Children who are new to public school supports who have or are suspected to have a disability impacting learning (includes hearing, vision, functional, cognitive, communication, social emotional, motor, behavioral, or academic difficulties): **[INITIAL EVALUATION]**
- Students with known or suspected disabilities who may be headed to another private program after GEMS Chicago, but require proportionate share (fractional) services: **[SERVICE PLAN]**
- Students who may or may not be supported, post-GEMS, in a private or public school but may need the option of public school support **[INITIAL OR RE-EVALUATION]**

What is the process to refer my GEMS student (age 6+) to CPS for a referral to the Citywide Assessment Team (CAT)?

1. First, **compile all relevant information** you have about your child's strengths and needs in school over the past school year. Include grades, attendance, summaries of performance, previous support plans, clinical assessment, achievement testing, diagnostic information and—if helpful— samples of student work.
2. **Connect with your child's "helper network" to secure any supportive documentation to transfer to CPS:** therapists, tutors, teachers, physicians. Summaries of needed support in school. Be sure to address all potential areas of need to share with CPS.
3. If applicable, include current (within 1-3 years) **private psychological or neuropsychological testing** to accompany your referral.
4. **Complete the required CPS forms** (all available linked at the end of the presentation):
 - A. Parentally-Placed Private School Student Consent and Registration Form SY25
 - B. Parent/Guardian Authorization to Send IEP Documents and Related Information via Electronic Mail
 - C. If applicable, complete Consent for Release/Exchange of Student Records and Information for any professionals who need to communicate with the team before or after the referral.

What is the process to refer my GEMS student (age 6+) to CPS for a Citywide Assessment? (continued)

Once your child's information is ready to be transferred electronically (pdf format is preferred):

1. **Email** this information to privateschoolevals@cps.edu and await confirmation of receipt. Make a note of the date and time you sent this email. If you are understandably sensitive to sharing confidential information about your child via email, you may make arrangements to hand deliver the forms or password protect the forms with instructions on how to access the documents in a separate email or voicemail.
2. **Monitor** your email and await a reply, determining if the evaluation is *deemed necessary* or declined.
3. You will be **receive a reply** with a copy of your rights as a parent. If *deemed necessary*, you will also be offered a window of time and often variable locations (days/times, although they can be very limited as the process progresses so start early!) for this evaluation.
4. **Plan on at least a several hours/half day** (or even multiple days in more complex profiles) for that appointment.
5. You should plan to **accompany your child to the appointment**. You may bring any one you wish to support the process, including providers that may have a special understanding of the child's learning profile.

What is the process to refer my GEMS student (age 6+) to CPS for a Citywide Assessment? (continued)

Once you arrive for the actual evaluation appointment:

1. You will **sign in** at the CPS office and await your name to be called.
2. Once you are called into the meeting, you will be **introduced** to the team members and their roles. The purpose of the meeting will be summarized.
3. A *domain meeting* will commence where all team members will **review** what we currently know about the child, and what areas/*domains* where challenges are historically observed are relevant to explore through assessment (achievement, cognitive, motor, hearing/vision, communication, social emotional, functional, health). Team members who may not have a role in evaluating your child may be dismissed. Once the relevant areas have been decided by you and the team, you will be asked to sign consent for the actual child evaluation to commence.

