

How to Advocate for Your Child with a Disability in Your School District



Parents of children with disabilities want their children to have the support and services that will help them succeed.

How can parents make sure their child gets the help he/she needs and is legally entitled to?

KNOW YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS AND WHAT THEY ARE ENTITLED TO: A school district is required to provide a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE) to each qualified person with a disability who is in the school district's jurisdiction according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and it should be provided in the child's least restrictive environment (LRE). Please reference the following Web site for more information: www.drnj.org – Disability Rights New Jersey

UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS: Learn how your child's disability impacts the supports and/or modifications he/she needs to learn. Educate yourself about available supports, strategies, therapies, etc. that will help your child succeed in the classroom.

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD STUDY TEAM: (e.g. Case manager, teachers, therapists, social worker, etc.) They are the key to a successful, productive school year. When possible, offer to help in the classroom. You will learn a great deal about how the teacher/therapist(s) teach and how your child learns and interacts with other children. Parents should also have ongoing communication with their child's teacher/therapist(s) in a way that is suitable for both parties. Some examples are through weekly emails, a communication book, monthly meetings or scheduled phone calls.

KEEP RECORDS: Keep records of evaluations and reports from doctors and therapists regarding necessary recommendations for your child in a classroom setting. Make sure to give your case manager a copy of these reports. Have a notebook or file documenting any interaction with the school district, such as telephone calls or teacher meetings. It is helpful to put all communication in an email which would include the date, who made the call, meeting attendees, what was discussed, and most importantly any follow up required.

HELPFUL RESOURCES: Below are some helpful resources to help you advocate for your child's needs if you are not in agreement with your school district.

- <https://movingmindsff.org> – Moving Minds Forward Foundation
- <http://www.njcie.org> – New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education
- <http://www.wrightslaw.com> – Wrightslaw
- <https://spanadvocacy.org> – Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
- <https://www.state.nj.us/education/specialed/form/prise/prise.pdf> - Parental Rights in Special Education booklet
- <https://understood.org> – Personalized recommendations for you and your child
- Join your local school district's SEPAG (Special Education Parent Advisory Group)

KNOW WHEN YOU NEED TO ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD. You may need to work with an advocate or attorney specializing in special education if your child's IEP (Individualized Educational Program) is not appropriate or is not being followed by his/her school.

