



Guest contributor Michelle Sturdevant-Case, the DD Ombuds Liaison & Stakeholder Engagement Program Manager at DDA, shares information about a new Family Advisory Council:

In 2016 DDA created a Self-Advocates Advisory Council. The group has representation from self-advocates around the state. The Self-Advocates Advisory Council has taken an active role in reviewing draft policies, procedures, practices, and communications. Their feedback has made a meaningful impact and improved the quality of DDA services.

In the spring of 2022, a group of dedicated family advocates asked DDA to create a Family Advisory Council. This request has been enthusiastically embraced as a natural outgrowth of the administration's vision and mission.

We recognize that much of what DDA is, and the models for services and supports available in this state came from the hard work and dedication of family members. DDA honors that history and recognizes that family members and self-advocates are at the heart of the history and future of DDA services. We are invested in creating a venue to ensure families are also offering their perspective and insight as DDA staff draft policies, procedures, practices, and communications. The mission of the Family Advisory Council differs from the current parent and family networks offering advocacy and support around the state. Parent and family networks offer an invaluable service in advocating for changes to current programs and services or the inclusion of new programs and services. This advocacy has a powerful impact on the overall direction of DDA services.

The Family Advisory Council will be collaborating at a more micro level with DDA staff. Family Council members will meet monthly to provide feedback to staff on programs, policies, and procedures of DDA as they are being developed to ensure they reflect the experiences, wisdom, and creativity of family members of DDA eligible clients. Family Advisory Council members will have opportunities to provide suggestions on how to improve the quality and effectiveness of DDA programs. DDA staff will also seek input from the Family Advisory Council to ensure robust, transparent, accessible communication with DDA eligible individuals and their families.

[Click here to read more](#) about the Family Advisory Council and Michelle Sturdevant-Case at michelle.sturdevant-case@dshs.wa.gov or 360.480.0718 with any questions.

New Resource for Families!

Systems are working together to support students with intellectual and developmental disabilities transition from school to adult life in a more seamless manner. Four videos have been created by DSHS' Developmental Disabilities Administration to give students and their families direction during four phases of their life, the three years of transition in the school system (ages 18 to 21) and the year after. Visit <https://informingfamilies.org/schooltransitionphases/> to learn more!



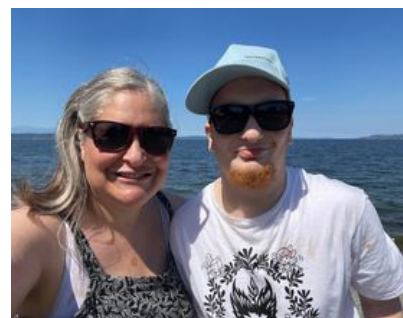


A Guide to Learning Advocacy in Special Education

Written by Rachel Nemhauser, The Arc of King County

I am the parent of an autistic teen who has been receiving special education services for over 15 years, and it's fair to say that in that time I've learned a thing or two about how the system works. I didn't start off knowing much, and in fact I spent the first seven or eight years doing my very best to advocate and engage while having very little idea how to do either one. The experience was often painful and frustrating because I wanted so much to ensure my son got what he needed and was entitled to at school, but I just didn't know how.

As time went on, I gradually began to learn and understand more, especially through my work creating and overseeing the IEP Parent Partner program at The Arc of King County, and my experience improved. The more I learned about the basics of special education the more effective my advocacy efforts became, and the less frustrated I felt. It was so empowering to know my son's rights, and to finally feel like an equal member of the IEP team.



Rachel with her son, Nate.

It is my fervent wish that all parents of special education students receive the information and training they need to be the effective advocates they want to be. Special education is complex, confusing, and often overwhelming, but some basic information can make a significant difference. With that in mind, I've compiled a list of 10 fundamental principles I think are helpful for all parents to understand.

Ten Tips for Advocating for Your Child

1 Understand the legal basics: There are two federal laws that govern special education services. The [Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act](#) (IDEA) guarantees a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for eligible children and youth with disabilities. [Section 504](#) of the Rehabilitation Act allows for reasonable accommodations as necessary for each student for them to be able to access their education. The laws are complicated and dense, but if you understand this it will take you a long way in your advocacy: A child with a disability has a right to an education with his general education peers, and is entitled to make substantial progress in his or her learning. Challenging and aggressive behavior, complex medical needs, or unique learning requirements do not diminish those rights in any way.

2 Know what an IEP is: An [Individualized Education Plan](#) (IEP) is a legally binding contract that lays out the special education instruction, supports, and services a student needs to thrive in school. A parent is an equal member of the IEP team who has a right to request a meeting with the IEP team at any time.

3 Know the difference between accommodations and modifications: Modifications appear in an IEP. They are changes to the general education curriculum, and change WHAT is being taught or learned. Accommodations appear on a [504 Plan or an IEP](#) and change HOW the student learns or shares their knowledge.

