



Selecting an Educational Advocate

Advocates*

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Role of advocate

“Depending on a non-legal advocate’s knowledge and skill level, they represent a child’s best interests, help parents prepare for, and accompany parents to a variety of public school meetings, including IEP, Section 504, Student Study Team (SST), Manifestation Determination IEP, and Informal Dispute Resolution (IDR) meetings, and Expulsion Hearings. They utilize a multi-modal approach to learn about the student and make educational recommendations. Advocates review school records, Special Education records, 504 plans, and private assessments and evaluations; they consult with specialists who are knowledgeable about the child and they observe the child in the classroom; they inform parents/guardians of their educational rights.

We empower and educate parents; we help them formulate appropriate IEP goals, accommodations, modifications, behavior plans, and identify appropriate related services such as Speech and Language, Occupational Therapy, Assistive Technology, Adaptive PE, and aide support as appropriate. We provide expert opinions in exploring school placement options ranging from inclusion, learning centers, special day classes, non-public school, and residential treatment programs as appropriate. We draft dispute resolution proposals, state Department of Education complaints, letters, and written requests to district personnel and administration.

We assess each student’s case, and when appropriate, we assist parents in seeking reimbursement for outside services and school placement for past, present, and future educational expenses. When appropriate, we refer our clients to an attorney who specializes in Special Education law.”

From Psychology Today article [here](#)

Other helpful articles about the role of an advocate can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

My top 3 concerns / challenges to share with a potential advocate

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Questions to ask when considering hiring an advocate

Background / Education / Training

- What is your background (education, training) and how did you get into education advocacy?
- Have you been certified by COPPA (Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates) or another group?
- How do you stay current in the field? (updated training and education through workshops, conferences, and continuing education programs, etc)

Role of Advocate

- How do you see your role as a school advocate?
- How do you view the parent/advocate relationship?
- In what situations do you feel you are most helpful to parents?
- How do you approach a disagreement with parents? With school personnel?

Experience

- What is your experience advocating for the needs of dyslexic students in public schools?
- How many families have you worked within our district? Which campuses? Other districts?
- How would you describe your relationships with the school personnel in your cases?
- Do you have experience in situations similar to mine?
- What type of experience do you have with district complaints, due process, mediation, etc?

Needs of a Dyslexic Student

- What do you view as the pros/cons for a dyslexic student with a 504 plan (general education) vs. an Individualized Education Plan (IEP, in special education)?
- Have you helped any families secure special education services for a dyslexic student that has resulted in additional services in dyslexia intervention beyond the standard district intervention (ie. Take Flight)?
- Can you review my student's evaluation and help the school write measurable IEP goals based on the evaluation and my student's present levels of performance?

Your Situation

- How do you believe my situation should be handled?
- What will your role be in my situation?
- What is the estimated time frame for the scope of the work we have discussed?

Working Relationship

- How will I be expected to assist and work with you?
- How will you help me/us prepare for meetings?
- What do you charge for your services and how are fees determined?

Referrals

- Can you provide referrals?

** Decoding Dyslexia does not endorse individual advocates. We share names that others have shared with us and encourage members to interview multiple individuals and make their own decision about the role an advocate may or may not play in their school experience.*