You Can Do It!!

Parents as Advocates
A Guide for Parents & Other Professionals

COMPILED BY:
Syracuse City School District
Parent Partnership Network

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What Parents Need to do to Advocate for their Children in the System

(1) Know your child

(2) Know the culture of the District

(3) Know “Who’s Who” in the District

(4) Enter with a positive attitude

(5) Save the “big guns” for most advantageous times

(6) Know your rights as a parent to be involved

(7) Know the services that should be available

(8) Remember—Anger Is Not An Effective Advocacy Tool!!

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Effective Parent–Teacher Relationships

(1) Crucial to *Work Together*

(2) Focus on child and developing *Positive Communication Techniques*

(3) Both need to build *Trust and Respect*

(4) Create a *Safe Environment* for speaking

(5) *Equality* of positions

(6) *Share Knowledge* of each other’s responsibilities for child and suggestions

(7) Set up a regular *Communications Link*

(8) *Respond* to suggestions and *Carry Out* responsibilities

(9) Both should *Be Prepared* and have questions ready
Professional/Parent Communication Model

Knowledge & Information

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By Joe and Roe Vargo

Accept Parents’ Knowledge of Child
Basic Advocacy Skills

The following list defines and describes the basic advocacy skills essential to an effective advocate. Each of the skills listed will be illustrated by a scenario or role-play. After each illustration, there will be time to answer questions or provide further explanation.

Listening
Listening is one of the most fundamental skills required in working with people. Active listening, as it is sometimes called, means that the listener “hears” both the meaning and feelings communicated by the speaker. As the speaker talks, listen carefully.

- What is the speaker meaning as he speaks?
- What non-verbal cues are there, and what do they suggest about the speaker’s feelings?
- It is helpful to listen for a central theme or attitude.
- This understanding is then repeated back to the speaker to confirm if what was heard was indeed what was spoken.

Focusing
Focusing is used to redirect an interaction back on target. Often when individuals do not want to answer a question, discuss an issue, or take responsibility for a problem, an effort is made to direct the conversation to some other topic in order to skirt the problem. Focusing on the issue brings the conversation back on point and encourages the participants to address the issue at hand.

Redefinition
This skill is used to transform negative statements (accusation, derogatory remarks) into positive statements to support the advocate’s own position (instead of a defensive reaction). Developing this skill can help the advocate protect himself or herself against guilt-inducing comments. As a parent-member of the committee, you can use this technique to reframe a comment and allow the parent time to get past their initial reaction.
Clarification
Clarification is simply the skill of asking a direct question about something you do not understand. The key to becoming proficient at this skill is to ask for the information needed to clarify a given point or issue without becoming intimidated or embarrassed. When you are listening to anyone explain anything that you do not fully understand, take notes and write down the questions for which you need answers. Do not be afraid to ask questions. That is how you will learn the answers.

Assertive Statements
All of the skills listed thus far are assertive techniques; however, the assertive statement stands out as a necessary technique in its own right. An assertive statement expresses your ideas, clearly and directly, without a feeling of intimidation or disempowerment. An assertive statement is often the strong statement required to cut through evasive tactics and demand the services that are needed.

Summarization
Summarization is a technique used to recount or review what was previously discussed between all the speakers. Summarization is particularly useful to the advocate because it allows the advocate to review what was discussed and agreed (or not agreed) upon during the meeting. It also provides the participants an opportunity to correct any misconceptions created during the meeting and to amend or clarify any decisions.
Tips For Parents

Federal laws and state regulations provide for parent participation at every step of the special or general education process. Parents who speak for the needs and rights of their children are parent advocates. The tips in this section can help you to be a more effective parent advocate.

Qualities of an Effective Parent Advocate

1. Know your (and your child’s) rights.

2. View yourself as an equal member of the decision-making team.

3. Be active and involved in every step of your child’s education program.

4. Keep an up to date file of your child’s record.

5. Keep lines of communication open with your child’s teacher and other school personnel. Provide positive as well as negative feedback.

6. Be Assertive! Stand up for your child’s rights while respecting the rights of others. When problems arise, focus on solutions, not personalities.

