



Access Center for Education

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Interested In Advocacy?

As ACE enters our peak advocacy season, we are looking for support. Since we are expanding our program offerings, ACE is looking for a qualified individual to assist in providing sliding-scale advocacy services to parents of special education students in Orange County.

Irvine, CA 92604

PHONE:
(949) 370-1186

FAX:
(949) 262-0711

E-MAIL:
sadtoglad@mac.com

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.sad-to-glad.org
www.ace-ca.org

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IEP Game Training and Outreach

Access Center for Education has just completed its first year of implementing our new IEP Game training. Our first training session was at the International Learning Disabilities Association Conference on March 2, 2005 where we trained approximately 12 parents and 9 professionals. In October of 2005, we trained 8 parents and 18 professionals from around the country at the first national Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education's IEP Facilitation Conference. And, on February 22, 2006, we trained 15 parents and 6 district personnel at the Yorba Linda CAC meeting.

This means that ACE has experienced significant program growth in the past year. Prior to implementing the IEP Game training method, ACE offered no training and solely provided advocacy and tutoring. By the end of

our second fiscal year, ACE's total community contact consisted of providing advocacy support to 50 parents of special needs students. Today, we are half way through our third fiscal year and ACE has trained 35 parents and 33 professionals. This means that we have tripled our community exposure and doubled our parent empowerment efforts through training, while holding steady with advocacy.

Who else is using the IEP Game Interactive Training?

The Connecticut Learning Disabilities Association is now using the IEP Game interactive training method to train their peer advocates how to analyze special education cases.

OC Joint Powers Alliance Meetings

Executive Director, Brenda Rogers, has been attending the Orange County Joint Powers Alliance meetings. For those unfamiliar with the JPA, Orange County created a new county wide special education committee comprised of school district special education directors and Orange County SELPA directors. This JPA is funded by each individual school district. Each district contributes 50 cents per special education child, per year, into a super fund held by the JPA. Three main purposes of the JPA are to:

1. create alternative dispute resolution procedures in special education, as an attempt to reduce litigation.
2. help fund individual school districts in their due process hearings with parents. JPA funds are allocated to individual districts to assist them in fighting strategically chosen legal cases with parents. Funds are allocated on case-by-case basis during closed session JPA meetings. These meetings include attorneys employed by the districts. The JPA chooses legal cases based on the significance of the issues to be argued in the due process hearing. Significant issues are those that can potentially be fought all the way to the state or federal Supreme Court level in order to produce legal change in special education through Supreme Court decisions. The JPA emphasis is on key issues of importance to school districts.
3. fund legislative action for district identified

issues of importance. This means the JPA is funding the recruitment of legislators to sponsor bills that govern special education.

Why is the JPA important?

1. Compared with the number of parents of special education students, there is very little parent involvement in the decision-making process and priorities of the JPA.
2. Considering that the money contributed from each district comes from 100 percent of the children parent's send to school, the JPA has allocated approximately 2.5 % of their annual budget to parent training for alternative dispute resolution. This means that 97.5 % of the JPA budget is spent on:

- a) training district personnel how to create and administer alternative dispute resolution procedures, while parents are left clueless about another special education process
- b) litigation against parents in hopes of changing special education law through Supreme Court decisions
- c) recruiting legislators to sponsor bills on issues of importance to the JPA, with relatively little parent input.

More parents need to get involved and come to JPA meetings – it's about our children!

Advocacy Tips



"The IEP Game levels the language field in IEP meetings by providing a vocabulary that translates the professional jargon of specialists into accessible concepts parents can understand."

Save \$10 on Wrightslaw's From Emotions to Advocacy II

ACE would like to give you a copy of *From Emotions to Advocacy II*, for your donation of \$16.

This book teaches you how to transform your child's special education documents into an organized exhibit package, just like attorneys do in case preparation.

You will also learn how to understand the scores presented to parents in school district psychoeducational evaluation reports.

To become a savvy advocate, read this book and then participate in ACE's IEP Game interactive training boot camp.

Social Psychological research shows that individual decision-making is greatly impacted when a person is within a group setting. IEP meetings are group settings where an individual parent must make important decisions for a child. There are two main social psychological dynamics a parent confronts in an IEP meeting: (a) Group Conformity and (b) Conformity to Authority. Research finds that an individual has a strong tendency to agree with what he/she knows is wrong in order to stay in the good graces of a group. In other words, most people have a stronger desire to be liked than to be right. Therefore, in group settings, an individual is prone to agree with the group even though secretly disagreeing because the individual wants to be liked. Research also finds that individuals are compliant with authority. Classic Social Psychological research illustrates that most individuals will cause pain to a stranger if asked to do so by an authority figure.

IEP meetings are group decision-making situations in which parents are subject to the tensions between the desire to be liked and the desire to be right while faced with an entire group full of school authority figures. This means the social psychological deck is stacked against parents in IEP meetings.

No wonder research in special education finds that "parents are passive recipients of

professional advice" in IEP meetings. Here are some strategies for confronting social psychological dynamics impacting parent decision-making and participation in IEP meetings:

1. **Never go to an IEP meeting alone.** Research shows that individuals are half as likely to agree with what they know to be wrong to stay in the good graces of the group when the individual is not alone, or anonymous, in a group. Bring a friend, relative or advocate.
2. **Prepare a "parent concerns" letter before attending an IEP meeting.** A parent concerns letter should be written at home, in a pressure free environment. The letter should document the parent's observations and other evidence supporting any issues a parent may be concerned about regarding his/her child's education. Distribute the letter to the IEP team as a record of concerns.
3. **Learn how to create legally and educationally sound "parent concerns" letters that effectively communicate and validate parent concerns and requests.** Participate in an interactive IEP Game training session and learn how to identify the evidence in a child's special education file that justifies a parent's requests for appropriate accommodations, modifications, placements and/ or services.

IDEA 2004



Special education research explains that legal statutes entitle individuals to protection under the law but "...ensuring that protection is up to the person...[for example,] 'if you buy a toaster that doesn't work as it's supposed to, you take action...You don't wring your hands and wait for the company to find you. It's the same with IDEA...The full implementation of the law depends on parents..." Maya Kalyanpur et al (2000).

Did you know that the IDEA specifically targets post-school outcomes as an important purpose of special education? For example,

20 U.S.C. § 1400 (d) describes the major purpose of the IDEA as:

"The purposes of this chapter are -

(1)(A) to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living;

(B) to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected"