

Spotlight on Parent Centers

For many parents new to the world of special education, figuring out what you know and don't know is half the battle. Federally-funded parent centers provide valuable support, information and resources free of charge to families. Many families find this support meets all their needs and are able to continue navigating the special education system with great success. You can find your parent center by visiting www.cadeworks.org and clicking on the map.

State Agency & Parent Center Information



Services Available to Families

Parent centers assist families with a number of services to include:

- Workshops and trainings for parents
- Explanation of parent rights
- Parent to parent mentoring
- IEP meeting preparation
- Connecting with parent support groups
- Sharing resources available in the community

Additional Resources

The Center for Parent Information and Resources
www.parentcenterhub.org

CADRE for Families
www.cadeworks.org/for-families

CADRE believes in ...

Collaborative methods to resolving disagreements between families and schools and encourages **Facilitative Advocacy**, a principled practice combining:

- highly effective communication strategies
- facilitative behaviors that encourage participation in discussions
- interest-based problem-solving skills
- collaborative approaches

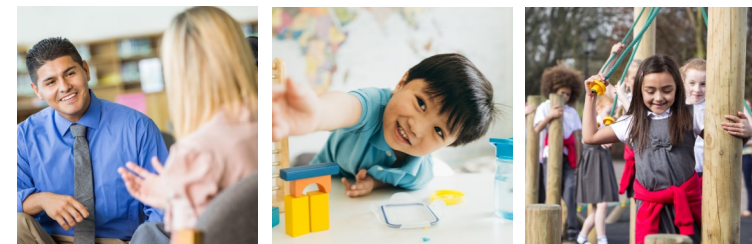
The National Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE)

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Office of Special Education Programs
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Educational Advocates: A Guide for Parents

An educational advocate, also known as a parent advocate, child advocate, student advocate, or independent advocate, assists parents of students with disabilities in navigating the complex world of special education. For a fee, professional advocates provide information, guidance and support throughout the IEP process to encourage decisions that meet the needs of the student.

This guide will assist parents in:

- ♦ Asking interview questions that will help get an understanding of an advocate's approach to providing support
- ♦ Connecting with parent centers in your state
- ♦ Connecting with additional sources of information about advocacy



Supporting the prevention and resolution of disputes through partnership and collaboration



ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

What special education training do you have? Experience?

Advocating for students with disabilities requires a firm understanding of federal and state regulations and requirements. Experienced advocates can provide examples of completed courses or trainings they have attended. They should also be able to tell you how they stay current on changes in the field. Some may have additional training in conflict resolution, meeting facilitation, or mediation. Many parent advocates are also parents of a student with a disability. An advocate that has experience with your child's school and positive relationships with district staff can be a huge asset and will assist you in working collaboratively to meet your child's needs.

How do you view the parent/advocate relationship?

The advocate should never place their opinions and desires ahead of the parents. An advocate's role should be to provide support and guidance to the parent and provide information about policy and procedure. The advocate should encourage the parent to speak up for themselves and help them find the best way to voice their concerns. At no time should the advocate push a parent to do anything that is not in the best interest of their child.

How do you approach disagreement with parents? With school personnel?

This question can tell you a lot about the advocate's style when faced with conflict. Planning for a student with a disability is a challenging task. There are always going to be times when team members disagree. This is part of the process, especially considering how much everyone on the team cares about the student. Research shows that when families and educators work collaboratively to resolve disagreements, the outcomes are more mutually satisfying and benefit the child long term. Adversarial approaches to disagreement lead to difficult meetings and broken relationships.



How will you help me/us prepare for meetings?

IEP meeting preparation is probably the most important role an advocate can fill. In order to help you prepare for an upcoming meeting, your advocate should review your child's educational records. The advocate should listen to your concerns and help you generate ideas and proposals to suggest to the IEP team. Finally, the advocate should help prepare you for areas of potential conflict and give you strategies to help you through any difficult conversations.



What do you charge for your services and how are fees determined?

It is important to get a clear understanding of fees and charges upfront. The advocate should be able to provide you with an explanation of their fees and how they are determined. Be wary of advocates that require payment in cash only and do not provide you with a detailed invoice and receipt.

Do you have references I can speak to?

Speaking with former clients and other community members who have experience with the advocate gives you a good understanding of how they have conducted themselves with other families. Many advocates have websites, Facebook pages, or other online resources you can visit to get more information.

WARNING SIGNS

Be careful with advocates who:

- Promise specific results
- Shut down home/school communication
- Make threats, name call, or insult
- Encourage parents to withhold information
- Focus discussion on him/herself

