

HOW TO ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT!

Parents of children with special needs want their children to have the support and services that will help them succeed. Public schools have the responsibility of educating large numbers of children with limited financial resources.

How can parents make sure their child gets the help he/she needs?

UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD'S NEEDS. Learn how your child's disability impacts their ability to learn. Educate yourself about available supports, strategies, therapies, etc. that will help your child succeed in the classroom.

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.

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

GET TO KNOW YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER/THERAPIST(S). He or she is the key to a successful, productive school year. When possible, offer to help in the classroom. You will learn a great deal about how she/he teaches 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.

HELFULL RESOURCES WHEN YOUR SCHOOL DISTRICT TELLS YOU NO: Below are some helpful resources to help you advocate for your child's needs if you are not in agreement with your school district.

www.njparentadvocates.org –NJ Parent Advocates

www.movingmindsff.org –Moving Minds Forward Foundation

www.spannj.org – Statewide Parent Advocacy Network

www.wrightslaw.com –Wrightslaw

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 school.

Developed by Family Faculty – March 2013

