

## Help for unruly kids who speak little English

By MENSAH M. DEAN  
[deanm@phillynews.com](mailto:deanm@phillynews.com) 215-854-5949

Students from non-English-speaking backgrounds did not receive required services at alternative disciplinary schools operated by Community Education Partners (CEP), a private company under contract to the School District of Philadelphia, according to an agreement just reached between the school district and the Office for Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education.

"The frustrating thing about this situation was that it was so predictable," said Len Rieser, codirector of the Education Law Center, a public-education advocacy group.

The agreement is in response to a complaint that the Philadelphia-based law center filed last September.

"To enter into a contract with a private company without reaching a clear agreement about the services that children will receive is to ask for trouble," Rieser added.

District spokesman Fernando Gallard declined to comment, stating that the complaint was still an active legal matter.

Under the agreement with the Office for Civil Rights, the district will ensure that children assigned to CEP's disciplinary schools are evaluated to determine whether they need help learning English.

The disciplinary schools will provide programs for children with limited English proficiency, and will also set up procedures for communicating with parents who speak little or no English.

The Office for Civil Rights will monitor the situation until the district achieves "full compliance" with the agreement.

The law center had alleged that students with limited English were not receiving English-as-a-second-language classes and could not understand their instruction.

The complaint also said that the schools were not able to communicate with parents who have a limited command of English.

The schools operated by CEP serve students with disciplinary problems.

CEP, a for-profit company based in Nashville, received its first contract from the school district in 2000 and now operates three schools here.

According to the law-center complaint, when the district entered into its contract with CEP, no arrangements were made for students learning to speak and read English.

Even so, the law center said, the district assigned such children to the alternative schools, where they were unable to progress. For example, the law center alleged, one student spent his day doing puzzles, drawing, and playing computer games because he could not follow along in his classes.

Rieser noted that the law center spent several years trying to get the district to deal with the matter before finally filing the complaint.