

- Broadcasting from Da Vybe Radio Station 107.9 FM. My name is Amelia Headley LaMont and I am joined this morning by my co-host, Iris Bermudes. Good morning, Iris.

- Good morning, good morning Virgin Islands.

- We have a few rules of engagement. We request that there be no use of names, no personal attacks, no unfounded allegations, product pitches, no profanity, and we don't give medical advice, so we won't be able to respond to questions of that sort. The opinions expressed are those of the Disability Rights Center and those of our guest. This is a live calling show and we encourage you to call in if you are so inclined. The number is 779-1079 or 713-1079. Today we have a very special guest, we are thrilled because this is, we are coming upon the beginning of the school year. We're, our special guest this morning is Maureen Moorehead, district director for the Division of Special Education. Good morning, Ms. Moorehead.

- A very good morning to you and to our listening audience.

- How are you?

- I am well. And first, let me say on behalf of our district director, Mrs. Lyrhea Bryan-Heyliger and our entire special education leadership, thank you for affording us the opportunity to share some information about our programs and the services that are available to individuals with disabilities from birth through 21 with your listening audience, so we thank you so very much.

- Thank you, thanks for participating.

- It's always a pleasure.

- You are so welcome and we're really, really thrilled to have you here but firstly, congratulations on being selected to 2016 Saint Croix District Employee of the Year for your devotion for services provided within the Department of Education, well-deserved, well-earned. I tell you, you need to tell us about what made you so passionate about Special Ed because I remember, working with you a long time ago and you were still that passionate, no we got to do this, we got to do that person.

- Well, thank you so very much, you know, in order to keep your passion, you've got to always remember why you're, where you are and why you do what you do and who you do it for and when you see the children and families that you are afforded the opportunity to make a difference in their lives, you can't help but be passionate.

- You can't, that's so true, that is so true.

- And it's been many years, so the fact that you're able to sustain that passion for such a long period of time is quite remarkable.

- I have had the privilege of working with so many outstanding educators. Educators who are supportive, educators who wanna be sure that you succeed, who offered their, provided mentorship and, you know, when you work with parents and you do something that is so simple and it makes such an impact in the parents' life, they remember that forever. And so working at the Department of Education of Division of Special Education, it's an absolute pleasure.

- Very good.

- Tell us a little bit about you. I mean, what brought you to this, you know, vocation?

- Oh, I got there quite by chance and I'll tell you a little bit about that. When I graduated from the University of the Virgin Islands, I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education. I knew when I came out from the UVI that I had all the skills, I was ready to go and change the world.

- Change the world.

- And then I got into a 5th grade class at the Eulalie R. Rivera School and I was shocked because I had students who were functioning on the kindergarten in my 5th grade class. I had kids who were functioning on the 5th grade level and kids who were functioning all the way to 8th grade level. And when you think of it, back in those days, we didn't talk much about differentiated and structure. We didn't talk about meeting the child where they were, we taught to the middle. And I came to the realization that during that school year that I did not have the skills necessary to make a difference for all of my children in my class and I wanted them all to succeed. So at the end of that year, I separated from the Department of Education. I went on to the University of the Virgin, no, that's not where I went. I went on to the University of Connecticut in Storrs and I completed my master's degree in Special Education with the emphasis, back then it was mental retardation, now it's intellectually disabled. So I did my master's degree in that and then at the end of that year, I returned to the school system, hoping to work with that population. Unfortunately, there were no vacancies there but there was a vacancy working with students with emotional disturbances. I figure I'll give that a try and let me tell you, I just absolutely loved working with that population because generally, those kids are bright.

- Uh-hmm.

- They got off the track a little bit but with a little nudge in, you can get them back, so I figured, "Okay. This could be a passion." And so at the end of that year, I, again, separated from the Department. I went back to Yukon and I completed my six-year certificate with an emphasis in working with students with emotional disturbances and administration. And about a year later, back then, Public Law 94-142 had just come into play. So I was invited to apply for a position to be the District Coordinator of Special Education, which I did, I got it and 39 years later, I'm still here, so that's, that was my path to Special Education and I must say that during the, during my, the time that I've had with the department, I've worn a lot of different hats. The hat that I wear often depends on the needs of the students, the staff that I have, that we have and the preferences of the leadership of the department. But I must say that the Department of Education and the Division Of Special Education has provided me with so many opportunities for personal development and the support has always been there and it is when those factors that are in place, you don't feel as though you're going to work, you feel as though you're going to do something you enjoy and 39 years later, I still enjoy it and so I'm still here and that, my dear, has been my path to Special Education.

- Now, you mentioned Public Law 94-142 that was, what was then called the Education of the Handicap Act.

