



Sonia Braniff, newly-appointed member of the Board of Education's Committee on the Handicapped, discusses the rights of handicapped children during an interview.

S.I. Advance Photo by Frank J. Johns

Through her work on the COH she is attempting to facilitate the mainstreaming of handicapped children into regular classrooms and to improve parents' awareness of both their rights and responsibilities in preparing their child's educational program.

She is currently focusing her sights on the upcoming preparations of the Individual Education Prescription (IEP). The IEP is an individualized outline of both long term and short term educational and social goals prepared for each handicapped child by the teacher, in cooperation with the parent.

But Mrs. Braniff fears that many parents are unaware of how important their input is in the development of the IEP. "This is really their chance to have a say in the child's education," she said. All too often, however, parents view the forms as merely more Board of Education red tape and give only a cursory approval to the IEP.

Since IEP's are prepared by the schools in May, Mrs. Braniff is beginning to step up her efforts to educate parents in their importance.

Throughout the Island, Mrs. Braniff has a reputation for character and integrity. It stems, in part, from an incident in 1975.

Unable to obtain a license to open the

Danube Nursing Home, Bernard Bergman offered several alternative plans to have the vacant Concord building opened. A final attempt was for the opening of the 240-bed facility as the Island View Care Center, a custodial care facility for residents of the Staten Island Developmental Center.

Mrs. Braniff, president of a group of parents of Cerebral Palsy children and a key member of the regional retardation council, was pressured and threatened to vote for the proposal by some officials from the city's United Cerebral Palsy organization. Desite concerns about personal retaliation against her daughter, Mrs. Braniff voted against the plan and, later, testified before the Moreland Act Commission about the tactics used by proponents of the plan.

Mrs. Braniff, whose commitment to the rights of the handicapped is extremely strong, is pleased with the composition of the new committee.

The three other parent members, she said, are "very, very strong advocates for children" and if the composition of the committee is any indication of its effectiveness, Mrs. Braniff sees a great deal of future success.

"The committee," she said, "will create its own direction. It can only be as strong as its members."

Page 2 of 2