

A Pocket Manual for Advocates
Information and Resources
For Lay Advocates

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*Everyone has a disability. Everyone has a gift.
Your job is to find the gift and remove the obstacles of disability.*

Sylvia Feelus Levy, (1926-1994)
Special Education Teacher

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The contributors of “A Pocket Manual for Advocates” have graciously shared their experiences and have allowed the inclusion of their material to benefit children with special needs and their advocates. Please contact them directly for permission to reprint their individual contributions.

An * before a name indicates contributors who have chosen to remain private in order to preserve privacy. In those instances their names and some identifying information have been changed.

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*Creativity can solve almost any problem.
The creative act, the defeat of habit by originality, overcomes everything.*

George Lois

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Finally, we would like to acknowledge all children with special needs who have touched our lives with their exceptional gifts and talents. You have enriched our lives in ways unimaginable. We learned so much from you.

A Note from the Authors

This article was written to provide shared experiences and resources for lay advocates—those willing to provide support to parents, from simple handholding and organizing paperwork, to attending important meetings, to taking notes. A lay advocate can be a parent, family member, friends, a teacher, or a professional advocate. Lay advocates are not associated with the legal profession, but can be paid or volunteers.

Attention, Parents!

Parents, if you are in the throws of a major crisis and are heading for the phone or the Internet in search of information or an advocate, Caution! The well being of your child and family are too precious to place your trust on an impulsive decision. Interview the advocate as if he or she were a daycare provider. Ask them how long have they've been an advocate, and how many families they've worked with. The advocate should be able to provide you with lists of references, and trainings and conferences they've attended. Don't take anyone's expertise for granted.

Verify everything. You don't want a disaster walking with you in the door when you meet with school officials. And if your advocate brings their personal vendetta to the table, which polarizes the team and sabotages your child's well-being and education, find another. The focus should be on the needs of your child. You need a support person who helps you in every way, to be an advocate for your child, not someone who harbors an agenda against your school district.

Reflections

By Janie Bowman

In December 2006, I began posting messages describing my plans to publish an article on advocacy on various lists and forums, including the ADD Forum on Thom Hartmann's Web site: <http://www.thomhartmann.org>. I also posted two surveys for three weeks on my site at <http://www.brightword.com>. The response was tremendous. In addition to posting online, some people chose to email me privately with resources and information they felt would be helpful to include in the article. The willingness of others to share resources, ideas, and experiences is incredible; we can't thank them enough.

We are shaped and fashioned by what we love.

Goethe

Introduction

A Pocket Manual for Advocates is written for

- Lay advocates.
- Parents who attend meetings with other parents.
- Teachers who advocate for their students.
- Friends or family members who advocate for children and families in an educational setting.

Each situation is different and not all experiences or resources will be pertinent to yours. Even professionals differ among themselves, so we don't expect you to agree with everything we write. A good advocate will seek the most current information, and we encourage you to research and verify all information and resources. For your convenience, resources that may be helpful are listed after each section and at the end of the manual.

Advocacy is a process, not a destination. We can be plunged into the world of advocacy by a slow turn of events or by a surprise diagnosis. But one thing is sure, we didn't wake up one morning saying, "Today I'm going to help support other parents in their quest for a free and appropriate education for their children." Excruciating "hands on," ears "tuned in" and "eyes wide open" experiences are at the core of what activates advocates.

If you're new to advocacy, don't be surprised at what can happen at school meetings. Parents in tears, frustrated teachers, IEPs that don't provide needed accommodations, goals that were met three years ago... When at a standstill, the presence of an advocate may help.

Prepare for the worst, but plan for the best. When the IEP meeting functions at its best, the advocate's role is that of a coach and cheerleader. The entire team shares in the success of a student when his educational opportunities provide him with a lifetime of joy and opportunity.

The dynamics of these meetings are nothing new and are predictable. In 1994 Pete Wright, a special education attorney who won a U.S. Supreme Court case on behalf of a student with learning disabilities, was a regular on the ADD Forum on CompuServe. He often said that, "In most of my cases, the facts and issues remain the same, only the names and dates of birth change."¹

¹ IEP, Evals, and Advocacy. From an archived discussion posted on the former ADD Forum on CompuServe, between Pete Wright, Esq. and Steven J. Foust. February 6, 1994.
<http://users.rcn.com/peregrin.interact/add/pete.html>

The Basics

For Kim Stanley, a homeschooling parent of two children with special needs and founder of the Autism InfoGroup, advocating is a gratifying experience. “I helped a family that homeschools with their IEP, which was pretty poorly written, and told them what to do and how to get the changes that were needed to give their son the best possible education they could get.”

Indeed, a gratifying experience for the parent translates into a gratifying experience for the advocate. So much is at stake, and when things turn out well, there is cause for celebration.

An advocate who communicates effectively, is honest and on time, and shows professionalism will be taken seriously by the child’s IEP team. Sure, you’ll make mistakes. You are, after all (super) human... But admit it when you make one.

Dress for success. We know it’s tempting (especially when the school schedules a 7 a.m. meeting,) but no pajamas, please! If you want the team to take you seriously, leave your “mommy” clothes at home and dress professionally. *Marie is a mom whose advocate sent her back to the dressing room. “I was ready to walk out the door and my advocate asked me if I had anything other than all black to wear. I wanted to look as evil and powerful as possible. But I listened and changed my clothes and the meeting was successful. Had I worn my evil outfit, maybe not.”

Many advocates like to bring goodies to meetings. It’s a nice touch and icebreaker. Schools are now limiting goodies to store-bought, however, so take a side trip to your local bakery before the meeting.

Seating arrangements are important. It’s not appropriate to discuss important matters while you’re sitting at a child-size chair & desk combination. Neither is sitting in a room with background noise that doesn’t allow each member of the team to hear what’s being said, or doesn’t allow for a clear, legal taping of the discussion. If the need arises, ask for more appropriate accommodations.

Privacy is a moral and legal necessity to ensure confidentiality. Meeting with team members in the corner of the classroom where students and other adults can listen in is not acceptable. If you think teachers, assistants and parent volunteers can’t hear what you’re saying, think again! It’s only human nature to be curious about what’s going on with something out-of-place in any environment. And having adults huddled in the corner of a classroom whispering is out of place. Others will listen in.

So there are no misunderstandings, state your parameters and fees to the parents from the get-go. Keep things simple. Sharpen your skills by attending trainings, conferences, and network with others. Keep up with changes in the laws, and read, read, read.

Experience is the best teacher. The more meetings you attend, the more you’ll know about the school staff, school district administrators, and district programs.

Consider the educational staff as your coworkers. Your reputation with them will precede you, and somewhere along the way you’ll discover that meetings no longer have hidden agendas, hidden resources, or hidden services. All the school has will be available to you and to your client.

Though advocates are expected to know the laws surrounding special education, things can turn problematic if they dip into the realm of acting as an attorney and provide legal advice.

- Never offer legal advice, as this is the role of an attorney.
- Provide legal resources so the parent can make informed decisions.
- Encourage a client or parent to have legal representation if they are going to file a formal complaint or file for a due process hearing.
- Think twice before accepting an advocacy support role in a due process that was filed without your knowledge or input. If you were not a part of the team prior to the filing of a complaint or request for due process, limit your role to providing resource information and case organizational support to the parent or the parent's attorney.
- Offer resource information and your opinion based on a previous experience, but be careful that you do not use names or breach confidentiality.

Your own child is your first priority. If you advocate for other students in your child's school, you leave your child open to retaliation. At some schools your advocacy could be perceived as a conflict of interest causing them to think you have a vendetta against the school and/or staff. If you must advocate for others in your child's school, use the team approach. You will then be perceived as a focus group rather than a threat.

Be honest to the parent, client, and team. If you disagree with the team's decision, get your concerns and opinions out on the table, and be sure the parents understand your position. Remember, the process is parent or client driven, as long as the student's best interests are a priority.

Self Reflection. At the end of each meeting, ask yourself:

- What worked?
- What didn't?
- When did we make progress?
- How could I improve things?
- What did I do to make team members comfortable? Uncomfortable?
- What changes do I need to make?

Having an advocate carries no guarantee, and having one may not be what you need. Amy Caraballo, a parent advocate and Chair of Mercer County, PA Special Education group, MCPASE, explains, "Someone mistakenly told us when we first hired an advocate that 'Once you bring an advocate to the IEP, the school will do whatever you want.' We had hoped that the school would start to do 'the right thing' by bringing someone else into the mix on our side. Well, [the advice] could not have been more wrong. The school was very easy to get along with at IEP meetings. The meetings were really never a problem. It was the implementation of the IEP that was problematic. Bottom line is, we never needed an advocate. We needed an attorney all along.

"So I think it is very important for lay advocates to remember that they are there to educate the parents and help intervene when they see something that goes over the parents heads during a meeting, etc. But when it comes to problematic schools who are

not implementing IEPs, attempting to change placements, etc., advocates need to know when its beyond their capabilities.”

Liz is the parent of a twice-exceptional child whose advocate was very skilled in supporting her family in school meetings. “Our needs were very well met. Our advocate outlined the process from request for evaluation to IEP for us. She prepped us for meetings, and helped with our emotions during the process. She attended meetings with us, and asked the questions we forgot about. She also kept meeting notes. And when my husband's stress levels began to negatively affect the meetings, she explained to him that our child would be better served if he did not attend the meetings.”

*If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.
If you want to be happy, practice compassion.*

The Dalai Lama (1935 -)

The importance of Preparation

In these increasingly litigious times, we cannot stress strongly enough the importance of documentation. You never know when a family you're working with will end up before the U.S. Supreme Court, either by their own volition or being dragged there by the school district. It works both ways. Prepare "as if" and it may nudge the school into working *with* you instead of *against* you.

Calendars show a history of what transpired throughout the year. They are invaluable and every family should be encouraged to keep one.