4 Understand evaluations and the IEP process. In order to qualify for special education services, a student needs to be [evaluated](#) and found to be significantly behind their general education peers in one or more areas. The IEP team uses the evaluation results to create the student's IEP, and uses data throughout the year to check progress on goals. The IEP is rewritten and revised at least once every year, and the student is re-evaluated at least every three years.

5 Learn to speak the language of data. All special education decisions should be [data driven](#), including changes to the IEP, level of support provided, and student placement. Parents should expect to receive quarterly IEP progress reports, and can use them to track their student's progress on goals. When asking for a change or sharing a concern, focus on what the student needs to meet their IEP goals.

6 Know how and when to discuss placement. Inclusive education is a legally supported, evidence-based best practice that shows improved outcomes for ALL students. IDEA requires students to be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE), and to the maximum extent appropriate, school districts must educate students with I/DD in the regular classroom with typical peers, unless the IEP requires another arrangement. Most important when you're discussing placement with the team, keep in mind that educational needs drive IEP goals and IEP goals drive placement.

7 Be a behavior detective: Behavior is communication. Consider a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) to learn more about the behaviors interfering with your student's learning. Once an FBA has been completed, a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) and behavior goals may be added to the IEP. Remember, schools are required to teach our children, regardless of challenging behaviors, and to keep all children safe while doing so. Being sent home or forced to learn in isolation due to challenging behaviors is not acceptable. If this happens, an IEP meeting and a revision/creation of a behavior plan may be in order.

8 Follow the hierarchy. When advocating for your child, it's helpful to know who your student's IEP Case Manager is, and who the decision makers are. If you aren't getting the answers you need, work your way up the ladder: Teacher/Special Ed Teacher/Therapist > School Principal > Special Education Administrator Director of Special Education > Superintendent. Respect the hierarchy and don't jump ahead!

9 Know your options for conflict resolution: Washington State's Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) gives us multiple options to resolve disputes with the IEP team. You can read about them here: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/special-education/dispute-resolution>

10 Be thoughtful when working with the IEP team. Consider balancing relationship vs. advocacy. Can you be friends with the IEP team members? Should you be? There are no right answers here, but knowing how important a trusting and collaborative relationship with the team can be, it's worth thinking about how you want to show up to those meetings and interactions.

For additional information about special education:

- Wrights Law (www.wrightslaw.com) Extensive parent-friendly information about special education law and advocacy nation-wide.
- US Department of Education IDEA website (<http://idea.ed.gov/>) The federal government's website about the IDEA Act that dictates special ed law. Has extensive information about each area addressed in IDEA.
- Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Special Ed Parent Liaison (<http://www.k12.wa.us/specialed/families/assistance.aspx>) Available as a resource to parents in non-legal special education matters to answer questions, provide info/referral, and assist parents to understand the complaint process. Does not advocate on behalf on any one party.
- WA State Governor's Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO) (www.oeo.wa.gov) OEO can serve as a neutral third party between families in public schools and may attend IEP meetings on occasion.

I also encourage you to reach out to the IEP Parent Partner program at The Arc of King County! We're available to answer questions, provide support, or even match you with other parents who have been through similar experiences! You can reach us in English at ask@arcofkingcounty.org or 206-829-7053, or in Spanish at preguntas@arcofkingcounty.org or 206-829-7030. This stuff can be hard, and you should not have to do it alone. Support is available, so please reach out if you need us.

FREE BENEFITS AND HOUSING REVIEW!

Thanks to a generous grant from the Dan Thompson Memorial Fund and contracted through the Developmental Disabilities Administration, Partners4Housing is offering a FREE Benefits and Housing Review to individuals with IDD 17 and older in Washington state. Sign up at <https://signup.partners4housing.com/promo/>



State of Washington
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Developmental Disabilities Administration
P.O. Box 45310
Olympia, WA 98504-5310

Fall Activities and Safety Resources

Holiday Resources for families

The holiday season is right around the corner! Many local organizations and communities host various events from Halloween to New Years! Informing Families has created a webpage to showcase inclusive events throughout the state. This page will also share events that are created specifically to be sensory-friendly. Have an event you would like listed or shared? Email us at informingfamilies@ddc.wa.gov!

Preparing for Winter

The winter season means holidays, family events, and more. It also includes winter storms and extreme weather. It is important to begin preparing the winter weather early! Check out the resource below to begin planning:

- **Preparing for Winter Weather:** <https://informingfamilies.org/preparing-for-winter-weather/>
- **Resources for Emergency Preparedness:** <https://www.ready.gov/>
- **Protecting Yourself from Winter Weather:** <https://www.ready.gov/winter-weather>



Get instant updates from the Developmental Disabilities Administration:

- News and Announcements
- Provider Information
- Resources
- Training and Events!

How to Sign Up:

- Text "DDA" to 468311
- Visit <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/dda> and then scroll down the home page and click on the GovDelivery envelope and sign up link for news and information.