

Education

POSITION STATEMENT ON FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Summary of the Issue:

Students learn best when their families and educators work together. Families play an important role in the process of eligibility determination, Individualized Education Program development, and placement decisions. Families are children's first and best advocates, and bring special knowledge and expertise to the table which should be encouraged and respected. However, many families need assistance to become successful and effective participants in the process.

Background:

Family participation in every phase of Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act (IDEIA) services is mandated. To be effective advocates, families must learn to navigate in a complex, confusing and seemingly contradictory maze of laws, rules and practices. While more resources are now spent assisting parents and guardians to be effective advocates, these are still significantly less than those committed to legal fees or school administrator training.

The special education system continues to depend too much on complaints of parents /guardians to assure compliance with IDEIA. As a result, students with disabilities and their families must use considerable energy advocating for proper implementation of their IEP. Students with parents skilled in advocacy often seem to have better experiences in school. Students who have parents who can not or will not advocate for them, too frequently appear to receive special education services that do not really meet their individual needs.

While the use of mediation as an alternative dispute resolution tool is on the rise, conflicts around special education too often produce "winners and losers." Bad feelings on the part of schools and families too frequently create a climate of mutual suspicion and hostility which can make collaboration difficult.

While collaboration is essential around individual children, it is also important that families play a role in the development of special education policy and practice. Parents are important partners on planning groups, legislative task forces, and local, state and federal committees that make decisions about funding priorities and program structure.

Council Position:

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities believes that children with disabilities are more successful in school when their parents are actively involved in their education and when parents and educators work in partnership. When conflicts arise between families and schools, all parties must focus on the educational needs of the child as they seek resolution

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities believes that services are best when those who are directly involved participate in the design and evaluation of those services. Youth with disabilities, parents / families must be represented on all local, state, and federal bodies which make decisions about special education funding priorities and program structure.

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities believes that parents / families must have opportunities to increase their knowledge and skills to participate effectively in all levels of special education. Workshops about special education law and practice are most successful when parents and educators participate in a common training forum.

Future Activities:

- Participate in the State Advisory Council for Special Education.
- Collaborate with the Oregon Parent Training and Information Center, the Oregon Advocacy Center and others to provide information and training to parents /families.