If you take notes or tape the meeting, give these to the parents to include in their child's file. Make sure the parents have the necessary paperwork before they get to the meeting. They may need help organizing the child's file so they can easily find any necessary information.

Have the parents read the IEP completely, including the fine print, before signing.

RESOURCES

Tips on how to organize a school file

The File: Do it right!

<http://www.fetaweb.com/03/organize.file.htm>

What is Advocacy?

By the Washington Protection and Advocacy Agency.

[http://www.wpas-rights.org/What is Advocacy/what makes an advocate.htm](http://www.wpas-rights.org/What%20is%20Advocacy/what_makes_an_advocate.htm)

Advocacy Strategy Workbook: Building your Advocacy Plan

By the Washington Protection and Advocacy Agency.

http://www.wpas-rights.org/What%20is%20Advocacy/Advocacy_Strategy_Workbook.pdf

Are You Ready to File for Due Process?

http://aboutautismlaw.com/are_you_ready_to_file_for_due_process.html

Pat Howey, Educational Consultant

Why Do We Need a Model Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility for Special Education Lay Advocates? This is a first draft that includes many thoughtful and practical ethical ideas.

http://www.pathowey.com/model_code_lay_advocates.htm

Games some schools play

Disclaimer: We didn't say "all" schools. We recognize and celebrate those educators who put their jobs on the line, but there are circumstances where parents and advocates feel schools do play games. Here are some examples:

- The school tells a parent, If we do it for your child, we'll have to do it for everyone else.
- Meetings that end prematurely with unfinished business.
- Copies of a child's schoolwork are placed in his district-level file in order to prove he's dysfunctional. It can't possibly be the school environment. (Hint: compare the school's file with the file the school sends to the parent's attorney.)
- The school rewrites reports so the child won't qualify for needed services, or the school shows progress when none is evident.
- The school spends more money to fight a parent in court than it takes to provide needed services for the child.
- Administrators give teachers glowing reviews throughout the year, then give them poor marks at the very end, because they don't approve of teachers who advocate for students.
- The school calls Child Protective Services to distract and retaliate against an advocate, parent or teacher.

Truancy

Children miss school for reasons other than having a cold. Truancy laws are similar for each state, but advocates need to know what their specific state laws are. These laws affect families with children with special needs, especially if the relationship between the school and the family is polarized. Be proactive. It's very important for the family to address the cause of the absence and medical documentation is vital. Keep a detailed calendar of appointments, or of any time when the child has missed school, what times you dropped him off, and when the school considered him truant. (Date and time) Document! Document! Document!

RESOURCE

Truancy Toolkit

<http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/truancy/communications.html>

Working with families who homeschool

Families choose to homeschool for many reasons. For many, it's a personal choice or natural extension of their time together during a child's preschool years. For others, the home provides a better learning environment for their child. There are fewer distractions, more flexibility in choosing curriculum, and less stress on the family. Throw in a child's special needs and the realization that the public school isn't providing needed accommodations for the child and you've got a recipe that reads, "It's easier to homeschool than to navigate the bureaucratic labyrinth." The child and family may have experienced retaliation, or the child may have been pushed out of public school.

Though the laws vary, homeschooling is legal in every state. State and Federal laws are often open to interpretation by school districts, and it depends on whether the status is that of a private school, or if access to public school classes and services are specifically written in each state statute. Families need to be very familiar with the homeschooling laws in their state. State and district offices have this information, as do homeschool organizations and local homeschool support groups. Advocates should have a current copy of the law to make available to the IEP team if there's any misunderstanding.

Depending on the state homeschooling laws, when a family decides to homeschool a child already enrolled in the public school they might be able to withdraw the child and begin homeschooling immediately, or they may have to wait until they fulfill needed requirements mandated by state law. They may have to wait, for example, until the quarter or semester ends. It's crucial to understand the homeschooling laws before a family begins to homeschool or they may inadvertently fall into the truancy category.

When you work with families who homeschool, it's important to address any bias you may have against homeschooling. Nothing is more problematic for a family than to put their trust in someone who ultimately does not share the same vision or concern for their child that they have.

As an advocate, it's crucial that you put aside any preconceived notions you may have about how children learn. Children are individuals and each family is unique. One size does not fit all and styles range from unschooling to highly structured. From a set curriculum to natural learning. From "ring the bell, take your seat, recess is over now" families to the relaxed, eclectic variety. To get a real feel for homeschooling, it helps for the advocate to know the family's homeschool philosophy. To better understand homeschooling, invite yourself to a homeschool get-together or field trip.

It's not easy to understand homeschooling unless you've "been there, done that" or know someone who has. The concerns should be two fold: Is the child learning and, is the environment better?

Though "socialization" is often used as a reason of concern to those unfamiliar with homeschooling, perception is everything. Isolation leaves families open to any kind of accusation. If a family is active in their community (and we don't mean over-scheduling), they are less likely to be a focus of concern.

A family may opt for part-time or dual enrollment at their neighborhood school, attend a virtual academy, or enroll in alternative learning programs affiliated with public schools. They may enroll in a private school with a homeschool extension program. The most important consideration is that a homeschooling family knows whether they fall under the public school law or their state homeschooling law because, technically, they are not "homeschooling" in the legal sense if they fall under a public school umbrella.

A family may want an IEP for specific services no matter how they structure their homeschooling experience. Depending on state law, many schools are happy to accommodate the child's needs; others may need a little help developing the IEP with families who homeschool.

Here's a summary of what's important for families who homeschool:

- Knowledge of their state homeschooling law.
- Keeping a paper trail.
- Being active in their community.
- Homeschooling families can develop their own IEPs. It will not be accepted as a substitute for one developed with the school, but it can serve as an outline for the child's homeschooling goals.

RESOURCES

A to Z Home's Cool Homeschooling is a site run by Ann Zeise, which includes an intensive list of resources for homeschooling children with special needs.

<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/weblinks/specialneeds.htm>

Important court cases involving homeschooling families.

<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/weblinks/cases.htm>

Home Education Magazine

Introduction to Homeschooling. Resources, information, networking, online services, questions and answers.

<http://www.homeedmag.com/ORD/hemintrobooklet.pdf>

Home Education Magazine's Laws and Regulations Page

<http://www.homeedmag.com/lawregs/lawregs.html>

Eight Probing Questions to Ask about Homeschool Regulation in Your State.

<http://www.nhen.org/leginfo/default.asp?id=268>

Links to information about special education and IDEA as it pertains to homeschooling.

<http://www.nhen.org/specneed/default.asp?id=242>

Choices for Parents. Non-Public Education: A Vital Part of U.S. K-12 Education
Updated June 2008.

<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/choice/schools/onpefacts.html>

Sabotage

When you begin advocating, you may be led by the parents to believe that the school is causing the adversarial relationship. The reality is, that you can't trust that every parent or client will tell you the whole truth or accurately describe the whole story. They are human and their perception is biased.

Also you cannot trust that every educator will tell you the whole truth or accurately describe the situation. Educators are human beings and their perception is biased, as well. It is a reality that educators are influenced by time and budget restraints as well as by supervisors and administrators. And even by another student's parent.

An advocate is not on the team to take sides. They are there to support the best interests of the child and support the needs and services necessary to ensure a student is a successful learner. Remember, most parents want services that ensure the success of their child, and most teachers want their students to be successful.

Equally disconcerting is when a parent is demanding of your time with little follow-through, as Kim Stanley knows first hand. "I have a parent who keeps telling me about the school situation, but does nothing about it."

The goal of an advocate is to tease out the facts and work toward benefiting the child. Don't get locked into emotionality. Assume nothing.

When advocates sabotage

Advocates can also inadvertently sabotage meetings. It's problematic when you, as an advocate, haven't met the parents who contracted with you, yet are seen meeting with school staff as the parents walk into the first team meeting you've been asked to attend. Ouch! This is only appropriate when you have a long-term understanding and working relationship with the family. This is no way to build trust.

Be up-front with the families you're working with. Kim Stanley's experience should remind us how important honesty is. "I found out as we were walking into a facilitated IEP that this was her first. I was not happy. I do not believe that she did what should have been done by an advocate in this meeting."

If you call yourself an advocate there's a certain level of professionalism that is expected. Would you personally use an advocate who verbally or in writing said things like:

- I've battled with this school district before.
- We'll go get them!
- Let's trap the teacher.
- We can play the same game.
- We'll boot them out the door!
- We'll let them have it!
- I'll punch them out!

If your sole purpose is to ridicule, embarrass, entrap, or find ways to get the school staff in trouble, then you need to ask yourself whether you are fueling an agenda that's based on previous, personal experiences you had with schools, or are you there to help the child? Look, behaving like this isn't going to defeat or benefit anyone, and they may

even push back, a concept described by George Lynn, M.A.² “Pushing back is a human reaction to warn threat away from us.” Though Lynn was describing oppositionality in relation to ADHD, acting bombastic will naturally result in negating your purpose. As an advocate, your behavior is an example of how people should behave, not contrary to it.

An advocate should set the tone; be cool, calm, assured, fair, and focused on the student’s needs.

Parameters

Be clear about what you can and cannot do. Lay advocates can assist, support and draft paperwork if requested by the parent. Never create documentation on your own or provide a recommendation. Generally, families expect you to know the law. However, you aren’t an attorney and can be sued if you act like one, so know your limits, provide legal resources, and refer the family to an attorney for legal advice. The majority of teachers want the student to be successful, and you’ll model behavior that the student and other team members will learn from.

When working with parents, ask them to be respectful of your time by letting you know via e-mail, a telephone call, or a letter that your services are no longer needed. If you are the contact point for the school, stress to the parents how important it is to keep you updated on new developments. Ask for the information to be sent as a letter or e-mail so both you and the parents have a paper trail.

It’s difficult to find attorneys families can afford. The disability rights, and protection and advocacy groups in your state may have a list of special education attorneys in your area.