- Yes. Uh-hmm. Yes, it was.

- Wow. All right.

- I remember when I was sent to the class room at Eulalie. What was the school? I'm trying to remember the name.

- Evelyn Williams, I think.

- Evelyn Williams. That was the best thing you did for me because I learned so much about the one-on-one teaching with these children and like you said, some were emotionally disturbed, some were autistic.

- Uh-hmm.

- Some were physically disabled and I, and I remember for the first time in that school, we put our kids on stage at the Christmas.

- Precisely.

- Christmas Holiday and that's your passion.

- Exactly. And that's what we wanna do. You know, I always say, "For a person with a disability, if we provide them with the accommodation, the modification, and the support, they can do whatever we're asking them to do." But too often, we have expectations but we don't provide accommodations, the modifications, or the support and so I love to see that because when we do that, then we, they can be included.

- Absolutely.

- Absolutely.

- Now, Iris needs to come clean audience, she talked about teaching, so you've, we've only known you as a health advocate. So now, we're learning that you have a background as a teacher and this maybe the first time that a lot of people, you know, knew that about you, so you wanna tell us a little bit more?

- No, this show's for Maureen, not, no, I did work with Special Education years ago.

- As a teacher.

- Well, as a, I was a specialist first and then we did transitional planning with the State Office for the kids in high school getting ready to leave to go to, into Voc Rehab or community colleges. I work with a teacher at Central High to do that but I think my passion, like Maureen was, when she put me in the classroom and it helped me learned everything that I had learned to get my masters in special education, it was right there in front of me and I had to apply all those things that we had learned and it worked. It worked.

- You know, one of the things I wanna say to that, a lot of times, there's a disconnect between students, what's happening in the school and the administration. And I think it's so important for us to get back into the classroom, to get our hands, to get involve and engage with the students because then we are able to make better decisions on behalf of our clients, who are our students.

- Exactly. Because when I went into that classroom and I, you know, brought back those theories that we learned about dealing [clears throat] with the children with different, you know, disabilities. You know, I kept telling myself, I could do that. I had an autistic child who loved to sing.

- Yes.

- Very intelligent but he couldn't express himself, you know, in speaking and when I heard him singing, I said, "Oh, okay. We'll teach you by singing." And we used that kind of method to help him overcome his speaking abilities and it worked.

- Exactly.

- It worked.

- Well, here's the plan. We're gonna explore a lot more this morning with our special guest, Maureen Moorehead and we'll be back in a few minutes.

- Welcome back. [clears throat] Maureen, when we were on break, we're talking about parents of special children with disabilities. Can you share with the listening audience since school is starting soon, what should parents of children with disabilities look forward to in this coming school year?

- First of all, I wanna remind parents that we are partners because we're working to support the same child.

- Right.

- I wanna also say that if we're going to be successful, the Department of Education Division of Special Education must assume its responsibilities but on the same hand, the parents must assume their responsibilities because neither one of us can do it independently. So as we get ready to start this, the new school year, I wanna remind parents that they have what's called an IEP which is an Individualized Educational Plan for their child. They should be familiar with that. The first thing that I would like to suggest that they do is when they're, if their child is going into a new class or a new school, be sure that they check with their teacher because it's important that the teacher and all the other persons who support that child know that the child has an Individualized Education Program. They need to know what is in it, they need to know what accommodations and modification that child has because too often, we get the complaint at the end of the semester or when the child is failing. So the first thing I want parents to do is to go in to the school. Remember, you're a part of that team. The other thing I wanna say to parents is you know your child better than any of the service providers that are serving your child.

- Yes.

- You're with your child 24 hours a day during the summer or at least...

- Uh-hmm.

- ...you know, a good portion of the day. We're seeing your child for just a couple hours of the day. Talk to your service providers. Tell us about some of the changes that happened over the summer. Tell us about some of their interests. Tell us, talk to us about some of your goals. Because in order for us to get there,

it's important that we work together and to work together, we've got to be on the same page. I also wanna encourage parents to be a part of your school's PTA.

- Uh-hmm.

- To be regular visitors. Don't come in just when there is a problem. I wanna encourage you, when our teachers, our staff had they do something good that you appreciate, that you let them know because that feeling on, of appreciation is going to inspire them and encourage them to keep going. I also wanna let parents know that during the school year, too, a lot of collaborative efforts with VI UCEDD, Disabilities Rights, University Center for Excellence on the, for Developmental Disabilities.

- Uh-hmm.

