



Advocating for Your Child

Being an advocate means to speak, write, or act on behalf of another person who may not have the knowledge, experience, or skills to advocate for themselves. Parents and legal guardians are the main advocates for their children. While parents may get help from other agencies, educators, private advocates, or professionals, they remain the central support for their children.

Things You Can Do as an Advocate for Your Child

- 1 Learn as much as possible about special education and your child's rights.
- 2 Keep an organized file of documents. Keep notes and copies of everything (e.g., individualized education programs, progress reports, report cards, notes/emails from teachers and school staff). Sort information by date or topic so you can find documents easily. Ask for a summary or notes from the meetings you attend.
- 3 Be prepared for meetings. Take important paperwork such as the individualized education program (IEP). Prioritize what is important to accomplish at the meeting.
- 4 Build strong relationships with your IEP team and school staff. Be polite and stay calm even if it is sometimes challenging. The more you can strengthen these relationships and come to agreement on issues, the more likely your child will benefit.
- 5 Assume the best. Most educators want the best for your child. If you cannot reach agreement, continue to learn and seek assistance.
- 6 Reference the [Michigan Alliance for Families website](#) which provides many free webinars, learning opportunities, and individual parent mentor services to help you enhance your advocacy skills.

April 2020



Strengthening Parent Advocacy

Parents often advocate for their own child. Sometimes parents may need help from someone who specializes in assisting parents with educational questions or concerns. Using helpful resources can aid in learning more about the educational process and building overall knowledge and advocacy skills. If assistance is needed, there are local resources to help.

Michigan Alliance for Families

The Michigan Alliance for Families has parent mentors in your area. Go to the [Michigan Alliance for Families staff directory](#) to find a parent mentor in your region and speak with them about your questions or concerns.

You may be able to have your concern resolved with the information and guidance they provide. If it cannot be solved, they can provide information on options available to you.

Office of Special Education Information Line

If you have a question about special education, contact the the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education (OSE) information line at 1-888-320-8384 or e-mail at mde-ose@michigan.gov.

Special Education Mediation Services (SEMS)

The [Special Education Mediation Services \(SEMS\)](#) provides free resources promoting collaboration, including mediation services, facilitation of meetings, and training to help parents learn how to work through concerns with schools.

Resources



[Michigan Alliance for Families: Parent Advocacy](#)

- [Center for Parent Information & Resources: Advocating for Your Child](#)