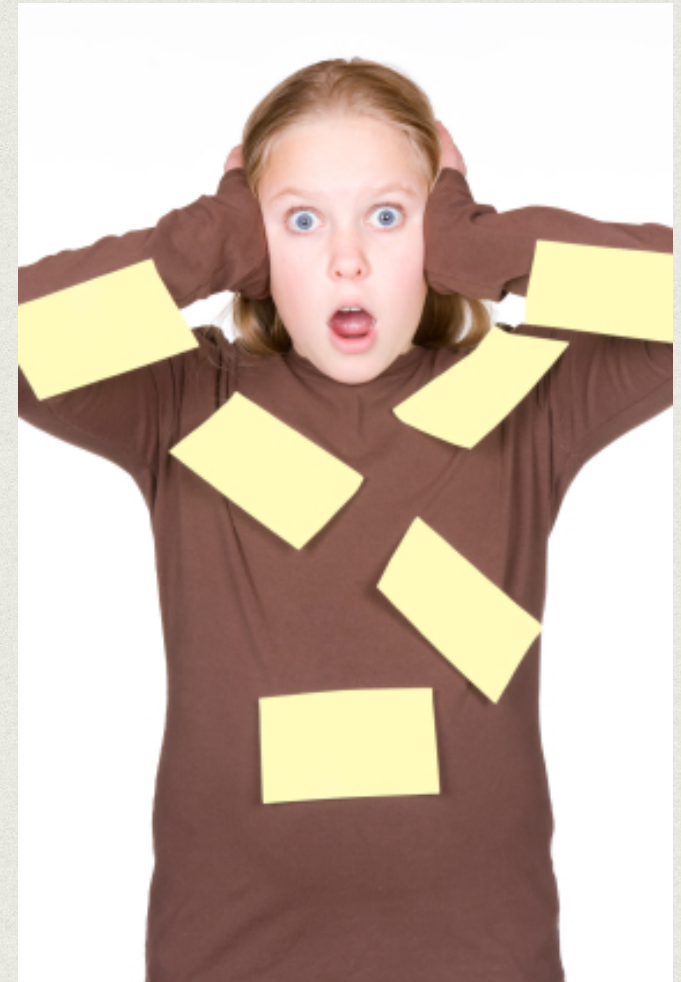
What is the process to refer my GEMS student (age 6+) to CPS for a Citywide Assessment? (continued)

Once you have signed consent for the evaluation, the actual *child evaluation* will commence:

1. You will **be informed if the evaluation is to proceed that day (and if so, what time).**
2. The team may choose to schedule more complex evaluations over multiple days.
3. If it proceeds, the team will typically break up into smaller groups (i.e., family and student). Evaluators may take your child to another room to conduct testing or conduct play based learning with you present. Typically, the family will be interviewed by the school nurse, school psychologist, and social worker for their evaluation components.
4. Once the evaluation has been completed, evaluation results will be reviewed by each team member and eligibility for supports will be discussed. If applicable, you should receive draft of all reports at least 3 days in advance of the meeting. Check the record for errors or points that require discussion in the next conference.
5. Once eligibility is determined, plan options (IEP or 504) will be discussed and timeline for development will be discussed (may be immediately after the eligibility meeting).
6. You will receive a record (digital or hardcopy if requested) all of reports and recommendations.
7. You have presumptive rights and protections as a family of a child with suspected disabilities. Coordinate a time to talk with us in intake if you need support after the meeting.

Some observations to help make the process effective...

- Plan for flexible paths in the process (i.e., all in one meeting, two separate meetings , and for more comprehensive evaluations there may be multiple meetings required for the six phases described). In our experience, there is some degree of unpredictability in each assignment we have shared with the CAT staff.
- It is super helpful (and often supremely appreciated by CPS staff) if you come with relevant contacts, diagnoses, and dates of relevant findings [surgeries, dates of attendance at schools, history of previous intervention, etc.].
- Prepare that some team members may be remotely participating.
- It is critical that each suspected area is determined to be relevant, and if so assessed with one or more appropriate instruments. If it is not relevant, it will not be examined in the evaluation.
- Ask your child's team if they believe there will be successive meetings planned.
- Bring snacks, drinks, and any supportive tools (sensory and fidget items, communication devices, and perhaps a preferred activity for the child to engage in if there are more conferencing between adults required).
- Feel comfortable taking a break if you or your child need it to participate meaningfully.
- Communicating a student's strengths is important in the process, but is essential to accentuate and document need! The more subtle the need to teachers, the more important outside supporting documentation will be.
- Be prepared to describe a 1, 3, and 5 year vision for you child in school. What do you think would need to happen to actualize those goals?
- It is a confusing and often counterintuitive process (even to those of us who work in this field): feel free to ask questions (particularly as acronyms are used!).



