



# THE EDUCATION ADVOCATE

*Ensuring that all children with disabilities receive quality educational services*

A Newsletter of The Department of Education Advocacy

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The last decision of the IEP development process, and at times the most overwhelming, is the placement determination. In other words, **where will your child receive his/her special education and related services?** There is a great deal of evidence that states the advantages and benefits of educating students in their neighborhood schools alongside their typically developing peers. However, you may find that an in-district placement is not appropriate for your child for a variety of reasons (e.g. lack of accommodations and supports by the public school district, sense of safety for your child, etc). With that said, you might find yourself looking into an out-of-district setting for your child. If you and your Child Study Team are considering an out-of-district placement, there are several factors you may want to consider and discuss:

## 1. OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTEGRATION WITH NON-DISABLED STUDENTS

When students are placed in out-of-district settings, whether public or private, there can be limited opportunities to be integrated with non-disabled peers. Parents and districts should consider this issue and talk about creative ways that the student can be integrated either during the school day or after school. There is actually a section of the IEP where the team needs to include a statement regarding participation in extracurricular and non-academic activities for students in out-of-district placements and delineate the means to achieve such participation, including, if necessary, returning the student to the district in order to facilitate their participation (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.7(e)17).

Furthermore, when considering an out of district placement, it is best to not think of it as "permanent". Often times, students go to a separate setting for a short time and then return to district. Therefore, IEP teams should develop a plan for transitioning students back to their home school. The law states, "For those students in a separate setting, the IEP team shall, on an annual basis, consider activities necessary to transition the student to a less restrictive placement." (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-3.7(k)). Since most support services, modifications and accommodations are portable, districts can work with parents and the administration to put the needed supports in place and plan for the smooth transition of the child back to the neighborhood school if/when appropriate.

*TIP: Ask about the specific strategies that can be implemented to return your child back to the neighborhood school in your district if/when appropriate.*

*TIP: Ask about the possibilities that exist to provide inclusive opportunities for your child in school or in the community.*

*TIP: Ask your local school district for information on how your child can take part in extra-curricular and other non-academic activities in the public school (e.g., belonging to an after-school club).*

## 2. EXPOSURE TO CORE CURRICULUM

The Federal law requires that school districts provide students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum; this can be achieved by aligning IEP goals and objectives to New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards. To view the Core Curriculum Content Standards, please visit:  
<http://www.nj.gov/education/aps/cccs/>

The type and degree of supports, all of which are portable, will clearly depend on the individual student. In addition, it is necessary to ensure that the instructional materials and resources being used to educate the child are age-appropriate. For example, if a 15-year-old student is reading independently at a 3rd grade level, he/she should be provided with appropriate reading materials for a 15-year-old, but readable at the student's independent reading level, i.e., 3rd grade.

Just remember, with appropriate supplementary supports and services, such as curricular or instructional modifications or specialized instructional strategies, individual instruction, assistive technology devices and services, support from a paraprofessional, related services, integrated therapies, consultation services and in-class resource programs, all students can meet their goals and make noticeable gains!

*TIP: Ask about the State's Core Curriculum Content Standards and ask to see samples of the curriculum for your child's grade. Make sure that the curriculum and work-related activities are age-appropriate and comparable to that which your child would receive in his or her neighborhood school.*

## 3. TEACHER CREDENTIALS

IDEA and No Child Left Behind require that all public elementary and secondary special education teachers be "*highly qualified*". Special education teachers who are responsible for direct content instruction in one or more core academic content areas in departmentalized middle and/or secondary schools must pass the Praxis II Content Knowledge Test(s) for the content area(s) and level(s) they are teaching. It is important to keep in mind that teachers hired by private elementary and secondary schools may not have to meet these requirements.

*TIP: Ask the school what type of certification their teachers hold and if the teachers would meet the definition of 'highly qualified teacher' in accordance with federal law.*

## 4. EFFECTIVE HOME-SCHOOL COLLABORATION

When families and schools communicate, there are better outcomes for kids and the relationship between the family and school is strengthened. Therefore, it is vital that families be given the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to their child's education and receive feedback and updates from the school. It can seem easier to develop a relationship with a child's teacher when the family lives minutes away from the school and can attend school functions or simply pop into the school when there is a concern. Therefore, when a child's school is further away, it becomes increasingly important for families and school personnel to delineate the means by which communication will occur.

*TIP: Ask the school how they foster home-school collaboration. How do they provide feedback? Are there opportunities to get regular and consistent feedback?*

*TIP: Be sure your child's name is on the mailing list for the public school to ensure you receive communication regarding any school events, meetings and trainings for students and/or parents that are held in the local school community.*

## 5. TRANSITIONING TO ADULTHOOD

The transition from school to adult life is one of the most important parts of a child's education. A solid and effective transition plan should include instruction that provides opportunities to sample and learn a variety of work skills in the community. Many private schools provide these opportunities with businesses in the school community, which may be quite a distance from the student's residence. This can present difficulties when students graduate and return to their home community. Therefore, it is important for families to begin developing relationships with potential employers in their community. Forming relationships with the local markets, shops, the library, etc in one's community can be helpful. By beginning this process in the student's home community, it will be more feasible to create a 'seamless' transition post graduation.

*TIP: Ask the school if they provide the student with transition skills in the student's home community. Consider the issue of transportation to a job once the student graduates.*

### Health Education for Students in Special Education

The Arc of New Jersey's Department of Education Advocacy is currently looking into the quality and effectiveness of health education (including sex education) for New Jersey's students with disabilities. *We will be looking for your feedback, so stay tuned for a survey to come!*

### IEP Survey

Disability Rights New Jersey, formerly New Jersey Protection and Advocacy, is conducting a parent survey to learn more information about what parents experience during the IEP process. Please take a few moments to complete the on-line survey at [http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=VH\\_2fCs4hGNtDoE\\_2f9lv7Hr0A\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=VH_2fCs4hGNtDoE_2f9lv7Hr0A_3d_3d).