7. Follow up on complaints.

8. Know your “bottom line.” Do not compromise on any part of your child’s program you feel is essential.

9. Find out about, and use, community resources (individuals and agencies), to give you assistance and support when needed.
Planning for and Taking Part in Meetings

1. If a scheduled meeting time is inconvenient, it is your right to ask that a meeting be rescheduled.

2. Review your child’s educational records. Remember, it is your right to have copies of these records.

3. Make a list of concerns and/or questions you want addressed at the meeting. For example, at a CSE meeting, list services and supports you think your child should receive. When preparing for an IEP meeting, write down any skills you would like your child to learn in the coming school year.

4. Make a note of any possible areas of difficulty or disagreement. Think of information to support your position. Also, list other suggestions. Establish your “bottom line”—any services upon which you won’t compromise.

5. Invite any people you wish to accompany you to the meeting.

6. Bring any report or notes that may be helpful.

7. Remember, you are the expert concerning your child and have valuable information to contribute!

8. Listen carefully to what others have to say. If you don’t understand something, speak up and ask for clarification.

9. Make certain you have a chance to state your opinions and concerns. Remember, the meeting is about your child, and decisions made affect your child’s life.

10. If more time is needed to discuss concerns or questions, request a follow up meeting. Make sure a date is set for the meeting before you leave.

11. All major points of discussion and commitment should be summarized so that everyone understands decisions made.

12. You may bring a tape recorder with you. You can’t be an effective participant and take notes, too.
Becoming a Full Participant in Developing Your Child’s IEP
Positive Student Profile
(TO BE FILLED OUT BY THE PARENT)

(1) Who is ________________________________?
Describe your child, including information such as place in the family, personality, likes and dislikes.

2. What are ________________________________’s strengths?
Highlight all areas in which your child does well, including educational and social environments.

3. What are ________________________________’s successes?
List all successes, no matter how small.

4. What are ________________________________’s greatest challenges?
List the areas in which your child has the greatest difficulties.

5. What are ________________________________’s needs?
List skills that you would like your child to obtain to maximize his/her potential.

6. What are our dreams for ________________________________.
Describe your vision for your child’s future, including both long and short term goals.

7. Other helpful information:
List any pertinent information, including health care needs, that has not been addressed before.
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

Depending on the age of the child, list his/her choices, fears, areas of comfort and discomfort and their dreams for themselves.
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
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Adapted from SPAN, a PTI of NJ
By: PNC, a PTI of NY/mk 3/95
New Dimensions in Parenting

Parents as Partners

How can parents and professionals work effectively as partners?

Here are several keys.

by Barbara Jones

Public Law 94-142 intends parents to be active participants, sharing equally in designing IEP’s and making decisions for their children. The law recognizes that parents are experts on their child, and professionals are experts in some specific field of training that the child needs.

Parents have vital information to share. They have known their child the longer and most intimately and see the whole child—strengths and challenges, likes and dislikes. They hold the vision of their child’s future.

Most importantly, only parents can represent their own family values. Often, staffing teams must make choices which involve values questions. These decisions can only be made in a sound way when the parents’ imprint shapes the direction.

So, how can parents and professionals work effectively as collaborators or partners? There are several keys.

First, everyone must accept the different roles of the various team members and the inevitable differences of opinion about the child’s needs. These differences are valuable and should be a positive catalyst to help all the “experts” in the child’s life create the individualized program that he or she really needs.

Second, people must be honest and share what they are thinking directly. Parents must tell professionals their thoughts. Professionals shouldn’t have to guess or presume what parents are thinking. Professionals have an obligation to be honest with parents. Protecting parents from difficult information is not a kind act of partnership. In fact, if bad news is shared with parents in advance, they can come to a meeting best prepared to be effective informed decision makers in a business setting.

Speaking up honestly is not easy to do. Using “I” messages or saying things from your own perspective is the easiest way to share and to receive information. If a professional says, “Your child has severe feeding problems,” the parents hears grim news—another thing the child can’t do well. However, if the professional says, “I think we should work to assist your child with eating,” the parent hears the concern phrased more optimistically. If a parent says, “You are spending too much time teaching shopping skills in the classroom, the professional hears a challenge. But if the parents say, “I would like my child to spend more time learning skills in a real shopping situation,” the professional hears a request instead of a complaint.

Sometimes speaking up honestly is difficult for parents who are afraid of alienating the professionals their child depends on. However, a timid silence will only result in more stress and frustration in the long run.

Sometimes concerns must be expressed over and over. Neither the professionals, nor parents, can be expected to sit in one meeting and understand how strongly someone feels about a particular issue if it’s mentioned only once.
**Third**, everyone on the team needs to listen carefully. During an important meeting it is easy to get stuck on some point made in the discussion and miss some of the other points. It is important to ask questions to clear up the issue right away, rather than dwell on it and not participate in the rest of the meeting.