- The Disability Rights, the Department of Education, a lot of us, we collaborate to offer training to help our parents understand their children's disability, to help them understand their roles, and to help, to give them some strategies that they can use to support their children. So it is very important that when you are aware of these activities, that you participate. Again, I think the most important piece that I wanna leave with parents is we're partners and a part, we've got to be on the same page, we've got to present a united front for our children because when we do, that's when our children are going to succeed. The other thing I wanna say is, if you have a problem or a concern, don't hesitate to call us. Our number is area code 340-718-7997 and each school has a person assigned to that, so you can ask our receptionist who is the administrator assigned to that school. Have a conversation, talk about what you need. The most important thing I wanna say is that it is by talking to the right persons that you're going to see change, so that if you talk about it without reporting it to the persons who can make a difference, all you're doing is talking. So we encourage you that if you have a concern, I wanna say I think we did a, we do a pretty good job but I know we're not perfect. And if your child happens to be the child for whom we're not perfect, you've got to let us know but let us work together to make a difference.

- Absolutely. One of things that [clears throat] DRCVI, the Disability Rights Center has done is purchased a video.

- Uh-hmm.

- A twelve-minute video which illustrates three couples that have grown up and gotten married. And this video is so inspiring because when you look at it, I want to share it with you.

- I would be happy to have it. Then I would be happy to share it with our staff.

- When you look at it, it shows how, although they had disabilities, yet they were able to maintain their marriage intact.

- Uh-hmm.

- So they learned a lot along the way, it goes to what you're saying, you know, we need to partner, we need to work with our, you, Special Education, need to work with the parents because they have that child longer and for more hours than anybody else and if they can take from the classroom what's being done in the classroom into the home setting, you're helping your child grow up at least appropriately.

- Absolutely.

- You know, because they're gonna become adults.

- Absolutely. You know, and you've got to, when you stop and you think about it, we're not preparing them to be successful in school, that is not our goal, it never was. Our goal is to help them to prepare them to be successful in life.

- In life.

- And the things that we're doing in the classroom are only practice and so for that reasons, we've got to have it coming from all direction and the message must the same.

- Exactly. Exactly.

- Uh-hmm. When you talk about life preparation, I guess that takes me to the transition piece. Can you tell us where we need to go in that regard 'cause I know for the years that we've been involved in working with students over the years, the transitional part has always been at least, from my limited view, a real challenge.

- Okay.

- A real problem.

- I'm gonna address that in three levels because when we talk about transition, most people think about the transition from school to work.

- Uh-hmm.

- But there's a transition from home to preschool.

- Uh-hmm.

- Okay.

- There's that transition from junior high, from elementary to junior high and from junior high to high school, and then there's the transition.

- Okay.

- In terms of the first transition that I spoke about, what I wanna say to parents is you can play a role in getting your child ready to make the transition a lot easier. Let's say preschool for example. To go from a Head Start program or a preschool program into what we call big school [laughs] can be very traumatic.

- Yes.

- Yes.

- But parents can begin to prepare their children for, drive by the school and you show them this is the school that you're going to be going, that's your classroom, that's your uniform, you know, you know that

they're going to be on a schedule. Don't wait until school, start to put them on a schedule. Start the schedule before, so that they can get accustomed to it. Talk to them about what's going to happen. You see, because even for us as adults, part of our anxiety often comes from not knowing what to expect.

- Not knowing. Uh-hmm.

- Uh-hmm.

- And so I wanna encourage the parents of our preschoolers to begin preparing them for the junior, for the elementary school. Similarly, it's a different life from elementary to junior high school. They're going to have classes that are, they're going to change classrooms.

- Yes.

- They're going to have a lot of different teachers. There will be different expectations. And parents can begin preparing them for that transition. And high school, oh, my gosh, that's a whole [laughs] there's a lot of preparations.

- Uh-huh.

- But, you know, that's where they need to prepare. Now, on the other end which is where you were spoke, speaking about, I just had to interject that piece.

- No, I'm glad you did. I'm glad you...

- Yeah, the, that piece that you're, that sometimes is a little bit difficult because unlike a lot of other places, there's not a whole lot of options available. You know, I heard someone say that when there's a job vacancy that's announced, there are so many people who are applying for that single job. And when you throw a person with disability in there and a lot of people are applying for jobs that they're overqualified.

- Yeah.

- And so when you throw a person with a disability in there, that makes it even harder.

- Uh-hmm.

- You know what I mean?

- Yeah.

- But our parents of students with disabilities need to get to know Voc Rehab, Vocational Rehabilitation under the Department of Human Services because they provide services, they provide support, they provide training, and so that's a piece that needs to be there. The challenge is in our community, there's not a whole lot for students with disabilities once they graduate. You know, I had a really sad situation, a young, I met a young lady, actually, I had her when I thought that Evelyn Williams which means that that was my [laughs] or very early, like, in my career. And so I said to her, I said, "Sweetheart, what you doing these days?" She said, "Nothing." I had just get up in the morning. I walk over to the post office to check the mail and then I just go back home.

- Uh-hmm.

- And that broke my heart because yes, she's not going to be a rocket scientist.

- Uh-hmm.

- But there is something that she can do...

-She can do.

- ...to help her earn something, to increase her self-esteem and to give her value.

- Uh-hmm.

- But there are so few options and so, yes, there is an area of need. How we're going to do it? We're going to have to do it collaboratively because there are no one agency or no one person who can do it but we, we've to come to the table to talk about the next steps for our students with disabilities because when we look at the Common Core, we're talking about getting our students ready for college and career.

- Yeah.

- Some of our students can and do go on to colleges.

- Uh-hmm.

- But some of them may not go on to colleges. And for those students, we need to have something but that brings me to a point that I have to share because this is an exciting program with the Department of Education [laughs] and that is our Career Academy. We have a Career Academy that is focused towards students on the high school level and these are students who have been identified as possible or potential dropout candidates. And so during the school year, we provide some additional support to help them along the way. And a little bit later in the program, the second semester, I think they go out and we try to do some job placements. And then in the summer, some of those students travel to some of the universities.

- Uh-hmm.

- So we do a college store for them because what we wanna do is we wanna inspire them.

- Uh-hmm.

- And, you know, because they're not doing well doesn't mean they don't have the ability.

- Right.

- It just might mean they may not have had the support, the interest or they have not have been exposed to a role model.

- Right.

- And so that's part of our career academy program that we're very excited about and the person who, if anyone has any questions on that, they can call Ms. Tanya Lockhart, and she's at the same 718-7997.

- Okay. So but the process starts at a particular age or a particular level?

- We're, yeah, we're looking at the high school level.

- Okay.

- And the reason for that because one of our, you know, we talk about those indicators.

- Uh-hmm.

- Yeah.

- One of our indicators is to reduce the number of students who are dropping out.

- Oh.

- And so that's the strategy that we've been implemented in an effort to try to keep them in school.

- All right. This has been a very informative morning and we will continue after this break.

- We're back. Good morning, you are listening to Ability Radio, you and your health. And our special guest this morning is Maureen Moorehead, District Director for the...

- Coordinator.

- ...District Coordinator, yes, I stand corrected [laughs] Special Education Department of Education. We do have a phone number for her in case you want to reach her or, her office is 340-718-7997 that's 718-7997. Maureen, let's talk a little bit about what is the new law. We talked about the Education of the Handicap Act, which has now been changed or amended. It's now the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. So it would be helpful for a parent to, you know, and quite often, you know, your expertise being early childhood education for parents to even identify or recognize what is a disability? How do we get there, you know?

- I know exactly what you mean

- [laughs]

- You know the hardest part is a parent who has a child with a disability as the first child.

- Yeah.

- Yes.

- Because often, they're not sure what the expectations are.

- Right.

- And so even though the child isn't speaking and he's 18 months, it's like, "Oh, okay. Well, they don't really know." The other thing that I find is there are people in our community who share information that's not always in the best interest of the child. That's, you know, my little Johnny, he didn't talk until he was two, don't worry about it.

- Uh-hmm.

- Yeah.

- And I wanna say to parents, if you're not sure or you have a concern, let me tell you, we do a public screening at least once a year.

- Uh-hmm

- There's absolute, for Preschoolers.

- Uh-hmm.

- And that's from birth to five. And you can bring your child in if you have a concern, we will do a screening and we will say to you, "Look, he is right on target, go home, play with him, talk to him a lot, have fun, enjoy him." We will say, "We too are concerned and we will do, like, a referral immediately." Our next public screening is coming up in September and I don't have the date with me right, well, I have a tentative date but I don't, I'm not ready to share that.

- Uh-hmm.

- But you can bring in your child. Listen to the radio, we'll have that information out and that's a free public screening for children from birth to five. Haven't said that I've got to tell you about some of my colleagues, and my partners, and my collaborators over in the Infants and Toddlers Program. The beautiful thing is that services for individuals with disability are available from birth through 21. So if you have a child, let's say, if you have a child that was born as a preemie, right away, you refer to the Infants and Toddlers Program. If you have a child that you are concerned about between the ages of birth to three, you can call the Department of Health over to Charles Harwood and they have the Infants and Toddlers Program. They have a group of awesome staff that will come out. They will evaluate your child and if he's determined to be eligible, then he can receive services. Once that child turns 2.6, two-and-a-half, then we begin having a conversation with the Preschool Program so it is with the Infants and Toddlers Program and the Preschool Program to talk about transitioning that student to parts, part B, which is the Department of Education Preschool Program, part C is the Infants and Toddlers Program. And once we transition that students, the services will continue. So services are out there is just a matter of accessing the services.

- Uh-hmm.

- When the child turns, if the child is going to turn five by December 31st, they are now eligible to receive their services in the public school system. So let me, having said that, let me tell you a little bit about what the disabilities are. First of all, in order to be eligible for services, the Individuals with Disabilities actually, which is our nation's special education law and we, you know, everything needs a little nickname.

- Right.

- Oh, yeah.

- And so we called that IDEA or IDEA.

- IDEA.

- Okay? But the, its official legal name is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. And what that says is that there are 13 disabilities that can make a child eligible for services and I will share those with you. Autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specifically learning disabilities, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury or facial impairment. Now, there's another special category that's called developmental disabilities that we use for very young children. You know, it's hard to test young children. They don't know you, they have no reasons to speak to you.

- Uh-hmm.

- And so at the end of your assessment, you can walk away feeling like, "He didn't answer any of my question. He must not know anything."

- Uh-hmm.

- It's not that he doesn't know, he just doesn't know you.

- Right.

- Or he doesn't feel like speaking at the moment.

- That's right.

- Right?

- Right.

- So, we have a special category for that that uses developmental disabilities if in fact we determine that the child is delayed. We don't wanna give them a heavy title and say they're intellectually disabled.

- Disabled.

- So, we, they have a period of approximately seven years, during that time we will retest them. And by the time they turn eight, they will have one of the 13 disabilities, but the law allows us to use developmental disability during the early stages so that we're not giving in these labels that's gonna go with them for the rest of their life that may not be so. The other thing that I wanna say is just because you have a disability doesn't automatically make you eligible for special education.

- Right.

- For example, if you have a person, I'm sure you know adults with disabilities, but if they get the necessary accommodations, modification, and support, they can function just as well, and the same thing applies to students. So a child must first be evaluated in accordance with the section of the regulations unidentified as one of the 13 disabilities. But the most important word I'm going to say is "and," A-N-D, and who by reason thereof needs special education unrelated services because not every person with disabilities will require special education unrelated services. And what you may ask in special education? Special education is that specially designed instruction and it, as it is at no cost to the parents to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. It may include instruction in the classroom, in the home, in the hospital, in the institutions, wherever.

- Uh-hmm.

- And it could come in a variety of ways. It could be, there's also related services so you can have speech therapy, vision therapy. So there's a variety of services. So, having said that, even though you have not asked, I'm going to ask the question for you.

- Okay.

- And so the question is, so, Maureen, what is the next step?

- That's right.

- I [inaudible]

- Okay.

- There are quite a few steps actually, so let's do that.

- So, let me tell you. It's a, it's a ten-step process, but it's one that folks need to be aware of.

- Yes.

- Okay.

- So, a referral can come, can be initiated wherever, but nothing comes without, to us without the knowledge of the parents, okay?

- Okay.

- So, you can say, "Oh, you know, Ms. Moorehead, this child over here, I think you need to take a look of him." The first thing I'm going to ask you for is parental consent. So, once a child is identified as having a special education need or all you need, all the person need to do is suspect because they're not necessarily the expert in the field. We're not asking them to do the diagnosis, but if you suspect, you need to come into our office and we're located at number 1111D La Grande Princesse. It's two houses east of 2 Plus 2 restaurant. If you're coming east, it's on the left hand. It's a, it's a long yellow building where the department of maintenance is also there. But you can come in. You can ask us for an application package. Once we do that, there are number of pieces that is required and they'll discuss that with you when you come in. Once that is submitted, we review that. If we have enough information, we can proceed. If we don't, we will stay with you until we get the information you need. And sometimes you may

feel as though, "Ma'am, do you need all of that? What do you need all of that for?" You know, but I must say, if something, some things that are insignificant to you, for example, if the child had a history of being late walking, talking, you know, that gives us information that may not be important to you, and so, we're asking you for history. We're asking you for a lot of information. That information is help, going to help us determine what kind of instruments we need to use, possibly what we're looking for.

- Uh-hmm.

- We also ask for information if it's a school-age child. Okay, so he has a disability, so you have a concern. What have you done? Because special education is not your first line of defense, good instruction is.

- Okay.

- And so, we need to have evidence of your good instruction. And if you have done that, you have provided the support and that has not worked, then you send that to us. Once it, once we get that, we will always, we always need consent. So, once we receive consent from the parent to evaluate, we do the evaluation. The evaluation is done by a team consist, depending on the needs it may, it will consist of a psychologist, possibly speech OT, you know, those related services. Occupational therapy, speech therapy, you know, and on and on.

- Yeah.

- So, that team gets together and the child is evaluated, and then determination is made as to whether or not that child is eligible for services. And this goes back to what I said earlier. The eligibility is determined based on one of the 13 disabilities or the developmental delay. Then, once that, so we will determine which services he's eligible. And then we have what's called an IEP meeting. If you recall early I talked about each child having an individualized education plan.

- Uh-hmm.

- So, the good thing about it is whatever decisions are made, it's made by a team. Now, I wanna say to parents, I know sometimes when you come to the IEP meeting, you feel a little bit intimidated because the, all of these professionals who's gonna tell you about your child, but I wanna tell you that when you come to that meeting, that you are the most important person sitting at that table because you have knowledge of your child that we don't. And you have many more opportunities to work with your child at home that we have during the school day. So, I want you to feel comfortable sharing. Tell us about your child. If you don't agree, speak up. Don't wait until you get home and tell your husband about it because then it's too late. I need for you to share. I need for you to feel comfortable being a part of the team.

- Maureen, I'm so glad you're saying that because when I went to IEP meetings, parents were afraid to speak up.

- Precisely.

- You know, so that's great that you're saying that because like you said, it's you parent. You know the child more than we do.

- Yeah. We want them to speak up. And don't call me after the meeting and say, Ms. Moorehead, you know, I wish you, I can't change it because that is a legal document between the department and the parents. And so, when you're sitting at the table, that's where you make your, have your input. So, we develop this IEP. We have the meeting. We write the IP, and then in the IP, it's a lot of information. It tells us a little bit about the child, what his needs are, what we're going to do, who's gonna see him, how many times, when, where, on and on. And so when that's done, we send the IP out and the IP is implemented.

- Right.

- I wanna also say to parents, if you have concern that we have developed an IP, and the IP is not being implemented as developed, have a conversation with the supervisor for that area. Call us. That's why we're there. Let us know. I would like to tell you that we know it all, but we don't. So, if you have information, share that with us and it will help us to better serve your child.

- And do parents get a copy of the IPs?

- Absolutely. Actually, this is different to when you are on board. They do not leave that meeting without an IP.

- Oh, wow. That's excellent.

- Yeah. And that is why for all our preschool meetings, we hold them at the office and the office at the school. So, when they leave that meeting...

- Excellent.

- ...they're leaving with assign copies, so that's the change. And our director is very, our director, Ms. Bryan is, Bryan-Heyliger is very strong in that point, so, yes, we do.

- Great, great. Wow.

- So, they go back to the school. The IP is implemented and then each quarter, the progress is monitored. Now, another piece that I wanna say to parents is you are to receive a progress report, quarterly progress report. If you're not getting those, you need to have a conversation with your teacher because that's how you're going to know whether or not the child is making progress towards the goal. And don't wait until the end and then say, "Ms. Moorehead, he make no progress." You know what I'm saying?

- Uh-hmm.

- You've got to come in early and say, "Look, I'm concerned about this, I'm concerned about that," because we're a part of the team. So, we implement the IP. And at the end of a year, we reconvene the team to make, to review the IP. At that time, our conversation is about where he is, what progress he's made, and to set new goals. And we continue that process in every three years the child is reevaluated...

- Reevaluated.

- ...to determine if he continues to be eligible and what if any additional service he may need, and sometimes, just to say, "Thank you for giving us the privilege of serving your child, but he no longer needs our services."

- Oh, that's good. You mentioned a progress report, is that kind of like a report card?

- It's a more comprehensive than that. It is part of goal view, which is our system for keeping track of data and that's generated there. But what it does specifically, so, rather than dealing with an A, or a B, or a C. Okay. So, your goal was for the child to do X and in your IP, you said by, let's say the first month, the end of first monthly period he's going to be able to do this, he's gonna be able to do that. And so each of it is to tell you a little bit about the progress that the child is making towards the goal.

- That's good. That's really good.

- So, a quarterly progress report, a written, would be given to the parents?

- Yes. And if they're not getting it, have a conversation with their teachers. If that doesn't work, speak with the supervisor assigned for that school.

- That's good. Wow, interesting.

- Very good to know. Let me interject before I forget. I don't want this program to, of who listen, we don't let you know, if you miss anything that you've learned this morning, we have our shows recorded and they are posted on our website at drcvi.org. The recording is done at the courtesy of our engineer Mr. Derek, thank you. So, if you missed anything this morning, folks, and we also, this program will be rebroadcasted on, tomorrow at noon on 107.9 FM, Da Vybe.

- I wanna interject one other thing to is, because a lot of times parents are concerned. They don't want their child to be in a special education classroom because their perception of what it is is different. I wanna talk, if you don't mind, a little bit about the continuum of services.

- Absolutely.

- Absolutely.

- Okay. Now, when, I mentioned earlier that the children are evaluated to determine their needs, and the placement is based on their needs. So, if you have a child whose only concern is speech and language services, he's not speaking properly or whatever, that child is going to be in the GenEd classroom with his peers.

- Okay.

- He would be pulled out to receive speech therapist, but he will be in there. So, in terms of our continuum of services, our least restrictive would be where the child is in a General Education classroom with consultation services. What that means is that the professional staff on special education does not provide any direct services to the child, but they would consult with the teacher and all for strategies and ideas to work with the child. So, that's our least restrictive. From there, we have the General Education with resource services. That's where the professional actually goes in or pulls out the child who work with them. We have General Education with extended resource services, which means this staff do provide services but it's a lot longer, so they may be coming out for a period or two periods per day, whatever. And then there are the special class. And I've got to tell you a little bit about the special class because there's a stigma attached to it. And I wanna say that if your child is, see, our goal, our overall goal is for

children to be successful. And if I put a child who doesn't have the prerequisite skills in the classroom, that he has no idea what's going on, he doesn't have the skill or the interest, what's going to happen? The other 29 kids in that class is not going to learn because that child will become a disruption because that's not where he needs to be. Part of the regulation of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, is that we must maintain a continuum of services. Generally, we always look at the least restrictive.

- First. Uh-hmm.

- But when that isn't working or that's not in the best interest of the child, then we need to move along the continuum. And sometimes for some children, that will mean the special education classroom, so that is an option. There are kids who cannot be serviced in the Department of Education or in the public school system, and those kids sometimes are treated in special day treatments and programs, which means they're at home and instead of coming to school, they go to a special day treatment program for their instructions. We have students who, because of their medical conditions, they're unable to handle a day, a school day.

- Uh-hmm.

- And so those kids can be served at home or in the hospital. And then we have students whose need exceeds all of those and those would be students who would be served in residential facilities.

- Yeah.

- And I also want to mention one that you may not even think of, correctional facilities.

- Oh.

- Because when we have youths with disability, you know, not all the circumstance, it depends on the situation.

- Uh-hmm.

- But some situation, they can receive their services in the correctional facility such as YRC.

- Uh-hmm.

- So that is our continuum of services.

- Oh, interesting.

- Yes. We visited YRC and had, and that personally observed classrooms.

- Okay. Great.

- And it's really quite impressed with, you know, what you are able to fashion, you know, in a very difficult situation. I guess what, I'm just, first of all, just amazed at what I'm hearing, the difference. I mean, I'm sure you know where we, we've been involved at initially as a legal services person with special education at least from 1984.

- Yes.

- So we go way back.

- Yes.

- And so, I, it's been really encouraging to see the evolution. There were many more students I know over a thousand, I know in, you know, early in the day and we just discussed that population has...

- Right now, we are serving approximately 636 students in the St. Croix District. The total enrolment for the St. Croix District, I keep in mind those are not last school year, but the school year before.

- Before that.

- For the district with 6,134 students, which means 10% of our students with, 10% of our students have been identified as students with disabilities are not receiving some level of services. But keep in mind the overall enrolment decreased. And when that decreased, so did the numbers in special education.

- And you had mentioned earlier that the early childhood enrolment has increased?

- Yes. You know, if there's one thing I want people to take away from is, you know, our slogan is, "Early intervention, the sooner, the better."

- Yes.

- I cannot overemphasize the need to start early. When I look at some of our data, what our data is telling me is that most of our, not most, but that significant number of students are referred to special education, someplace between fifth grade and eighth, ninth grade.

- Yeah.

- And I wanna say whatever problems or challenges they're having didn't develop there, it didn't start there.

- Exactly.

- It started back in pre-school, it started later. But a lot of times, we have the mentality, "Leave it alone, he's gonna, he's gonna do okay." Or, you know a popular one that I hate, "Okay, fine." That went just like that.

- Yes. Yes.

- And so the feeling is there's a family member that they can associate with, and I wanna say is the earlier we can get those, these children into an intervention program, the better it's going to be for everybody concerned. Because, let me give you an example, when you have a preschooler who goes into kindergarten cannot identify his letters, cannot identify his numbers, his name, or any of the basic information that is expected of a child going into kindergarten, that kindergarten teacher must now teach that child that. So while he's teaching that child the pre-school material, what happens to the kindergarten material? That's not covered.

- Uh-hmm.