*We can be sure that the greatest hope for maintaining equilibrium
in the face of any situation rests within ourselves.*

Francis J. Braceland. *O Magazine*, April 2003

² Lynn, George T. M.A. C.M.H.C. 1996. *Survival Strategies for Parenting Your ADD Child: Dealing with Obsessions, Compulsions, Depression, Explosive Behavior and Rage*. California. Underwood Books.
<http://childspirit.com/>

Windy's Top 5

By Windy Payne

1. One of the most important things parents need to keep in mind when they invite an advocate to a meeting or hearing is to introduce them as the child's advocate.
2. The parents should expect the advocate to ask questions at the meeting, prompt the parents to ask more detailed questions, and assist the parents in understanding what is being discussed and decided.
3. The advocate will also assist the parents in preparing for their meeting by taking notes and possibly providing a recording device for the meeting.
4. An advocate should act as a mediator of sorts, helping calm down both sides to allow a meaningful conversation to take place.
5. An advocate should remind the parents of key points that need to be discussed and assist them in explaining their child's needs to the IEP [team].

Windy Payne lives in Washington State and is both an advocate and parent of a child with special needs. E-mail: windy.p@gmail.com.

* * * * *

Genius is one percent inspiration, ninety-nine percent perspiration.

Thomas Edison (1847 – 1931)

Advocacy: Beyond the Basics

Advocates may find themselves supporting families in areas other than handholding and paper organization in a school meeting. Here are a few that come to mind.

Meeting with your legislator

Circumstances may require you to contact your legislator, and the task may be daunting if you haven't done this before. Of course, being prepared is a given. Be specific, but briefly summarize what you'd like your legislator to address and provide examples and illustrations. Add a few personal stories. Learn what the counter-points are and be prepared to justify your argument. Having another advocate in tow will help fill in any needed details. Be patient—change is slow. Thank your legislator for his time and send a thank you in writing.

Advocating before your legislature can lead to other possibilities, including forming a support group. Kim Stanley, whom you met earlier, began by advocating for her child and moved quickly to educate her legislature on needed services and support. “I started by advocating for my child, testifying at the legislature.” ... This led her to “helping parents in the district. And then I started the Autism InfoGroup, an education, information and support group for families and friends with autism. I do support on a one-to-one-basis for them and help them through all aspects of the process. We meet once a month with a topic to inform and educate.”

Coordinating a parent advocacy group

A parent advocacy group can be organized at the school or district level, but one thing is certain, it will be a grassroots effort that involves a lot of time and energy. But, oh, so worthwhile when you see results.

- You got that written in the IEP!
- How did you get those services?
- The school did that for you?
- The principal told me that, too, but here's what worked for me...
- This teacher was fantastic to work with!

Interesting things happen when groups of people with mutual interests are brought together to share their experiences. By networking, parents don't feel alone; there is strength in numbers. Remember, the issues are the same, only the names and dates change. How can an advocate network parents so they can share stories, laugh, cry, and problem-solve?

- Invite them to join other parents in a casual, inviting place: your home, the library or other community place with a room available to the public.
- Provide dessert (chocolate?) and drinks.
- Have a focus of concern. The topic could be a school-wide concern or problem area.
- Help the group develop their own goals such as: writing letters to the school board, attending school board meetings as a group, writing letters to the editor, contacting the press, etc.
- Have them bring their IEPs to compare accommodations.
- Encourage networking by having them share contact information.
- Set up role-playing scenarios using real situations. Parents can learn from other parents and model this information in similar situations.
- List future topics, plan the next meeting, and end with a positive note.

RESOURCE

Organizing Parents: Building Family Advocacy Organizations. From the State of Connecticut, Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities.
http://www.ct.gov/opapd/lib/opapd/documents/adobe/organizing_parents_manual.pdf

Mediation and due process hearings

Never go to mediation or due process with a family you don't have experience with. There's too much at stake, and without adequate information you may end up jeopardizing the outcome. Additional concerns are the legalities of supporting parents and children with special needs in due process hearings. State law varies and it would be prudent for advocates to research what they can and cannot do.

RESOURCE

The Involvement of Lay Advocates in Due Process Hearings. October 2001.
Quick Turn Around. (QTA) Eileen M. Ahearn, Ph.D.
National Association of Special Education Directors. Alexandria, VA.
Special Education Programs. (ED/OSERS) Washington, D.C.
http://www.brightword.com/eric_lay_advocates.pdf

Mandated reporter status

A mandated reporter³ is a professional who has regular contact with children, disabled persons, senior citizens or others who are vulnerable. Mandated reporters are required to report if they suspect or observe neglect or abuse. Whether a mandated reporter is compensated or not in their professional position, they still fall under the mandated reporter status.

If you accept any kind of state contract or license, you'll know if you are a mandated contractor. If you are a mandated reporter in one area, (a Ph.D. for example,) you are a mandated reporter in every area. If you spot abuse in the grocery store or in a nursing home, you are required to report it. Possible exceptions would be for those who are spiritual advisors, as there are additional laws that protect them.

If you are a mandated reporter and fail to file a report, you could be held accountable at a later date if it was found that you knew something and didn't report it. If anything is said that causes you to suspect abuse or neglect, as a mandated reporter, you are bound by law to report it. A general citizen is not bound by law to report abuse, only by conscience.

Anyone working as an advocate should be aware the mandating reporter law exists and know what the responsibility of mandated reporters are.

RESOURCE

Mandated Reporter Information.

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/responding/mandated.cfm>

Google search for: training "Mandated Reporters" plus your state.

*The mind, once expanded to the dimensions of larger ideas,
never returns to its original size.*

Oliver Wendell Holmes

³ Mandated reporter. Reference.com. *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*.
http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Mandated_reporter (accessed: July 14, 2007).

Working with Students Who Are Gifted and Talented

Families with a child who is disabled have IDEA⁴ on their side. The same for a child who is twice exceptional: gifted and disabled. But it's a misconception that children who are gifted and talented fall under IDEA. These students have a right for special education services only if there's a disability onboard. What's available to help families for the gifted and talented? Advocates need to look at the laws and regulations passed on a state and local level, too often with inadequate funding.

The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program is the only Federal program that addresses the need for gifted education, but with funding that is at the mercy of Congress. Sadly, grants funding is not available for 2007, and future funds are in question.

The U. S. Department of Education description states that the purpose of the Jacob Javits Act "... is to carry out a coordinated program of scientifically based research, demonstration projects, innovative strategies, and similar activities designed to build and enhance the ability of elementary and secondary schools to meet the special education needs of gifted and talented students. The major emphasis of the program is on serving students traditionally underrepresented in gifted and talented programs, particularly economically disadvantaged, limited English proficient (LEP), and disabled students, to help reduce the serious gap in achievement among certain groups of students at the highest levels of achievement."⁵

Do parents of the gifted and talented have recourse? According to ERIC⁶, states vary as to options available to resolve problems associated with educating the gifted and talented population. ERIC describes these options as negotiation, mediation, due process, and heading to court. The bottom line for advocates? Familiarize yourself with state laws that address the needs of gifted and talented children, and be prepared to lobby your legislature.

Children with gifts and talents are not immune to internal politics. It's important for parents to feel assured that a placement is appropriate for the child, and not being used to prop up classroom, school, or district test scores.

Since children who are twice exceptional have recourse under Federal and state laws, how important is it to meet the needs of children who are gifted and talented who do not have a disability? Imagine how problematic it would be if you are forced to watch the same movie over and over and over again—so many times over you know the script forward and backward.

As an adult, if it were your job, you'd be looking at the want ads. This isn't an option for a child in the public school system that is dependent on state law and funding to accommodate his gifts and talents. For a child with gifts and talents, it truly would be boring and feel like a prison sentence.

⁴ IDEA. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. <http://idea.ed.gov/>

⁵ Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program. <http://www.ed.gov/programs/javits/>

⁶ ERIC ED 415590 ERIC Digest E541. Know Your Legal Rights in Gifted Education. ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education, Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191-1589. 1997-0-00. http://www.brightword.com/eric_digest_e541.pdf

“More of the same” is problematic, as is adding “supplemental” stuff at the end of the school day so the child can feel “challenged.”

Students of all levels and abilities compete for limited funds. By virtue of their giftedness, it’s sometimes assumed that these children don’t need anyone to advocate for them. Advocates for these children shouldn’t assume children who are gifted are elitist. They are equally as “left behind” as those who are learning disabled and promoted through school to graduate as functionally illiterate. The goal of educating the gifted and talented is to provide equal opportunity and equal access to appropriate educational resources, which is the moral right of all children.

RESOURCES

National Association for Gifted Children.

<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=538>

Advocacy Toolkit.

<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=36>

SENG. Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted
Article library.

http://www.sengifted.org/articles_index.shtml

Gifted & LD

LDOnline Org.

<http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/gifted>

Gifted Child Quarterly.

<http://gcq.sagepub.com/>

*Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again
and expecting different results.*

Albert Einstein, (1879-1955) *(attributed)*

Advocating for Children Who Are Gifted and Talented

Interview with Roberta Braverman

February 4, 2007

By Janie Bowman

Roberta Braverman is a teacher for the gifted and talented in Mount Laurel, New Jersey, and Vice President for Advocacy with the New Jersey Association for Gifted Children.

<http://www.njagc.org> E-mail: njagc@njagc.org

You've been a teacher in gifted and talented education for over twenty-five years, and have been an officer and volunteer advocate for the New Jersey Association for Gifted Children. Can you compare how difficult it is to meet the needs of a student who is gifted vs. a student with learning disabilities, and then with a student who is gifted and has learning disabilities?