A **fourth** key to effective collaboration is the ability to negotiate and compromise. At PEAK, we teach parents about “workable compromise.” This does not mean that parents or school professionals automatically give in on the things they feel are important. Rather, compromise means that each side knows what it can give up with integrity and can negotiate to arrive, finally, at a middle ground. Compromise is not workable if parents give up everything they feel their child needs and the other parties give up very little.

*Parents often request only the very minimum they feel they can ask from a school district. Then when it’s time to negotiate, they have nothing to give up without feeling they are selling out on the child’s needs. This, of course, doesn’t mean that parents should demand the moon, but they should request everything they feel their child needs, knowing what their top priorities are.*

A final way that parents can be good partners is by learning how the special education process works. You can’t be a key player if you don’t know the rules of the game. By figuring out the school or agency bureaucracy, parents also can help the system change. On occasion, school professionals welcome parents’ advocacy and feel it assists them to move the entire system forward. Speaking to school board members or participating in study committees or special education advisory committees can also help.

One thing is certain, children’s programs will be most effective only when open, honest input is present, and when each child has a team that collaborates.

*Though professionals come and go, parents remain as their child’s lifetime advocates. Therefore, encouraging parents to be confident, effective advocates is in the best interests of the children.*
Build a Positive Parent/Teacher Relationship
by Lynn Ziraldo

Even though parents and teachers want what is best for a child, sometimes that message can get lost. When parents and teachers see things from different perspectives and fail to communicate their concerns effectively—or feel their ideas are not accepted—parent/teacher relationships can flounder.

However, teachers and parents can—and should—find ways to complement each others’ skills and knowledge. By focusing on the child and developing effective communication techniques, they can work together to build an educational plan that meets the child’s needs and has the support of school and family.

The following techniques have helped parents and teachers build positive and strong relations.

Strategies that Help Parents and Professionals Work Together
When parents and teachers work together, it sends the student the message that “we’re all in this together.” Therefore, it is vital that both parties learn to share planning for the child’s instructional needs, as well as identification of potential problems or areas that need work. The following practices form the basis for a good relationship.

- **Listen actively**—Teachers should put themselves in parents’ and students’ shoes, and parents and students should put themselves in the teacher’s shoes.
- **Show compassion, sensitivity, empathy, and mutual respect for each other**—All parties should try to understand the other’s perspective. By consistently trying to understand each other and focusing on developing solutions, negative situations can be avoided.
- **Treat each other as equal partners in the planning and decision making.**
- **Develop a mutual understanding of the strengths and needs of the student**—Parents and teacher should share their understanding of the child’s learning styles. Parents can provide input on how they see the child’s physical strength, how the child interacts with others, and the child’s mental processing out of the classroom, while the teacher can share his or her observations from a class vantage point. Plus, children can contribute their ideas on the ways they learn best, as well as the factors that inhibit their learning.
- **Trust each other’s judgment.**
- **Approach disagreements in a manner that encourages mutual problem solving**—Utilize a problem-solving model to keep emotionalism at bay. Most models include: stating the problem, brainstorming ideas, and developing a solution. Share the model with all parents and students to let them know how the school resolves issues.
- **Teachers should never criticize a parent and a parent should never criticize a teacher in front of a student.** The student should believe the school and family are working together for his or her benefit.

Develop a Learning Profile of the Child
By working together, parents and teachers can get a true picture of a child and create an instructional plan that works for the child—and has the support of teachers and parents. Parents and teachers should conclude:

- The student’s strengths.
- The student’s needs including physical, intellectual or cognitive, educational or a academic, cultural, emotional, and/or behavioral, social.
- The child’s interests/activities.
- The child’s goals.
Successful Meetings for Parents and Professionals
Successful meetings require the participation of teachers and parents. Both have relevant information that will help each other understand the child and develop a learning program that best fits the child’s needs. To ensure parent/teacher meetings meet these objectives, both parties should:

- Focus on the best interests of the child.
- Concentrate on determining a positive course of action.
- List questions about strategies, terms, or behaviors you don’t understand. This is an opportunity to clear up misunderstandings and, possibly, hard feelings.
- Determine the ways in which parents and teachers can share responsibilities. Teachers need to share the strategies they are using in the classroom so that parents can use them at home. Parents can make sure the student has a place to do homework, as well as the equipment they need to complete assignments—and if the child is not completing assignments to enact consequences at home.
- Ask for suggestions—Teachers can learn successful strategies to work with a child by asking for suggestions from parents and students. Conversely, parents can ask teachers for learning or behavior strategies they can try at home.
- Share information with the child—By attending parent/teacher meetings, students can present their ideas and perspectives and learn to advocate for their needs.
- Set up a procedure for follow-up.
- Summarize the information, as this will be the basis for the next meeting.
- Express appreciation for each other’s participation the conference.

