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## SPECIAL EDUCATION FIELD ADVISORY

**FROM:** James P. DeLorenzo

**SUBJECT:** Health and Safety Precautions for Students with Disabilities with Elopement Behaviors

In response to an incident whereby a young student with autism wandered from his New York City (NYC) school building last fall, I issued a memorandum in November 2013 regarding school-wide policies and protocols that schools should have in place to address, prevent and respond to students who have behaviors such as wandering and elopement. The memorandum provided important information on the role of the committee on special education (CSE) to identify, assess and address such behaviors as well as the need for building policies, procedures and protocols to prevent and address instances of wandering and elopement. A copy of the memorandum can be found at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/elopement-healthsafety.htm>.

The New York State Education Department has since been provided a copy of the findings of the Special Commissioner of Investigation related to the disappearance of the young NYC student mentioned above. This report highlights additional actions that might have prevented this young student from leaving the school building unattended and unnoticed. In light of the findings, I would like to add the following actions to be considered for each student with a disability.

In some instances, it may not be clear that a student has a past history of wandering or elopement behaviors. In addition, a parent might not have attended a particular CSE meeting or considered that the CSE needs to know about their concern that their child might wander or elope and therefore might share this concern directly with the teacher or other school personnel rather than discuss it at a CSE meeting. Thus, whenever a teacher or other school personnel learn of a concern about a child's behavior that may impact his/her safety, this information should immediately be reported to supervisory staff and other staff working directly with the student. School administrators must ensure that staff assigned to safety in the building where the student attends can respond appropriately and that a plan to ensure the safety of the student is developed and implemented.

In addition, when a behavioral concern is raised that was not considered by the CSE, the teacher or other staff should use appropriate discretion to request a meeting of the CSE to review and, if appropriate, revise the student's individualized education program and consider a functional behavioral assessment and behavioral intervention plan to address the concern.

In light of the above, I recommend that schools revisit their policies and protocols to address the above recommendations. Thank you for your timely attention to this matter.

c: John B. King, Jr.  
Ken Slentz