

11/12/2014

To: The Administrative Heads of Schools, Directors and Regional Program Coordinators of California Virtual Academies

CC: Regional Lead Teachers of CAVA Schools, Superintendents of CAVA's chartering school districts, other CAVA stakeholders

Dear CAVA Administrative Team:

We, the undersigned teachers in CAVA K-5, Middle School, and High Schools, have become increasingly concerned about our decreased ability as professional educators to spend time working with students in support of their learning and academic success. Growing clerical duties assigned to teachers are preventing us from teaching, and keeping our students from learning. This issue is especially concerning because several of our schools have been in Program Improvement for years and are in danger of coming under state management or being closed if student achievement does not improve.

Specifically, we are concerned about the workload associated with the following job tasks:

- Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) conferences,
- Attendance verification
- Other clerical duties such as monitoring enrollment paperwork and auditing progress reports and report cards, which are typically handled by classified front office staff in most schools,
- New initiatives like Data Driven Instruction and the meetings and materials associated with it, and
- Special education department issues preventing students with IEPs from receiving required services.

### **Individualized Learning Plan (“ILP”) Conferences**

Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) conferences are a vital part of any student's education. They provide the student and parent an opportunity to reflect upon past academic achievement, plan ahead for future courses, and to set and communicate goals about career path and postsecondary education plans.

At a typical school, staff at the guidance counselor office conducts the ILP conference. At CAVA, even though they fall outside of the scope of the teaching credential, it is the classroom teacher who is responsible for these time consuming ILP duties. Each conference must be scheduled in advance at a mutually agreed-upon time and place, documents must be prepared and sent in advance, the conference must be held live together with parent and/or student, recorded if possible, and then documented afterward using a lengthy process of uploading, saving, and sending documents and recordings. School-imposed goals and deadlines for completion of ILP conferences are unrealistic given the amount of preparation and processing involved.

At CAVA, completion of ILP conferences at the beginning of the school year is placed at a higher priority for teacher attention than is setting up courses and preparing to teach content lessons. This interferes with the teacher's ability to ensure content courses are ready for students, and makes the teacher unavailable to students and parents who need help with lessons and assignments during these important first few days and weeks of school.

### **Attendance Verification**

Attendance monitoring and verification duties differ according to grade level at CAVA; however, the extensive training materials provided to all teachers only address things as they apply to K-5 teachers. Expectations of teachers are unclear, as we are told to exercise "professional judgment" while evaluating student assignment submissions in order to determine how many days of attendance they are justified in claiming each month. Unclear expectations about how teachers are to enforce school policy are problematic in an "at-will" employment environment.

Teachers are asked to challenge and to override the attendance entered by the parent. The process of tracking student online activity and assignment submission within courses is arduous and time consuming, preventing teachers from working with students or preparing and conducting lessons. Teachers are asked to sign and date verification documents with particular dates without regard to the actual date the signature is being made. Teachers are asked to make changes to previously submitted records weeks or months after the fact, and are asked to back-date signatures.

In addition to holding ILP conferences and taking part in the editing, filing, and distribution of ILP documents, and the monitoring and verification of student attendance, the classroom teacher is also responsible for ensuring that important enrollment paperwork such as the Independent Study Master Agreement (ISMA), ISMA addenda, and Back To School Packet (BTSP) are completed by parents correctly and in a timely manner. The classroom teacher must also audit data on progress reports and report cards for accuracy before individually distributing electronic and mailing paper copies to families. All of the above administrative tasks are well suited to the classified front office staff of a typical school, but at CAVA, it is the certified, credentialed classroom teacher who must spend hours to handle these duties, at the expense of the learners enrolled in content-area courses.

### **Data-Driven Instruction**

Data-Driven Instruction, or DDI, is a process by which educators collect and evaluate information about student achievement and use it to guide future teaching practices. Our corporate management company, K-12, has introduced this new approach to CAVA's high school for the 2014-2015 school year. Putting DDI into practice at CAVA is problematic for two major reasons: 1. Assignment due dates are not enforced at our school until the end of the term, and 2. We do not have benchmarks against which to evaluate student work. For these reasons, data gathered has problems with validity. Teachers are being required to meet synchronously with their Regional Lead twice per month for a DDI discussion. Collecting and

analyzing data, preparing a presentation on such data, and engaging in these DDI meetings represents a new and significant addition to teacher workload this year. This new administrative meeting requirement further robs our students of the teacher attention they deserve.

### **Special Education Concerns**

Special educators are legally and ethically bound to ensure our students receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). CAVA's staffing and task-assignment model threaten our ability to provide this to our students.

This year the high school special education students are being assigned special education teachers as homeroom teachers, a role formerly fulfilled by general education teachers. Parents are concerned that taking away their relationship with a general education homeroom teacher is segregating their students. This segregation raises legal and ethical issues.

The added tasks required for maintaining homeroom courses is interfering with special education teachers' implementation of IEP (Individualized Education Plan) services. Special education teachers at CAVA have caseloads of up to 34 students, exceeding the 28-student maximum set in the California Education Code. In addition, CAVA's churn in student enrollment means that far more IEP meetings are held at our school than at traditional brick and mortar schools, whose special education teachers have fixed caseloads for the year. Special education teachers at CAVA in all grade levels typically hold 75 to 100 IEP meetings per year.