Continuing the Relationship
A continuing relationship between family and school requires a commitment to communication and shared responsibility. To encourage further positive parent/teacher interactions:

✓ Set up a regular communication link—Set up a communication mode that works for parents, teachers, and students. In addition to meetings, letters, faxes, and phone calls, computer networks can augment communication. Some educators and families correspond via a communication book in which parents, teachers, and students write down observations, ideas, and concerns.

✓ Respond to suggestions—If any party asks for suggestions they should try them. The suggestion can be assessed and reevaluated at a later date.

✓ Carry out responsibilities—Both parties are responsible for carrying out their responsibilities as outlined in the action plan. A reevaluation may indicate a later change.

✓ Monitor the progress of the action plan—Evaluating the action plan can include input from numerous sources: self-evaluation, peer evaluation, formal and informal assessments, and/or home and school observations. All forms of evaluation should have been set out in the action plan.

Lynn Zirlado is President Elect of CEC’s Ontario Federation and the Executive Director of the Learning Disabilities Association, York Region. She is the parent of two adolescents with special needs.

HOW DO WE AS SERVICE PROVIDERS HELP TO AFFECT POSITIVE, GROWTH-PRODUCING CHANGES IN THE FAMILIES WE SERVE?

1. **Building Trust and Developing Relationships (Person-Agency Fit)**

   a. Historically, families with a member who is disabled may have been undermined by the system.
   b. Families may feel they have not been listened to or understood.
   c. Adults with disabilities may have life histories and previous interactions that influence the formation of new relationships.
   d. Use the point of meeting a family and making an assessment as a time to start building trust.
   e. Develop the groundwork of how you, as a member of their service environment, will approach problems, issues, and dilemmas.

2. **Learn About People’s Preferences**

To support a person’s lifestyle and to affect change in a person’s life, agencies and others need to become skilled in learning a person’s preferences. **HOW??????**

   a. **Listen Better**
   The most important thing is to really listen to what people want (whom) we are providing support to.

   b. **Asking**
   Ask questions that will give you insight into how a parent or a person feels and thinks.

   ✓ “How do you feel about this?”
   ✓ “What do you think about this?”
   ✓ What is the difference between those two questions??

   Remember that people with disabilities are seldom asked their opinion, much less have their responses taken seriously.

   c. **Create a Safe Environment for Speaking**
   Non-judgmental, empathetic, problem-solving-oriented, provisionalism, equal.
3. **Spend Time Together**
   If a person cannot articulate clearly, you may need to spend time just observing. Body language, mood, or behaviors are all forms of communication.

4. **Develop a Person-by-Person Approach**
   We are all individuals with specific individual wants and needs. Avoid phrases like, “Our agency does things this way.” Be willing to open yourself up to change as well.

5. **Take the Initiative—Accept it when the Family Does, Too**

6. **Watch Your Language Style**
   Do you create a defensive climate or a supportive climate? The SIX do’s and don’ts in language style are:
   a. Avoid **evaluative** statements. **Descriptions** provide more information and do not alienate people.
   b. Avoid struggles of power and control. Instead, try **problem-solving** orientation.
   c. Do not go into a house with a **strategy**. Your motive becomes suspect. The use of **spontaneity** opens more minds.
   d. Avoid **neutrality**. It may seem like you don’t care. Instead, try **empathy**.
   e. The communication of **superiority** in power, position, intelligence, etc., arouses defensiveness. Trust requires a sense of **equality**.
   f. Do not approach a problem or a situation with such **certainty** that you fail to be **provisional**. Those that seem to “know” all the answers tend to put people on guard.