I would say that any child whose test scores measure him out of a range that is considered a norm is going to be meeting some difficulty in a school that focuses on standards. Standards are basically a benchmark to compare each child's performance. Are they at a specific level yet, or aren't they? There are more provisions in place for a child with disabilities than there are for a child with gifts due to the way our laws are written. Perhaps the vocal advocacy of the parents of children who are considered exceptional or in the remedial range is what brought greatest benefit to this student population. I think the strengths of the parent advocacy efforts have made it so that, at least, dollars and attention need to follow the child who has learning disabilities, whereas the gifted child is often left without resources or support that are guaranteed by law.

What effect has NCLB had on funding and programs for gifted and talented?

We are working on gathering more solid statistical information, but the anecdotes we hear in the field are that programs are suffering because of limited funds. When schools are being asked to validate the growth of a grade level of children or a whole school, very little focus is on an individual child's growth. Now supposedly that's starting to change a bit. There's a term called "Adequate Yearly Progress." How does one measure Adequate Yearly Progress when the first test shows mastery of all the grade level concepts, and then the last test shows mastery of all the same grade level concepts? So unless schools use "out of level" tests for the advanced students they're not really going to know if that child is making adequate yearly progress. If they're saying it's adequate if you are at the grade level standards, the argument that the child walked in with mastery of grade level skills may or may not hold. Pre-testing to assess a child's challenge level for instruction is necessary in all subjects and frequently throughout the year. Then the practice of differentiating instruction might occur, to deliver just what each child needs, as a pharmacist would dispense medication.

But I do feel that the focus has been more on getting students to standards or a basic level rather than beyond.

How can parents, advocates and teachers best work with school administrators to meet the needs of gifted students, especially those who are twice exceptional, who have learning disabilities as well?

I find that the only cases that we have actually had on record in New Jersey that have been taken through due process hearings are the ones where the child is what they would consider twice exceptional—they are gifted and they are special needs. Our state requires districts to identify and serve gifted students through the administrative code, which is school law. But the language is unclear about how to identify, and even more obscure about how to serve, so we have what is called “local rule.” And there are over 600 school districts in our little peanut-sized state and they have 600 different things, or nothing at all, happening for gifted children.

If a child is both gifted and has a learning disability, there’s a chance that her giftedness will be recognized and possibly accommodated. Most often the attention is focused on what is wrong, as opposed to what is perceived as right. If a child is achieving, with her giftedness masked by performance at an average pace, often the disability is ignored due to an absence of failing scores.

What is a spousal tag team and how does it relate to advocacy?

Even if both parents aren’t living together in the home, if they attend a conference as a team, then the “stage mom” psychology cannot be used as an excuse. Too often parents of the gifted have been accused of having this type of mentality or are perceived as being pushy parents.

With two parents or a group of parents of gifted children present, it’s harder to explain away the lack of services in the district for gifted children. Two different parents, presenting their views in two different ways, usually helps.

Bringing in an advocate is, hopefully, a more impartial method to assure the needs of the family and the opinions of the school are clearly presented. Parents are impassioned because they want changes now. They want the fix to be for their child and almost immediate. Those of us who work in education know that big changes don’t happen that quickly. Setting precedent is a big thing, in that I’ve known of school districts where children have been allowed to be accelerated with the agreement that the parent wouldn’t go out onto the soccer field and share that agreement with everyone else.

It’s almost like schools don’t want acceleration to be part of public record. We’ve had a lot of cases in New Jersey that have eventually gone to either an administrative law judge or the complete due process route. Many cases ended off the books. It was almost hinted that, “We’ll give you what you want, but it’s not going to go on the record.” So there’s nothing really in the judicial record that we can use to say, “This is precedent for gifted services and now you have to do it, too,” because it never gets that far.

A strategy I frequently use when I advocate in Trenton, is to do a little audience participation with the legislators. I ask them, “How many of you went to private school?” And they raise their hands. And I continue with, “Keep that hand up. How many of you send your children to private school?” And then we have more legislators with their hands up. Finally I ask, “What if you could not afford it, you didn’t know of the options outside of public school, and you were basically stuck in a school that was very much focused on remediation and passing the state and federal tests? What if you are able and capable and you are not allowed to learn? The curriculum is repetitive and redundant and you already mastered it?” Now we have to work with all the remediation and fix children performing below some arbitrary standard before someone takes our money away, or comes in and takes over our school district or whatever. It’s almost like, you know, a knee-jerk fear reaction. The state tests are coming and our district must show improvement in the number of students who are considered proficient.

And another thing is, how many gifted children are we losing to private/home schools? The idea is, shouldn’t the local district want to keep them there, if for nothing else to make their district look better in the stupid test score games that we play? So, I try to point that out also, but we don’t have a lot of statistics of how many people have left the public schools due to the fact that their kids aren’t getting what they need because they are gifted or twice exceptional. I’d love for someone to begin doctoral research or seek out information with that in mind.

The word “opposition”—I’ve used this word a few times, and thought it many times more. Could you elaborate on how you would define the word opposition and in what context?

Well, from the parents’ point of view, when you are opposing a system that has been supposedly in operation without your input for quite a while, often the perception of bringing new ideas forward becomes adversarial as opposed to collaborative. Some districts welcome parents on curriculum and program assessment committees, and others do not.

There is often opposition to change. Noticing and accommodating gifted or twice-exceptional children who are not failing is a novel idea whose time has come. Those ideas that may be perceived as criticism, may threaten what is perceived as past practice. New ideas that may upset the applecart may not be welcomed.

Philosophically, one might say all children are at school to learn. I truly believe that. But when it turns into making practical changes or improvements that may mean thinking outside the box, sometimes that’s where the opposition is. Maybe it’s due to ignorance, a fear that needed change must be costly. Many improvements or needed changes for gifted students can be done inexpensively or free. If gifted programming is met with opposition, the perception may be that money is taken away from some other students who need it, and there’s only so much of the pie to go around. So I think that the opposition can be blatant or it can be subliminal due to fear and ignorance of change, and questions about where the money is going to come from.

You joined a committee to include advocacy as part of your job description. That's a wonderful idea! What prompted you to do this?

It was necessary to include advocacy in my job description because of frequent communication with parents about their awareness of federal, state and local initiatives that may impact gifted education.

OK, last question. As a teacher, assuming you had unlimited funds, what would be the number one item on your wish list?

Well, I have too many to choose one. The one I can probably hang my hat on, one factor proven through research, is smaller class sizes. The ratio of teacher to students probably will make the most amount of difference for the most number of kids. Another top choice would be teacher training. In many states, like New Jersey, once you get your certificate, you don't have to take anything else but the 100 hours required every five years.

Personally, I have found I could do 100 hours a year, because I attend many conferences and I try to stay current in my field.

If you think about a Broadway show and how many months you're in production, and how many practices go on, and how many hours a cast is actually in front of an audience, it comes to, maybe, two hours in a night. And then think of the total opposite of that: Teachers are always in front of children. The preparation time and a teacher's time to learn is so limited. Most people think of a teacher's day of nine-to-three. Teachers use all the evening and after-school hours to do planning, grading, contacting parents, and everything else. There isn't enough time to do it all well. I really think that we could really streamline the effort and make more changes for children if there were fewer children in front of every teacher, and if teachers were trained to work with children of special needs.

* * * * *

Communication Skills

What are the two most important communication rules to remember? Always consider confidentiality, and never write or say anything you wouldn't want the whole world to know. Assume millions worldwide can read every e-mail you send and every online message you post, (It's as easy as, right click, forward, gone!), or hear any message you leave using voice mail (To forward this message, press...). Once you hit the send button, Oops! You can't change your mind.

As an advocate, always use your imagination and include a healthy dose of paranoia. For example, visualize a subpoena demanding "all correspondence, including notes, letters, e-mail, voice mail (including digital and computer-based files), etc.

Taping

As an advocate, you'll have many situations where you'll need to record phone conversations or meetings. Laws on recording meetings and phone calls vary by state, so be sure that what you're doing is legal. Some states allow recording with the approval of all parties; some only one. Don't give anyone a reason to discredit you, or worse, have the recorded information thrown out if the parents go for due process.

For taping IEP meetings, Federal law is silent on this issue, so it's important to know what your state and district written policies are. Familiarity with OSEP, Office of Special Education Programs, and the ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act may offer some remedy in the event a school denies a parent the opportunity to tape record a meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, have everyone to say his or her name and title while the tape is running. State the date, time, place, and purpose, as well. In other words, saying you are going to tape and recording everyone's permission must be recorded on the tape. When finished recording, give the tape to the parents.

Never leave a recorder unattended, and be sure to re-introduce everyone with his or her permission to tape after a break.

RESOURCES

Google search for: "state laws tape recording" without the quotes and you'll find links for recording laws. Also search under "tape record IEP meetings." Search your state's Department of Public Instruction and district Web sites for their tape recording policies.

OSEP, Office of Special Education Programs, letter dated June 4, 2003.

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/letters/2003-2/redact060403iep2q2003.pdf>

How and Why to Tape Record Meetings by Brice Palmer, a Vermont advocate.

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/advo.tips.mtgs.tape.palmer.htm>

E-mail etiquette

There is no such thing as privacy or anonymity when using the Internet to send e-mail or post on newsgroups or online forums. Yet, e-mail can be helpful in many ways.

E-mail is a time saver in helping parents get organized and coordinate schedules. When working with parents it may be helpful to specify that all e-mails belong to them, with you retaining a copy.

You can use e-mail to keep everyone on a child's team updated. A quick e-mail list setup to include addresses from all team members can keep everyone abreast of the information, and you don't have to play e-mail or phone tag.

E-mail can be used to clarify what was discussed and agreed to in a meeting, or to thank others for following through on something important. E-mail can be part of a paper trail for a child's record, but don't depend on it.

Newsgroups

Newsgroups and forums can be informative if you're careful to take a close look at the resources people suggest. However, when posting on newsgroups, leave specifics aside. Again, confidentiality is important.