- So when he goes to kindergarten, he's still learning, I mean, when he goes to first grade, he's leaning the kindergarten.

- Kindergarten.

- And that continuous, and that is why by the time they get to the six, seven, eighth grade, that's when you're seeing it spike.

- Yes.

- Additionally, by the time you get to those grade, reading is so important.

- Right.

- And if you cannot read...

- For sure.

- ...the text, you can't do the work. And that's why we get a lot of the referral there. But I wanna encourage all, I wanna encourage our teachers who may be listening, our parents, if you have a concern, do an early intervention. Do a referral because our whole focus is to make a difference in the life of children and families that we serve.

- Wow.

- Now, the actual referral is to the, a diagnostic center, correct? Or...

- Oh, that's a great question.

- Okay.

- Let me talk a little bit about that. If you are in a public school, you're going to start at the school level. So start with your school counselor. They have what's call a basic Child Study Team. They will take a look at that. You see, we don't want to be a first line of defense.

- Okay.

- By the time you come to us, we want to know that you have tried A, B, C, D, and these are the results.

- Uh-hmm.

- And that's the part of the referral packet. So if you are in a public school, your first line of defense is your school counselor. If you are in a private school, and I wanna talk a little bit about private school.

- Yeah. I was gonna ask you. Uh-hmm.

- Private school students are entitled to services, but our obligation is to offer them a free, appropriate public education.

- Public education.

- What that means to, is that, let's say, Ms. Iris, that you have two children.

- Uh-hmm.

- You know, your little one goes to Country Day and here you have a little one with a disability. And I'm saying to you, based on his disability, we can serve him at the Juanita Gardine School.

- Uh-hmm.

- If you'll say to me, "Thank you, Ms. Moorehead, but I would just, that would just break my heart to separate them. So I'm going to send them there anyway." Then that child would be considered a parentally-placed private school. And by doing that, they're not entitled to all of the services that are, or all of the rights that's offered to a child in the public school system. We do provide speech. So if that child was in need of speech, you can bring him, once he has an IP, you can bring him to the office between the hours of 3:00 to 5:00 and get his speech. But you will not get resorts, you will not get any of the other stuff.

- In the school.

- But if you came back to me and you said, "Ms. Moorehead, you know, I think I really made a mistake and should I really put our child in this classroom?"

- Uh-hmm.

- Then all of his rights are returned to him. So, because what the regulations require is that we make available, a free, appropriate public education.

- Right. Right.

- Okay. Well, thank you. This has been very enlightening. Very enlightening. Again, let me remind our listening audience that this program will again be aired on Sunday at noon. Thank you so much for joining us. Break, a little break, okay. I, I'm, missed my cue this morning. No coffee. What can I say? We'll be back in a little bit. Thank you for listening. Hold on. We're back. We're back. And our special guest today is Maureen Moorehead, District Coordinator, Special Education. Before the break, well, Maureen, you mentioned distinctions between rights for a student whose, attends public school versus a parent who may have a child in private school, can you just repeat that or make it clear?

- I'd be happy to. All right. What our regulations require is that once a child is identified, we make available, a free, appropriate public education. Let me use an analogy that I think will make it easy to understand. Let's imagine that you're going up to Buccaneers for the Sunday booth, Sunday brunch. So, right? And on one table are the eggs, the coffee, French toast, you know, the whole gamut that you would have typically. And on the other table, there are just a couple Danishes and a cup, a cup of coffee. All right. Everybody is going to eat, but the private schools student is only entitled to the coffee and the

Danish. Whereas the child who's enrolled in the public school can take just about anything from the fruits to the, whatever from that table.

- Yeah.

- However, if a parentally-placed private school student would like to have access to that buffet, they can come back into the public school system. And once they are enrolled, then they, too, become entitled to that and that's what the regulations require. So, yes, we serve the private schools students, but they're not entitled to the same level of services.

- All right. Well, this has been...

- Excellent.

- ...very good.

- This has been very excellent. I'm telling you.

- Again, parents, if you need to get more information from the office of the District Coordinator, her number is 718-7997. We also discussed just before the program that, and we have in the past with the Disability Rights Center collaborated on a number of trainings, so I'm excited about that prospect for this coming school year. Iris Bermudez will be working with us on doing trainings for parents and for students, and we look forward to a very educational year. This sounds like it's gonna be a very positive year for parents as well as students. Those of you who have any issues, or questions, or concerns, feel free to call the Disability Rights Center at 772-1200 or our St. Thomas Office, which is 776-4303. Again, this show will be rebroadcast tomorrow at noon on 107.9 Da Vybe. Thanks to VI Lottery, Making a Distance Program for sponsoring this program and we will see you next week.

- Thank you.