What are some considerations for an ideal referral to the CAT?



- You have a **relatively short window** to operate to initiate the process (two months) for SY25-26 services and supports.
- Start **now** in determining if/securing a good private evaluation is included with your initial email referral. The more info you can give upfront, the more streamlined the process. Often, CPS may defer to many findings of outside testing if the reasoning is sound (data linked to findings).
- CPS is required to provide evaluations free of charge. But, these can feel rushed and sometimes miss important features of a child's learning profile. Private evaluations under insurance can take up to 4 months from referral to report. The team may need time (at least 10 days) to consider any outside report. Private pay evaluations may be the best option for some families given the timeline.
- **Schools are not required to accept outside reports.** They are required to **fully consider** the results and findings.
- Remember that **clinical diagnoses** are —by themselves— insufficient to warrant a Section 504 Plan or IEP. The child must also demonstrate *adverse effect* (documented and observable discrepancies in a major school/life activity) to warrant a support plan. This is where provider input is often essential in demonstrating how diagnoses impact learning and school functioning.
- Not all students require special education services. **Reasonable accommodations** are environmental changes that can be provided by a general education teacher under a 504 plan. These accommodations do not substantially alter the learning standard or expected outcome that other children are expected to demonstrate. There are no goals or specific outcomes connected to this type of plan.

What are some considerations for an ideal referral to the CAT? (continued)

- Once eligible, a child's **placement** can be very complicated (not covered in this presentation).
- Children who require an IEP (special education), are supported under one or more of the special education **eligibilities** [here](#). A child can have multiple eligibilities, with one primary and multiple secondary eligibilities.
- The process can be overwhelming and confusing: the **best advocate** asks questions, and clarifies assumptions before the conversation emerges further.
- Disagreement and disputes in the process are not unexpected, but can be challenging and difficult to navigate without some expertise (*"We don't know what we don't know!"*)
- Plan for the **marathon**, not the sprint!
- Once eligibility is determined, the IEP can be reviewed
- An IEP parent's **most powerful right** is the ability to request a meeting within 10 days.



Critical Steps and Timelines for Summer 2025 (SY25-26)



- CPS has communicated a **CAT referral deadline** of 5/23/25.
- If request is issued by 5/23/25 and *deemed necessary* thereafter, this would guarantee a summer evaluation appointment which runs **only three weeks**.
- The **window** of evaluative appointments for all of CPS for SY25-26 is 6/23/25 to 7/25/25.
- The **W&A Intake window** for GEMS Chicago families is 4/23/25 to 5/15/25 (may be held virtually).
- We have coordinated potential space for between **15-20 GEMS-Chicago families**.
- For scheduling an intake, parents are asked to complete and return the W&A intake packet [here](#). Be sure to save before attaching so information is not lost! A draft agreement can be issued once we get the packet back.
- Our intake and retention (10 hour retainer) must occur by 5/15/25.
- Fee structure is being developed.
- Your patience is appreciated!

Important Resources

Wanzenberg and Associates

W&A Intake form [here](#)
Dr. Wanzenberg's email [here](#)

CPS Office of *Students with Disabilities (OSD)* site [here](#)
More details on the CPS Evaluation Process [here](#)
CPS family support specialist info [here](#)
CPS Referral form available [here](#) **(required for referral)**
CPS Email Authorization form [here](#) **(required for referral)**
CPS Release of Information (for outside providers) [here](#) **(optional)**

Attorney references available upon request.

Private evaluators available upon request, but these two evaluative practices (private pay only) have worked with GEMS-Chicago in the past and have limited space to assist in evaluation for GEMS-Chicago Families:

[Dr. Teri Hull](#)
[Chicago Neurodevelopmental Center](#)
(Drs. Victor, Tercek, Howard, Pecha, Lejo, and Gregor)

Other Advocacy practices we value in Chicagoland
(like us, all current or former special education administrators or staff):

[North Shore Special Education Consulting](#)
[Education Empowerment Partners](#)
[Brandon M. Cochrane and Associates](#)



Q&A/IN CLOSING...