In addition to an increase in workload, there are also workload timeline conflicts. Homeroom duties and special education duties share many of the same deadlines. These conflicting timelines are causing trouble with meeting federal timelines which special education teachers are legally liable to abide. Another legal concern for the special education department is the fact that service provider coordinators who previously were employed in California have been released from duty and their jobs have been outsourced to Virginia. These out-of-state corporate employees have not been effective at ensuring CAVA's special education students receive the services that are required in their IEP documents.

At CAVA the homeroom teachers maintain student compliance records, work records, attendance records, family technical support, Independent Learning Plans (ILP), Independent Study Master Agreements (ISMA), weekly class meetings, progress reports, report cards, and an Online Learning curriculum. Special education teachers have not been trained to support these additional duties. Our Regional Educational Specialists and Program Specialists have also not received appropriate training in these tasks. This is creating problems with compliant documentation and decreased support for our families as they transition into the online learning environment. In addition, training on new special education procedures and systems have been preempted in favor of homeroom duties, causing special education teachers to begin the school year ill-prepared to implement our special education duties. Regional differences in training on school policy and procedure have been noted, further contributing to confusion among members

of teaching staff and prompting questions about the degree to which the special education department at our school is in compliance with state and federal law.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this letter is to draw the attention of CAVA administrators to these issues, which are a burden on CAVA teachers, students, and families. As decision makers in our school, we wish to make you aware of the impact of the policies and practices listed above.

We assert that things do not have to be this way. Other independent study virtual charter schools in our state hire attendance clerks to manage the important daily work of identifying and addressing truancy. Many traditional and charter schools leave the Individualized Learning Plan conferences to the guidance counseling staff whose expertise are much better suited to the task than the content-area teachers. Independent Study Master Agreements and addenda, Back To School Packets, progress reports, and report cards likewise are appropriately handled by classified clerical staff rather than by certificated teachers. Adding additional synchronous administrative meetings to our calendars for DDI-related analysis is another unfortunate condition that keeps the attention of our teachers away from course content and student needs where it ought to be focused.

We do not understand this aggressive push to assign teachers traditional clerical duties and fear it is related to the requirement that 40% of public revenue be paid to certificated staff in order for CAVA to receive the same ADA as brick and mortar schools.

It is our contention that a reduction in the number of administrative tasks and clerical duties assigned to credentialed teachers will result in greater teacher effectiveness and an increase in student performance. We are asking you now to remove the assignment of administrative duties from teachers so we may focus on what is really important: the education and academic achievement of our students.

Sincerely,

CAVA General Education and Special Education teachers

Amy	Betten
Dana	Janowicz
Kathryn	Bock
Amanda	Christiansen
Cara	Bryant
Stacey	Preach
Ali	Salazar

Rachelle	Chawke
Ellen	Davison
Tiffany	Lee
Mary-Sullivan	Roark
Julia	Roblyer
Steven	Scianni
Mirian	Song
Bonney	Waters
Michelle	Whitney
Angela	Barrett
Deanna	Dyer
Charlotte	Mehl
Stacey	Millar de Barrios
Melanie	Encinas
Thomas	Beeman
Bryan	Buckey
Diane	Daniels
Shannon	Erskin
Melody	Gomez-loele
Danielle	Hodge
Mark	Holtebeck
Hourig	Krikorian
James	Sheldon
Carrie	Davenport
Jennifer	Elizondo
Holly	Hamilton
Katherine	Hooper

Erin	Ryan
Jennifer	Sanchez
Sarah	Barnett
Steven	Bourget
Alyssa	Ginn
Sara	Godfrey
Jene	James
Al	Sanderson
Julianne	Jacobs
Julianne	Knapp
Yishan	Teng
Kristin	Bryant
Julie	Good
John	Lee
Samantha	Baksic
Annabelle	McBride
Margaret	McBride
Anna	Ordonez
Kathleen	Vokoun
Beth	Knight
Terrasa	McGuire
Justin	Sligh
Emily	Cruz
Tanese	Heard
Maggie	Pulley
Kristen	Ross
Casy	Wright

Rosalyn	Malihan
Jennifer	Matsumoto
Debbie	Scoltock
Samiya	Waheed
Lourdes	Almeida
Melinda	Bauer
Chris	Carlock
David	Carrillo
Brianna	Carroll
Marci	Gabriel
Karri Lynn	Harris
Cynthia	Haven
Megan	Hayburn
Yvonne	Huffaker
Nicole	Kellersberger
Ken	Lovgren
Dave	Matias
Melanie	McCauley
Carley	Nava
Amy	Rocha
Jennifer	Shilen
Laurie	Smith
Cathie	Sowell
Jason	Spadaro
Jaime	Talley
Bernadette	Taplin
Diane	Totten

Maria	Cottani	
Maya	Luna	
Janice	Stark	
Gina	Manifesta	
Cherish	Quandt	
Chris	Ruggles	
Shelby	Sullivan	
Michelle	Vreeman	
Sharlie	Walker	
Amy	Crook	
Matthew	Greene	
Michelle	Thornburg	
Cynthia	Maitland	
Robyn	Morrison	Kronewitter
Susana	Tolchard	
Shelly	Pocinich	
Sarah	Vigrass	
Stephanie	Alteneder	
Laura	Ogle	
Roxanne	Shapiro	
Kelly	Walters	
Michaela	Warren	
Rebecca	Flynn	
Ellen	Welt	
Marco	Castaneda	