7. **When discussing with a parent(s) issues related to their child, remember**:
   a. You are talking about someone’s daughter or son or sister, etc. Clients and family members are very different people.
   b. Ask the parent to discuss the child’s strengths and weaknesses, as well as their preferences. Are they compatible with the parent’s wants, needs, and preferences?
c. Learn how the parent makes decisions regarding this child. Are they emotional decision-makers, intellectual, spontaneous?

d. What are the parents’ strengths, weaknesses, and preferences?

e. Use all the information from above to discuss ways of helping the child change his/her behavior.

f. Set up manageable goals for the family. Manageable means small, low frequency, and high probability of success. Help the parents to incorporate choices into their child’s routine. Encourage the parents to use positive reinforcement only—discourage the use of punishment.

g. Praise the parents for their efforts.

h. Keep in touch with the family. Often just a phone call—asking how the plan is going—serves as support.

i. Be open to change, but encourage patience and perseverance. Negotiate the length of a plan’s usage at the front end. You need several weeks to see change start to happen.
Working With Policymakers

General Tips

THIS SECTION IS ADAPTED FROM THE PTA ADVOCACY TRAINING MANUAL. WE GRATIFY ACKNOWLEDGE THE ASSISTANCE OF ARNOLD FEGE OF THE NATIONAL PTA.

From your local school board to Congress, the goals of your advocacy efforts are likely to require action by a decision-making body. Working with elected officials involves persistence, strong listening skills, and a compelling message. Here are a few pointers to keep in mind:

Do Your Homework. To be an effective voice for students and education, you need to know where policymakers stand on specific bills, as well as education issues in general. Through your efforts, you'll identify key advocates, from a variety of viewpoints, working in the public eye and behind the scenes.

To learn more about the policymakers and their positions:

- Keep track of what officials say in the media;
- Attend meetings and hearings (or obtain copies of transcripts or summaries if necessary);
- Check the World Wide Web (www) pages;
- Directly request a policymaker’s statement of position; and
- Learn the names and number of appropriate bills, their sponsors, and the rationale for support or opposition.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Although you may vehemently disagree with a policymaker’s stated position on an education issue, you can still communicate an understanding of other points of view. Respect is a fundamental ingredient of effective advocacy. To gain it, demonstrate it by taking the time to understand diverse opinions.

Think Locally—Before You Act Globally. As an advocate for children and education you have the best leverage with your own legislator, then with legislators representing other districts in your state, and finally those representing other states. Normally, if you want a bill sponsored or amendments made, you would go through your own legislator.

Understand The System. Savvy advocates understand the legislative system, are persuasive and personable, and know the details of, and reasons for, the policy proposals with which they are concerned. Knowing how legislators process information—and the constraints they face—will help you deliver information in an effective manner.
Begin The Process Early. Advocacy should start well before the bill with which you are concerned appears in the legislature. A good time is between legislative sessions when members often visit their district. You can also present the issue to interim committees between sessions.

Get A Sponsor. Find a sponsor, especially one from your district, and convince the sponsor to support your solution and your language (although the sponsor will almost certainly suggest changes to increase the chance of successfully passing the bill). If your legislator is not on the appropriate committee to initiate the desired bill, contact both your legislator and the head of the appropriate committee (but tell both that you are communicating with the other).

Get Your Issue On The Record. When your desired legislation is introduced, have the legislator you convinced to sponsor the law submit a statement for the record explaining why the law is necessary. Work with your sponsoring legislator and supply information on how your organization or network can be most effective.

Contact The Whole Committee. Set up a group of education advocates in which each member is a contact person for each member of the legislative committee that will act on your bill. Attend any hearing on your legislation, but you should have already made the necessary contact. Have members of your group in attendance when the committee meets to decide if the bill will be considered by the full legislative body.

Negotiate. Negotiating means giving as well as receiving. As an education advocate, consider the concessions you are willing to make small steps toward your goal. The PTA suggests, “Ask for more than you think you will get and then compromise. Remember that lobbying means having influence over even seemingly small changes in decisions affecting your cause.”

Don’t Forget Legislative Staff. Some legislative staff has power and can help you with their knowledge of the process, other legislators, and general strategy. Staffers also advise their legislators on education issues. Legislative staff can give you periodic updates on where committee members stand on your bill, advise on your own actions, and help you arrange meetings with legislators and committees. In turn, you can help them write their bills and offer support for their work.