Voice mail

When leaving voice mail, it's easy for anyone living in the receiving home to hit the forward button and pass it on to others. Again, don't assume privacy. While we use emoticons or smilies to indicate emotion in an e-mail or on a Web site, voice mail has the advantage of actually hearing the emotion behind the words. If you're angry or upset, take a walk before you dial. Never leave sensitive information in someone's voice mailbox unless you are 110% sure it will go to the intended recipient and won't be picked up by others, and forwarded or deleted.

State the date, time, and your name for each message that you leave. Depending on the system, calls that are saved or forwarded may not tag the original date and time. If there's a special message you want to save, forward it to yourself and state the date and time in the introduction. That way, you have a timeline embedded in the forwarded message.

When parents need a “Letter to a Stranger”

Advocates are often asked to help write letters to school or district staff. If the relationship between the parents and the school is polarized, your job description will include writing skills beyond simple grammar and punctuation. Remember, however, the parent always has the final say. The following is a possible scenario from a parent’s viewpoint:

“So what is a Letter to a Stranger and how do I write one?” A Letter to a Stranger is referred to extensively by attorney Pete Wright of wrightslaw.com, and is an important tactic and strategy that all advocates need to learn.

It’s a rare parent with a child with special needs who hasn’t been tempted to write an angry letter to the school. Such a letter is always precipitated by a critical situation where you feel you need to respond “Right Now!” Well, OK. We understand that. (Been there—done that.)

A Letter to a Stranger isn’t written for your benefit, however, or for your child’s benefit, or for the benefit of the school. You are writing it for the benefit of a stranger, someone you’ve never met who knows zilch, nada, nothing, about your situation, but someone who can make life-altering decisions about your child’s future and the well-being of your family. “Who can this stranger possibly be?” you ask. Think older, conservative, and well read. Think “judge.”

Remember, you are preparing paperwork, “as if,” as if you are going to court—as if you are going to end up at the steps of the U. S. Supreme Court, at the steps leading to human beings who don’t know you and who are in a position of power to change your child’s life and that of other children forever.

Now that we’ve defined “stranger,” write that first draft and put it away. After the first draft and cooling off period, write down what’s important to include in your letter. Tell the story from beginning to end, and use language to invoke sympathy, not anger. State your case grade level by grade level, or by date and time. You want the stranger to see you and your child as real human beings, not a diagnosis or behavior problem. Think twice before using canned letters. The stranger may have had the same or similar ones cross his desk before. A personal touch is better.

Next, run it past another pair of eyes to check for continuity and spelling errors. If it tells a story in a business-like manner and with empathy, then you’re ready to roll.

There are circumstances where it is necessary to send letters certified, or to obtain a hand-written receipt. However, this practice in excess may cause the school to feel a lawsuit is in the works, and polarize the relationship between the parent and the school. Therefore, it is important for an advocate to consider the circumstances and share alternatives, but let the parents decide how best to obtain documentation.

RESOURCE

The Art of writing Letters: by Pamela Darr Wright, MA. MSW. You’ll read the original “Letter to a Stranger,” by Pete Wright and Janie Bowman, which is permanently archived in The Smithsonian. You’ll learn the “Twelve Rules for Writing Great Letters,” see the differences between the blaming approach and the story-telling approach, and discover how to write for “sympathy” and not “therapy.”

http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/DRAFT_Letters.html

Working with Schools

Parent preparation

Advocates and parents share the same feelings when dealing with school issues. “It feels like divorce,” describes it perfectly. To be effective advocates, we’re expected to have the strength of Atlas and have the most current legal resources available. Oh, and a degree in library science would help. How else can we keep track of all the notebooks we’ve accumulated these last thirteen years? Where’s the executive secretary to handle the paperwork and answer the phone? We also have to be flexible and be available twenty-four hours a day for meetings and to handle crises. (Three hours of sleep? No problem!)

Issues that may be on the table:

- Behavior/discipline.
- Grades and grade levels.
- IEPs, Individualized education programs, or plans.
- Evaluations.
- FAPE, Free and appropriate education.
- LRE, Least restrictive environment.
- ESY, extended school year.
- Transition, from grade to grade and to adulthood.
- Work, employment and life skills.
- Abuse of the student by peers or staff.
- Confidentiality.
- Educating the educators.

Advocating isn’t for wimps. You need a strong spine and a good dose of self-esteem. An important part of advocating is making sure the parents prepare as if they are going to court. Though parents should be encouraged to pursue every means at mediating the problem, you never know if they will end up in due process.

Using a notebook, advocates can help organize paperwork for easy access and reference. If needed, they can provide recorders to tape meetings, giving the tapes to the parents for their records.

To expedite the flow of information between advocates and school staff, state social services agencies and other, advocates should have parents sign an Exchange of Information Form. You can obtain these forms from the school or social service agencies.

Telephone Log

Prepare a ledger to include:

- Date.
- Time.
- Call to or from: Name and contact information.
- Issues discussed.
- What they will do.
- What I will do.
- Date for follow-up

RESOURCES

Questions Often Asked by Parents About Special Education Services.

http://www.brightword.com/nichcy_questions.pdf

Google search for: “exchange of information” permission schools, or plug in the school district to see if they have the form available online.

Academic Content Standards

Academic Content Standards can be used by parents to plan for a student’s IEP. They may be called by different terms in each state, but these standards clearly spell out what a student is expected to learn at each grade level. It also states what school districts are expected to know and be able to do. These can be used to your advantage in planning a student’s IEP.

Transition for high school students

Transition services are mandated in IDEA for students sixteen and older. Learn what vocational and transition services are available in your district and in other districts. You’ll then have a clear idea of what’s available in your area, and the IEP team will have more choices available to meet a child’s needs.

Transition services are to include a focus in three areas: academic and functional achievement, based on the child’s needs, and pertinent instruction. Specifically IDEA 2004⁷ explains transition services for students in high school.

⁷ IDEA 2004. Reauthorized Statute. Secondary Transition. 3. Changes the definition of “transition services.” <http://www.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/tb-second-trans.pdf>

From IDEA—Reauthorized Statute: The term “transition services” means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

- Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education; vocational education; integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education; adult services; independent living or community participation;
 - Is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests; and
 - Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.
- [602(34)]

Educating the educators

It bears noting that training for teachers and administrators can be too little, and sometimes too late. Even a certificate in special education doesn’t help if some educators keep grasping at straws to explain away learning or neurology based differences. Just ask *Crystal. “My son was in first grade and had sensory issues. He hated loud noises and would often scream. Or course, everyone became quiet when he screamed. The staff couldn’t figure it out, and the principal, who was certified in special education, inferred he had a behavior problem. My son was trying to cope with the environment, and I had to continually remind them of that fact.”

What exactly, do some educators say to parents about children with disabilities? Here are some comments parents have heard:

- His IQ is too high to have a disability.
- He’s just lazy.
- She doesn’t need a behavior plan. She needs medication.
- She doesn’t need medication; she needs counseling.
- She doesn’t need counseling. You need to discipline her more at home.
- He needs a brother or sister.
- I want him on medication.
- I don’t want him on medication.
- You must change or increase his medication.
- He’s just acting out.
- She cries at the drop of a pin, and you need to tell her to stop.
- You need to discipline him when he gets home (5 hrs later).
- Allergies are a medical need, not an educational need.
- Etc. Etc. Etc.

It's discouraging for parents and advocates to hear the same things over and over again, year after year. What to do? Most teachers want to be helpful, but may not have appropriate training or resources available to them, so keep a handy list of resources you can share with them. More importantly, keep the focus on task, and have expert assessments and paperwork handy.

It helps for advocates to have knowledge of district alternative programs and Federal supplemental choices. Michelle K. Vogel, the mother of a child diagnosed with Schizoaffective Disorder and an educational and mental health advocate, had to hone her research skills in order to find information on available services. "The kids I advocate for are usually at the elementary level and have various diagnoses. The hardest ones to get services for are the children on the autistic spectrum. Also, because some PDD⁸ kids and those children with Asperger's, for example, appear physically 'normal' to most general ed teachers, there are many barriers to services."

"Other information I have found difficult to procure is information on supplemental services that are available when the school is in violation of the 'No Child Left Behind' laws. When the school is on its 3rd year of not meeting adequate yearly progress, there is a host of services that can be requested by the parents of children who need extra help. They don't necessarily have to be on a 504⁹ or IEP either. I think this is valuable information for an advocate to have."

RESOURCES

Hands and Voices

Pop-up IEP, responses and what the law says.

http://www.handsandvoices.org/articles/education/popup/pop_index.html

Choices for Parents. Supplemental Educational Services.

From the U. S. Department of Education.

<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/choice/help/ses/index.html>

⁸ Pervasive Developmental Disorders. An explanation of PDD can be found in NICHCY Fact Sheet 20 (FS20) 1998. Resources updated, October 2003. "The term Pervasive Developmental Disorders was first used in the 1980s to describe a class of disorders. This class of disorders has in common the following characteristics: impairments in social interaction, imaginative activity, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, and a limited number of interests and activities that tend to be repetitive." There are five disorders in the PDD category: autism, Retts disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified.

http://www.brightword.com/nichcy_pdd.pdf

⁹ Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities. FAPE. Requirements under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. U. S. Department for Civil Rights. July 1999.

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html>

Students and self-advocacy

An important aspect of teaching younger children self-advocacy skills is to be sensitive to their feelings about school. Some children are extremely vulnerable to peer rejection and misunderstanding teachers and staff. Listen as well as “hear” what they are saying. Treating their learning and attention differences as a defect that has to be kept secret gives the child the wrong impression. Answer their questions directly and honestly, with age-appropriate words and explanations. Being open and honest builds trust.

Students should be encouraged to attend meetings and advocate for themselves. They should have a voice in their future. Of course, children shouldn't attend meetings where the possibility exists that the meeting will turn hostile. Remember, first do no harm. It's OK to ask the student to step outside. If the student is young or needs supervision, have an adult go with him. If there's no adult, end the meeting in a nice way and reschedule. Don't allow things to get out of control to the detriment of the child.

