

NYC Task Force For Quality Inclusive Schooling
“Creating an Inclusive Environment for All Students”
June 8, 2006

Stepping into Educational Advocacy: Parents Lead the Way

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Presenter’s Background:

Catherine McHugh has a Master’s Degree in Special Education and has worked as a teacher, school social worker, and rehabilitation counselor. Currently she is employed as the director of educational advocacy training at the NYS Commission on Quality of Care and has been working there for the past 25 years.

Workshop Objectives:

- Provide introduction to the parent’s role in the special education process.

- Provide parents with an understanding of the special education regulations to communicate with their school district.
- Explain how to create documentation, which supports the services the child needs.
- Explain how parents can take what they know about their own child and convert it into the IEP

Topical Outline:

- Regulation 200.4: The Law of Special Education- The Five Procedures
- Parents taking lead role in the evaluation process
- The process of translating the evaluation into the IEP

Content of Session:

Ms. McHugh spoke about the parents' key role in attaining educational rights for their children with special needs. She emphasized that parents must use the law to advocate for their children with special needs. Teaching directly from the law, she explained that regulation 200.4, details special education. The law notes five procedures, or steps, to obtain special education: referral, evaluation, IEP development, placement, and review. After a child, who is suspected to have a disability is referred to special education; he/she must be evaluated.

The presenter discussed that evaluation is the most crucial procedure in the special education process. Evaluation forms the foundation for which plans for the child will be built. A multidisciplinary team using different perspectives and expertise does the evaluation. The third procedure is IEP development, which includes a discussion of the multidisciplinary team evaluation as well as developing a document based on the

evaluation that states the child's current level of functioning. The fourth procedure is placement, in which the IEP is put into place. The educational program is carried out as specified in the IEP. Lastly, the fifth procedure is review, where the IEP is reviewed and rewritten based on the child's progress.

The presenter reminded parents of their role in the process, and clarified that parents have the right for their input throughout this process. She stated that often parents feel that they are not part of the evaluation process; however in the law they are mentioned first on the evaluation team. The parents must be fully informed of the proposed evaluation and are allowed to ask about the evaluator's background. She maintained that if the parents are able to ask the right questions they could utilize their key role on the evaluation team. This includes making sure that evaluators are using the appropriate tools to evaluate their child. For example, a language based test would not suffice for a child with a language processing disability. A parent must make sure that at least one person on the evaluation team has an educational background, which allows him/her to understand the disability.

The presenter insisted that it is imperative that the parent has the child assessed for academic achievement, emotional status, vocational skills, and communicative skills. She established that parents should recognize that these skills must be evaluated by law. The presenter affirmed that parents know their child the best and the parents' understanding of their child's ability are regarded greatly in the evaluation process. Upon obtaining the results of the evaluation of the child's skills, parents should promote building on the child's strengths and skills as well as development of skills that the child is lacking. These should be used in the development of goals in the IEP.

Relevance to Inclusion:

The law mandates that all children be educated in the least restrictive environment. Now parents can use the law to advocate for their child to be in the least restrictive environment, which means the regular education classroom. Without parental understanding of the law, schools are slow to keep children in inclusive settings and instead children with special needs are grouped together. When parents know how to get the evaluations they need, and use their parental input in evaluation, they can better help their children's placement in inclusive classrooms.

Goals, Concerns and Issues for Future Work:

The presenter commented that some schools are willing to have inclusive classrooms but are neglecting to put the support for their children to thrive. "Yes - the door is open, but now we need to convince the schools for support to make it a successful experience"