

Examiner

Lyme-Old Lyme Ordered to Pay For ‘Woefully Inadequate’ Education for Student with Dyslexia

— Ally LeMaster, 12.5.2024



LYME-OLD LYME — Lyme-Old Lyme schools were ordered to reimburse a local family for the cost of pulling their child from the district’s schools to attend a specialized school in Southport, after the State Board of Education ruled the district had failed to provide a free appropriate public education.

“It is abundantly clear that the school offered a woefully inadequate program,” Board of Education Hearing Officer Sylvia Ho wrote in the decision, ruling that Lyme-Old Lyme must reimburse the family for Southport School tuition from 2023 to 2025, compensatory tuition for the 2025-26 school year, as well as transportation costs.

The state ruling means the parents of the fourth grader will no longer have to pay out of pocket for The Southport School, which offers programs for children with learning and attention deficit disabilities. A hearing officer for the state board handed down its decision on Nov. 26 after receiving the complaint in May.

The decision concluded that the student, who was diagnosed with a type of dyslexia, had been falling behind in reading and math at Mile Creek

Elementary since the first grade, despite the reports by the school of learning progress.

The student's first grade progress report described satisfactory reading performance, but an independent assessment two months later found that the student read far below the first grade level.

The same outside assessment found that in the second grade the student was "functioning below kindergarten grade level expectations" in literacy, and was more than a grade behind in math, even after the school reported improvement in both subjects.

The parents asked the school for an independent literacy specialist to evaluate the curriculum, a request that was denied by the student's special education team.

The parents then enrolled their child in The Southport School for third grade and requested that Region 18 cover for the expenses. The district has not yet reimbursed the family for the costs.

While the total cost is currently unclear, tuition at The Southport School is \$72,975 for the 2024-25 school year; the cost of three school years would be \$218,925. The distance from Old Lyme to The Southport School is a 120-mile round trip and could cost the district as much as \$45,000 a year based on federal reimbursement guidelines.

The family has 90 days from the decision to file a lawsuit against the district.

Jeffrey Forte, a special education attorney who represents the family, declined to comment on Wednesday but said, "The hearing officer's ruling speaks for itself."

Region 18 Superintendent Ian Neviasser did not respond to a request for comment.