Therese Holliday, advocate and Executive Director of the Wyatt Holliday Foundation, knows how important it is to empower students. Her most productive advocacy experience was at a high school, “with the family of a boy diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and ADHD. During the meeting I turned to the boy and said, ‘You are the most important person in this room right now... What exactly do you want to happen? Don't worry about the school or your family's feelings.’ The meeting took a whole new twist, and after asking the principal to check into the local vocational school for him, he was able to take on coursework at both schools and continue successfully. The adults had not even considered this option.”

RESOURCES

Helping Students Develop Their IEPs. NICHCY

Technical Assistance Guide 2 (TA2B). Technical 2nd Edition. January 2002

This is a NICHCY document written to help students develop their IEPs. It includes an explanation of IEPs and the benefit of having one.

http://www.brightword.com/nichcy_iep.pdf

A Student's Guide to the IEP

Student Guide 1 (ST1B) 2nd Edition. January 2002

This is an excellent resource from NICHCY that explains the IEP process. It includes questions for students to answer to prepare for the IEP meeting, accommodations they may need and preparing for the meeting.

http://www.brightword.com/nichcy_student_guide.pdf

Self-Advocacy: A Student's Perspective

Interview with Jay Feitshans
January 30, 2007
By Janie Bowman

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While a senior at Haddonfield Memorial High School in New Jersey, (Class of 2005) you advocated on behalf of S2142, the Gifted Disabled Community Needs Study Commission. What prompted you to take that step?

My own experience as a gifted student with a learning disability. I wanted to take more academically rigorous courses, but my middle school and high school always prevented me from taking courses for gifted students because I was classified with a learning disability. Having a supportive mother with a law degree from Georgetown, I was able to advocate for my right to take harder classes, although at every turn the educational system made everything a ridiculous struggle. Around my sophomore year of high school I told my mom that the system did not work and needed to be changed (This was not the first time; May 2001 we designed a conference on Inclusion, held at the U.S Capital with support from Congressman Saxton.) Well, my mom being the legal professional she is, agreed, and asked me about my thoughts. From my ideas, from my own personal experiences, my mom drafted the first proposal. I then spent the next two years lobbying state senators and government offices.

If you were to head up such a sub-committee today, what would be your top concern?

Well that is a difficult question because I see two issues, but they are really the same: the placement of students in inclusion settings, and the placement of gifted-disabled students in challenging classes. Most of my classes in middle school and high school were called mainstream classes because they used the mainstream textbook, but they were in fact for students with IEPs and 504 plans. So legally inclusion existed but not in reality. These classes were also more disruptive compared to their parallel classes with mainstream students. If disruptive students were spread throughout all classes they would not all be in one class to distract one another (I know this is true because I was in several of these classes, and I found myself engaging in goofing off like the whole inclusion class.) So against the wishes of the school I moved to another mainstream class, where I was one of the few IEP students. The second issue of placing gifted-disabled students in challenging courses may not exist if inclusion was practiced and vice-versa.

What feedback did you receive on the bill from state senators? Did the bill pass?

The feedback I received from the senators was better than I expected. I expected everything to take at least three years and it happened in two years. For the most part all

the senators were cooperative, although that was because of my mother's and my constant attention, and visits to their offices. Visiting your elected officials in person is the best way to get something done. Also Senator Vitale, an amazing man, really took an interest in my ideas and his support really helped. Yes, the bill passed unanimously the spring of my senior year, and this spring (2007) the commission has finished and will be releasing their findings.

How old were you when you began to sense the importance of advocating for yourself? Under what circumstances?

Well, I was in middle school in New Jersey. At the time the school had a policy of not having students attend their IEP meetings, only the parents. This may still be the case, I do not know. My mom always requested that I be present, not that they always did as she requested the first couple of meetings. At one of my IEP meetings my English teacher reported to my mother that I was getting 100s on my spelling quizzes. (If this was true, it meant I was improving and the school would declassify me, probably within the year.) Since I attended the meeting, to my IEP team's surprise I was able to correctly state that I had failed all my spelling quizzes. After correcting my teacher's statement, my IEP team was speechless, and decided to keep me classified with a learning disability. It was the first time I was so proud of performing so poorly.

As a child or teenager, who encouraged you to advocate for yourself?

Of course my mom, and only her. Before the above incident, I had taken the state standardized tests, and my school did not submit the scores to a gifted program at Johns Hopkins because my average score was too low. This was because of a combination math score of 97% and verbal score of 48%. My mom, in her wisdom, thought a place like Johns Hopkins may be interested in an individual with an excellent math score, and she contacted them to find out. Johns Hopkins informed her that their programs wanted students talented in verbal or math skills, or both. So with the school making every roadblock they could, mom had my scores applied to Johns Hopkins Center for Talented Youth. Much to the dismay of my school, I was accepted and attended four consecutive summers at CTY.

In high school, did your advocating affect your relationships with other students? Or were they able to see the big picture — that it wasn't just for your benefit?

Other students were not really aware of it. This is for two reasons: one, I was not at terms with my disability, and still struggle with my limits, (I still have fantasies of writing a book someday, but English class this semester reminds me how difficult writing is.) The second reason was my advocating. Although it was very public at times (speaking at conferences, coverage in newspapers), at my own high school it was not something I publicly addressed. I mean, if it came up I would give an opinion, but gifted disabled was not a topic I widely talked about in school. Advocating was necessary, not a conversation piece. The only thing that was difficult to explain was why I could get extra time on exams; my fellow students always begrudged that, as I would as well. Even after explaining my situation people still did not understand. And this is still true at college, if not more so, where people are even more academically competitive.

What was the reaction of teachers and staff at your high school to your self-advocacy?

I cannot generalize—each teacher had a different reaction. Some positive, some negative; none viewed me the same as before.

What do you know now about advocating for people with disabilities that you wished you had known in high school?

It is very tricky, time consuming, and after applying to colleges I would have done many things differently. For example, I would not have disclosed to a college that I had a learning disability. This may seem shocking, but I have come to understand a cold fact: that a college would prefer a student who is the best at everything, than a student who is excellent in one subject and less than average in the other.

Did you have peer exposure to students with special needs other than gifted? How did that absence or presence affect you?

If you mean did I have exposure to students that were only in special education classes? Yes I did. It scares me, because when I am around them I always wonder how close to their lives my life could have been if my mom was not so active in my education. Uneducated disabled students also make me afraid that, in fact, I am more disabled than I realize, and non-disabled people simply tolerate my presence because I'm "special." My disability is something I have always struggled with; sometimes I accept it, other times I do not want peers to know. It's a constant fight between showing my weaknesses, which is hard for anyone, (but mine are much greater), and also showing that I have strengths that are also greater than average.

In your opinion, what are the three most valuable self-advocacy skills to teach a child? A teenager? A young adult?

I think starting at the youngest age possible, children should attend their IEP meeting so they do not feel ashamed and embarrassed as they do when they are 14 and required to attend. Teenagers often feel the need to not be different, even students that have a completely invisible disability. Teenagers should establish a way they feel comfortable talking to their teachers about their disability. You are your best representative, except for your mom. By adulthood, after years of self-advocacy at IEP meetings and helping teachers know what alternative learning methods work, one should be able to be independent and proactive, thinking beforehand what one needs. For example, I am in college and at the beginning of the semester I request tutors for all my classes (at college this is available to all students). No mom and IEP team. That's really nice, but I have to be active for myself.

* * * * *

Retaliation: Welcome to the Dark Side

Like parents, you and your child are vulnerable to retaliation. The “powers that be” have more power and money than you, and have attorneys readily available who are paid for by public funds. Retaliation is real, against vulnerable students, their families, and advocates. Why do some school staff retaliate against others? The reasons aren’t clear, but perhaps readers should consider the following:

- To gain and keep control.
- The fear that other parents will ask for the same accommodations.
- To hide abuse by teachers or staff against defenseless students.
- To intimidate you into silence.
- Concern over funding.

Windy Payne appreciates how vulnerable advocates can be. “For some, becoming an advocate is a calling and for others it is something they just fall into. Whichever you find yourself to be, you need to protect yourself and your children from retaliation. Some school districts do not view advocates as a positive addition to their school meetings, which can cause them to act defensive, irritated, and angry.

“If you have a child in the public school that you are advocating in, you need to be aware that retaliation might be employed to intimidate you to stop advocating. The retaliation can come in many different and subtle forms such as: denial of services, denial of parent participation, denial of privileges to your child, inappropriate discipline and denial of access to your child’s classroom. Being aware of this possibility is the first step in protecting yourself and your children from harm.

“To further protect yourself you must rid yourself of any guilt or remorse you might feel for beginning your advocacy. After all, you are protecting an innocent child and assisting them and their family in receiving an appropriate educational experience. These children often have no voice or means of defending themselves and you might be the child’s only hope.”

Educators are also vulnerable, and those targeted are often shocked to learn how little support they receive from other school staff or their unions.

How to protect yourself against retaliation

There are no guarantees, but it helps to be proactive in an official way. For example, volunteering with a local or state advocacy organization may give you more credibility.

Documentation is also important to keep yourself safe from retaliation, so keep a detailed paper trail. Network with others in your district, and get legal advice if you are experiencing retaliation.

Teachers, joining a union may offer some protection, though it’s not guaranteed. It’s sad, but good teachers are jumping ship, as are parents who can afford to enroll their children in a private school. For those who can’t afford private school, homeschooling is an option.

RESOURCES

The Dark Side of Special Education: Retaliation Primer from The California Special Education Observer, 1998.

<http://www.parentadvocates.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=article&articleID=4527>

Basic retaliation information from Peter W.D. Wrights, Esq.
And Pamela Darr Wright, MA, MSW.

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/retal.index.htm>

Teacher Litigation (scroll one-third down the page).

