

Advocacy

Advocating for Special Education



Students who have special needs may require additional services, supports and therapies during school. Some students may need an extended day or extended year program. Others may need a person at all times to assist them at their programs. These supports must be discussed and agreed upon by the team at the student's IEP meeting (Individualized Education Program). If all team members agree, these supports should be written into the IEP.

IEP team meetings can be overwhelming and confusing. Clear communication with your school is an important first step. It is helpful to send a written letter with your concerns, even when you are not entirely sure of all your options. As a parent, you know your child's learning style and other needs best. You are an integral part of the educational team. It is helpful to have a friend or relative come to the meeting with you. That person can listen carefully and take notes so that you will be able to speak without worrying about a record of what was talked about and agreed upon.

At times, all members of the team may not agree on the services to be included in the IEP. In this case, parents may need to consult with specialists and professionals for advice. Advocates, tutors, educational consultants, mental health consultants, therapists and other professionals can help parents navigate the special education system in Massachusetts.

Parents can also find support through the Federation for Children with Special Needs. The Federation manages several projects that help families. There is a call center that provides information about special education laws and procedures, advocate referrals, community resources, disability information and related matters.

Family TIES of Massachusetts provides information, referral, and parent to parent support for families of children with special health needs or disability and their professional partners. We also provide information about Early Intervention (EI) and maintain a complete list of EI Programs in Massachusetts.

The information provided on the back page of this sheet is not a complete list of the resources that may be available. For information about community based programs, resources and local support groups, please call your Regional Coordinator or our toll-free line 800-905-TIES (8437).

We publish an annual *Directory of Resources for Families of Children and Youth with Special Needs*. The Directory is always listed as the first place to look for resources on our Topic Sheets!

Call us if you would like a copy of the directory mailed to you. A pdf version of the directory is available to download on our website www.massfamilyties.org. You can also find the phone number for the Family TIES Regional Coordinator for your area on our website.



Information and Resources

Family TIES Resource Directory:

- Under *Advocacy*

Federation for Children with Special Needs:

- Parent Training Information Center (PTIC)
<https://fcsn.org/ptic/>

Statewide:

- Mass Advocates for Children
<https://massadvocates.org/>
- Special Needs Advocacy Network (SPAN)
<http://spanmass.org/index.html>

National:

- Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights (PACER)
<https://www.pacer.org/>
- Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA)
<https://www.copaa.org/default.aspx>