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/teach.index.htm#litigate>

Search “retaliation” while in wrightslaw.com for a list of pages with that subject.

The Americans with Disabilities Act - Sec.36.206 Retaliation or Coercion.

<http://www.ada.gov/reg3a.html> - Anchor-48213

If we value the pursuit of knowledge, we must be free to follow wherever that search may lead us. The free mind is not a barking dog, to be tethered on a ten-foot chain.

Adlai F. Stevenson, Jr. (1900 – 1965)

Retaliation – A Teacher’s Perspective

E-Interview with a Special Education Teacher

January 20, 2007

By Janie Bowman

This interview is with a special education teacher who has a child with special needs. To preserve privacy, the teacher’s name and identifying information will not be disclosed.

You began by advocating for your students, then for your child. Ultimately, you experienced retaliation. Did this begin when you were advocating for your students or for your child? What kind of retaliation did you experience, and how did you handle it?

It began my second year of teaching, when there was talk of my “not getting along with some male administrators,” a result of my interactions with and reporting of a vice principal who was consistently violating the laws regarding suspension and discipline for IEP students. It got better at my next district, then occurred again with my son years later, as well as other students whom I was assisting as an advocate.

I handled the situation as a teacher by moving to a different district, where I knew the administrator for special education would support legal and ethical practices. I had to discuss these comments and basically defend my actions before I was hired, however. The district that violated the law multiple times with my son and with other students reportedly “blacklisted” me, telling community members that they “would not work with her because she is too confrontational,” as well as delaying and/or refusing every accommodation I asked for my son. I actually pulled my son out of school and homeschooled the rest of the year, then moved out of the area (for various reasons, the horrible experiences we had had with the district being one very major factor in that decision). I continued to support parents, both with information and by attending meetings, but I would warn them each time that the district saw me as an adversary and that my presence may or may not benefit them and their child.

Have you experienced retaliation from teachers or staff who say they have a child with a disability?

No, I have not.

Was your teacher’s union helpful?

I did not seek any assistance from them; I did speak to my direct boss, the special ed director, who was supportive but was prevented from taking substantive action in that district.

Did you contact an attorney? If so, were any lawsuits filed? If you filed any lawsuits, what were the results?

I did speak to [one] but could not afford an attorney with the situation involving my son. I filed a claim with the state but they never responded.

As a special education teacher, did you witness other educators or staff harass or abuse other students? Please elaborate.

Yes I did. I had a high school boy come to my classroom reporting that a teacher had actually stood in front of the class and mocked him for attempting to request a signature required by the special ed program. I had a teacher who would consistently ignore or yell at the students who were mainstreamed into his class, as well as ignoring requests for modifications, so I would often take my students out of his class and teach the content separately to my small group.

If so, reflecting on that situation, if you were the parent of the child who was abused, what would you have done?

I would have done basically the same thing I did as a teacher in the first situation: I asked the student if he wanted me to intervene and speak to both the teacher and the administrators about it. As a parent, I would have lodged a formal complaint with the district in writing. In the second situation, I would have requested my child be transferred to a different class. If that request was denied I would move into a formal complaint.

In your opinion, what can teachers or school personnel do to protect themselves against retaliation?

I am a big fan of paper! "Document everything" is my slogan. As both a parent and an advocate, if you have a paper trail you are safer. Keep a journal, send e-mails, write memos, etc. Second point is to KNOW the law and the regulations, and the district policies. Third is to really build good relationships with both the parents and the union, and learn who the folks are in the district (parents, union, administrator, etc) who really have the clout. Know the political landscape—there is one!

I feel teachers go into the profession because they love kids and want to help nurture them to adulthood. What causes some teachers to defer to principals, superintendents or others, and turn a blind eye toward the needs of children with special needs?

One thing is training. Most regular ed teachers, in my experience, are NOT given nearly enough training in special needs, especially given the amount of inclusion we see today. They are given even less training in the law. Couple that with truly outrageous class sizes and little planning time, ever decreasing resources, and ever decreasing training time and budgets, and many teachers simply do not have the ability or resources to become advocates. There is also a very strong and genuine fear of losing one's job or standing in the district in some places. There is also the possibility of retaliation in terms of poor scores on performance evaluations, and so on, or losing references, and the peer pressure

from colleagues who are unable or unwilling to step out of line themselves. There are also, as is true in any profession, the occasional “bad apples” who are simply uncaring or unwilling to really care in action as well as sentiment. Luckily that is the minority.

Considering all you’ve been through, do you intend to stay in the field of education?

I do want to stay in education—it is my passion, to work with kids who have disabilities. I am still struggling to see what that will look like, as I do not want to go back to teaching special education in the public schools. I know too much about the limits of what I can do for the students, given budget and caseload constraints, to feel that I could do the job within those constraints and feel good about it. I also feel that I would have to be very careful in choosing where I work in terms of finding a district where the atmosphere set by the administration does truly put the students first, and where those administrators pay attention more to student needs than budget items. I am looking more toward training others to work in the schools, work in higher education, or work in consultant type roles, so I can do the job and maintain my ethics and standards, rather than feel like I cannot meet the needs of my students.

* * * * *

*The best and most beautiful things in the world
cannot be seen or even touched.
They must be felt within the heart.*

Helen Keller

Final Thoughts

Most of us began the journey by necessity: having a child with special needs whom we needed to protect in ways not imagined by parents with neurotypical children.

If your child has lifelong needs, you're an advocate until the end. For others, they can retire as soon as their child is out the door and gainfully employed. It's a time for them to move into another career, get out of debt and secure retirement benefits. And then there are some who, well, can't forget those friends and teachers who held their hands so they wouldn't get lost in the special education maze. We can't ignore the grass-roots efforts of advocates who came before us, and who follow in our footsteps.

We have memories of wonderful teachers who went beyond the IEP to help our children, but we keep reading about abuse of children with special needs at the hands of trusted adults. We hear the same dictums today we heard fifteen or more years ago. The same tactics and strategies used by bureaucracies, including schools, to hold children and parents in an intimidation hold still exist. We forgive, but we never forget.

So, how does this all end? When is it time to put our legal and advocacy resources on the top shelf and walk out the door? Did anything change in the last twenty years? Oh, yes: the names and dates.

* * * * *

*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful,
committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*

Margaret Mead (1901 – 1978)

About the Authors

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Debbie Lynn Sorrells is an advocacy veteran serving over 3,000 individuals, children and families for over thirty years. This includes having provided childcare, respite and independent care, and foster care, including seven years as an agency contracted specialized treatment foster home provider.

Formerly a Registered Counselor in Washington state, she is respected for her client-centered style. Debbie has provided numerous advocacy support consultations and has facilitated workshops and trainings for parents and professionals. While employed at Child Care Action Council, Debbie provided training for respite providers and Medicaid Personal Care providers, which was necessary for people to become contracted Washington State Independent Providers. Additionally, she became a STARS Trainer in the Washington State Training and Registry System where she developed training materials and facilitated “Inclusive Child Care Training” for licensed childcare providers.

Under a grant, Debbie coordinated the resources used in workshops for Washington State Region 6 Division of Developmental Disabilities, Community Guides.

Contributors

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Definitions

Advocate:

Verb

1. to speak or write in favor of; support or urge by argument; recommend publicly: He advocated higher salaries for teachers.

Noun

2. a person who speaks or writes in support or defense of a person, cause, etc. (usually fol. by *of*): an advocate of peace.

3. a person who pleads for or in behalf of another; intercessor.

4. a person who pleads the cause of another in a court of law.

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IEP: Individualized Educational Program.

ESY: Extended school year.

Regulations: Part 300 / B / 300.106 / b

(b) Definition. As used in this section the term extended school year services means special education and related services that-- (1) Are provided to a child with a disability--

(i) Beyond the normal school year of the public agency;

(ii) In accordance with the child's IEP; and

(iii) At no cost to the parents of the child; and

(2) Meet the standards of the SEA.

<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cregs%2C300%2CB%2C300%252E106%2Cb%2C>

FAPE: Free and appropriate education.

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Mainstream: placing students with disabilities in a regular classroom.

LRE: Least restrictive environment. "Least restrictive environment" means that a student who has a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers, to the greatest extent possible. They should have access to the general education curriculum, extracurricular activities, or any other program that non-disabled peers would be able to access. The student should be provided with supplementary aids and services necessary to achieve educational goals if placed in a setting with non-disabled peers. Should the nature or severity of his or her disability prevent the student from achieving these goals in a regular education setting, then the student would be placed in a more restrictive environment. The less opportunity a student has to interact and learn with non-disabled peers, the more that the setting is considered to be restricted. By law, teachers are required to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment for students who have disabilities. To determine what an appropriate setting is for a student, a team will review the student's needs and interests. The types of educational settings for students with disabilities will vary. With the differences in needs and interests among students with disabilities, there is no clear definition of what an LRE will be for all students. Reference.com. *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Least_Restrictive_Environment (accessed: June 25, 2007).

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PDD: pervasive developmental disorder. Any of several disorders, such as autism and Asperger's syndrome, characterized by severe deficits in many areas of development, including social interaction and communication, or by the presence of repetitive, stereotyped behaviors. Such disorders are usually evident in the first years of life and are often associated with some degree of mental retardation. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/PDD> (accessed: June 24, 2007).

SEA: State education agency

Section 504: Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act or, more formally, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Pub. L. No. 93-112, 87 Stat. 394 (Sept. 26, 1973), codified at et seq., is American legislation that guarantees certain rights to people with disabilities. Reference.com. *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*. http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/1973_Rehabilitation_Act (accessed: June 25, 2007).

Acknowledgements

Peter W.D. Wright, Esq.

Pamela Darr Wright, MA, MSW

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<http://www.wrightslaw.com/>

Ilise Feitshans, JD and ScM

Health International: Human Rights and Health Law.

Information about public health, health & disability laws, and the impact of international human rights laws on our daily lives.

<http://www.trainingprofessionals.com/internationalhealthlaw/>

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Represents parents and students in special education disputes with public school districts.

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<http://www.fetaweb.com/03/organize.file.htm>

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By the Washington Protection and Advocacy Agency.

[http://www.wpas-rights.org/What is Advocacy/what_makes_an_advocate.htm](http://www.wpas-rights.org/What%20is%20Advocacy/what_makes_an_advocate.htm)

Advocacy Strategy Workbook: Building your Advocacy Plan

By the Washington Protection and Advocacy Agency.

http://www.wpas-rights.org/What%20is%20Advocacy/Advocacy_Strategy_Workbook.pdf

Are You Ready to File for Due Process?

http://aboutautismlaw.com/are_you_ready_to_file_for_due_process.html

Pat Howey, Educational Consultant

Why Do We Need a Model Code of Ethics and Professional Responsibility for Special Education Lay Advocates? This is a first draft that includes many thoughtful and practical ethical ideas.

http://www.pathowey.com/model_code_lay_advocates.htm

Truancy Toolkit

<http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/truancy/communications.html>

National Association for Gifted Children.

<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=538>

Advocacy Toolkit.

<http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=36>

Article library at SENG, an organization supporting the emotional needs of the gifted.

http://www.sengifted.org/articles_index.shtml

Gifted & LD

LDOnline Org.

<http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/gifted>

Gifted Child Quarterly.

<http://gcq.sagepub.com/>

A to Z Home's Cool Homeschooling is a site run by Ann Zeise, which includes an intensive list of resources for homeschooling children with special needs.

<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/weblinks/specialneeds.htm>

Important court cases involving homeschooling families.

<http://homeschooling.gomilpitas.com/weblinks/cases.htm>

Home Education Magazine's Introduction to Homeschooling. Resources, information, networking, online services, questions and answers.

<http://www.homeedmag.com/ORD/hemintrobooklet.pdf>

Eight Probing Questions to Ask about Homeschool Regulation in Your State.

<http://www.nhen.org/leginfo/default.asp?id=268>

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How and Why to Tape Record Meetings by Brice Palmer, a Vermont advocate.

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/advo.tips.mtgs.tape.palmer.htm>

The Art of writing Letters: by Pamela Darr Wright, MA. MSW. You'll read the original "Letter to a Stranger," by Pete Wright and Janie Bowman, which is permanently archived in The Smithsonian. You'll learn the "Twelve Rules for Writing Great Letters," see the differences between the blaming approach and the story-telling approach, and discover how to write for "sympathy" and not "therapy."

http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/DRAFT_Letters.html

Questions Often Asked by Parents About Special Education Services.
http://www.brightword.com/nichcy_questions.pdf

Hands and Voices

Pop-up IEP, responses and what the law says.

http://www.handsandvoices.org/articles/education/popup/pop_index.html

Choices for Parents. Supplemental Educational Services.

From the U. S. Department of Education.

<http://www.ed.gov/nclb/choice/help/ses/index.html>

Helping Students Develop Their IEPs. NICHCY

Technical Assistance Guide 2 (TA2B). Technical 2nd Edition. January 2002

This is a NICHCY document written to help students develop their IEPs. It includes an explanation of IEPs and the benefit of having one.

http://www.brightword.com/nichcy_iep.pdf

A Student's Guide to the IEP

Student Guide 1 (ST1B) 2nd Edition. January 2002

This is an excellent resource from NICHCY that explains the IEP process. It includes questions for students to answer to prepare for the IEP meeting, accommodations they may need and preparing for the meeting.

http://www.brightword.com/nichcy_iep.pdf

The Dark Side of Special Education: Retaliation Primer from The California Special Education Observer, 1998.

<http://www.parentadvocates.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=article&articleID=4527>

Basic retaliation information from Pete and Pam Wright.

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/retal.index.htm>

Teacher Litigation (scroll one-third down the page).

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/teach.index.htm#litigate>

Search “retaliation” while in wrightslaw.com for a list of pages with that subject.

The Americans with Disabilities Act - Sec.36.206 Retaliation or Coercion.

<http://www.ada.gov/reg3a.html> - Anchor-48213

Additional Resources for Advocates

Parent Training and Information Centers.

<http://fcsn.org/ptis/ptilist.htm>

COPAA, Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Guidelines for Choosing a Special Education Advocate.

http://www.copaa.org/find/adv_guide.html

NCLD, National Center for Learning Disabilities
LD Advocate's Guide.

<http://www.nclld.org/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=263>

Stacy Stern, Esq.

A Primer Geared Toward Legal Research.

http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/primer_legal_research_9902.html

Rutgers School of Law, Law Library (A good reference tool).

<http://lawlibrary.rutgers.edu/index.shtml>

Peter W. D. Wright, Esq.

Representing the Special Education Child:

A Manual for the Attorney and Lay Advocate.

http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/attorney_manual.html#anchor541174

General Resources

Learning Disabilities Association of America.

<http://www.ldanatl.org/>

National Center for Learning Disabilities.

<http://www.nclld.org/>

From Emotions to Advocacy.

<http://www.fetaweb.com/>

LD Online.

<http://www.ldonline.org/>

The Arc of the United States. A grassroots organization of and for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

<http://www.thearc.org/>

IEP guide · IEP special education IDEA 504 NCLB

A disabilities group to support one another with information.

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/IEP_guide/?yguid=898067

Mothers From Hell2

An Internet-based support/advocacy organization for parents and families of children with disabilities.

www.mothersfromhell2.org

Special Homeschoolers of Washington is an e-mail list for parents in Washington state, who are homeschooling kids with various special learning needs. We welcome parents who need support, a place to talk, vent, share or seek information.

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SpecialHSofWA>

National Disability Rights Network

Protection and Advocacy for Individuals with Disabilities.

<http://napas.org/issues/edu/>

VegSource Homeschool Forum.

<http://vegsource.com/homeschool/>

Hoagies' Gifted Education Page.

<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org>

Advocacy Training

University of Washington Advocacy Training

Advocacy Camp sponsored by Children's Alliance based in Seattle, WA.

<http://www.childrensalliance.org/whatwedo/advocacy-camp.cfm>

SEAT, Special Education Advocacy Training Grant Program. A limited pilot training program for advocates. Funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, OSEP.

<http://www.copaa.org/seat/index.html>

The SEAT program at the University of Southern California, at Children's Hospital in Los Angeles.

<http://dsci.uscuedd.org/AdvocacyLegal/SEATProject/tabid/421/Default.aspx>

Partners in Policymaking

A self-directed advocacy e-course and training program created by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities and implemented worldwide.

<http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/>

<http://www.partnersinpolicymaking.com/online.html>

NetAction's self-guided training course is a comprehensive guide to Internet outreach and advocacy.

<http://netaction.org/>

Research Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health

Portland State University

Portland, Oregon.

<http://rtc.pdx.edu/pgTraining.shtml>

Handbook by the Kentucky Protection and Advocacy.

<http://www.kypa.net/drupal/files/htn.pdf>

Team Child, Advocacy for Youth

Education Advocacy Project

Make a Difference in a Child's Life: A Manual for Helping Children and Youth Get What They Need in School. September 2000. Revised August 2006.

Advocating for children and youth who are out of home or in foster care. Specific to education law in Washington State, though advocates may find the information on resources and Federal special education laws useful.

A link to the manual is on the front page of their Web site:

<http://www.teamchild.org/index.html>

Books

(Based on survey responses and online queries)

Wrightslaw: Special Education Law

Peter W.D. Wright, Esq. & Pamela Darr Wright, MA, MSW
Harbor House Law Press, Inc.; 2nd edition (2007)

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/>

From Emotions to Advocacy

Pam Darr Wright, MA, MSW & Peter W.D. Wright, Esq.
Harbor House Law Press, Inc. (2007)

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/>

The Special Education Battlefield: A Guide to the Due Process Hearing and Other Tools of Effective Advocacy

Andrew Cuddy, Esq.

Ithaca Press (2007)

www.andrewcuddybooks.com

Autism: Asserting Your Child's Rights to a Special Education

David A. Sherman, Esq.

Oxford Churchill (2007)

<http://www.specialeducation.ws/>

<http://www.aboutautismlaw.com/>

Negotiating the Special Education Maze: A Guide for Parents & Teachers

Winifred G. Anderson, Stephen R. Chitwood, and Deidre Hayden.

Woodbine House; 3rd edition (1997)

Inside Out: What Makes a Person with Social Cognitive Deficits Tick?

Michelle Garcia Winner.

Michelle Garcia Winner. Rev. (2000)

<http://www.socialthinking.com/>

Linking Ieps to State Learning Standards: A Step-By-Step Guide

Lynda Miller and Lauren Hoffman.

Pro-Ed (2002)

Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents: A Practical Guide to Assessment and Intervention (Practical Intervention In The Schools)

Peg Dawson and Richard Guare.

The Guilford Press (2003)

I Know My Child Can Do Better
Anne Rambo, Ph.D.
McGraw-Hill Companies (2001)

Writing Measurable IEP Goals and Objectives
Barbara D. Bateman, Ph.D. JD & Cynthia M. Herr.
Attainment Co Inc (2006)

Better IEPs How to Develop Legally Correct and Educationally Useful Programs
Barbara D. Bateman and Mary Anne Linden
IEP Resources, Attainment Company (2006)

Walking Backwards to Undue Prejudice: A Report from the U.S. Capitol Inclusion Conference on Students with Disabilities
“Including Students with Disabilities: What Works, What Doesn’t”
Sponsored by Jay Levy Feitshans, Emalyn Feitshans, The Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth (CTY), and The New Jersey Developmental Disabilities Council. Ilise L. Feitshans, JD & SCM (Coordinator)
Report Release Date: May 10, 2001. Revised January 10, 2003
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http://www.brightword.com/walking_backwards.pdf

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An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.

Benjamin Franklin