You Can Do It!! Parents as Advocates— A Guide for Parents and Other Professionals (Rev. Jan 2012)
Working with the Media

Success in working with the media is most likely to occur when it is a strategically planned effort. That effort is, in turn, best supported when there is a consistent spokesperson guiding the implementation of a comprehensive communications plan with goals that enjoy the buy-in and understanding of all members of the group. A designated spokesperson not only allows the kind of coordination necessary so that the organization speaks with a “single voice.” It also provides media representatives with a consistent point of contact. After all, if you can call Ann Brown at Advocacy Group X who provided just the information you needed last week and a month before that, why would you bother to call Advocacy Group Z and take a chance on who answers the phone? There’s also an air of legitimacy that comes with the permanent assignment of the role and the implication that the organization takes communications with the public very seriously.

A comprehensive communications plan is a strategic overview of your work with the media and various publics. It’s the game plan for developing the influence and public awareness that will help achieve the organization’s strategic goals (it also may well be one of the goals in and of itself). The links between the communications plan and the organization’s strategic goals should be clear. In fact, the communications plan should become an organization-wide reference. It should include:

- A statement of purpose,
- The identified communications goals,
- A description of target audiences (e.g., local news media, legislators at various levels of government, your regional business community, other organizations),
- The strategies and activities—and timelines—that turn plans into reality, and
- A mechanism for periodic evaluation.
Remember that your audiences are internal as well as external—staff and volunteers, board of directors, and members need to understand both the intent of the plan and the tactics you propose to employ, and the consensus should be that they like it. If you’re not on the same wavelength with these folks (and vice versa), and if there is no buy-in to the goals, communication with the outer world is likely to be elusive in the long run.

Expect the development of relationships with the media to be long-range efforts that begin with research into potential markets and outlets, and building a database or mailing list based on that work (keeping the list up-to-date, by the way, commits you to a review at least once or twice a year—these people tend to move around). You may want to subdivide the list so that you can “target market” your information (a news release that goes only to technology-oriented publications, for example, or a news peg for a new book that is mailed to talk-show radio programs).

The primary tool is one you’ve been using since the day you were born, and there’s still no substitute for simple, verbal communication—face-to-face or (the global village being what it is) phone-to-phone. Of course there’s a reason why we talk about the art of conversation rather than the science. It’s easy to talk. It’s more difficult to communicate successfully. When speaking with representatives of the media, keep these points in mind.

- Know the media—and make sure they know you. Be familiar with the publications, the show, the style of the individual reporter.
- Be honest.
- Be accessible.
When *they* contact *you*:
- Return calls promptly
- Be sensitive to their deadlines
- Underpromise, overdeliver

When *you* contact *them*:
- Be concise
- Accept that they’re “always” busy
- Leave a succinct and specific voice mail message
- Give them enough lead time
- Spoon-feed them (give them a story that writes itself)
- Be fair:
  “Exclusives” as rewards or incentives may be OK—as long as they’re above board. That is, don’t give the impression that a release is embargoed until a certain date and then give the story to one outlet for that morning’s news. One article on page 10 of the Times is not worth angering the Associated Press.
- Use plain English:
  Most reporters aren’t educators—or even education reporters on a full-time basis. They may have been assigned to the metro desk yesterday; they may be writing about real estate tomorrow. Never patronize but, at the same time, never assume that they have in-depth knowledge about your issues.
- Maintain control of the conversation:
  - Ask “stupid” (NOTE THE QUOTES) questions—before you say anything else
  - Know what public information is
  - Know what “off the record” means
  - Assume that nothing is off the record
  - Pay attention to the question
  - Don’t let the reporter put words into your mouth. (It’s their job to get a story. Some of them have a penchant for lines, such as “So, would you say that . . .”)

*You Can Do It!!* Parents as Advocates—
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All of which is to say:

- **Think before you speak:**
  - Know in advance the points you want to make—stick to two or three points
  - Don’t be too self-serving
  - Think (preferably in advance) about ways to turn their line of inquiry in the direction you want
  - “No comment” is a comment. “I don’t know” is not a sin.
  - It’s OK to say, “This is an important issue, and I want to be sure I convey our position precisely. Would you mind reading back what you just heard me say?” However:
    - Never ask to see a story before it’s published
    - Never let a reporter get to you
    - If it doesn’t feel right—don’t do it. Research the reporter or outlet, if necessary, before granting an interview.

- **Follow up:**
  - Thank the reporter if the story is even fairly good
  - Complain only if the story is factually wrong—and even then, be professional—and remember that:
    - It’s a reporter’s job to get both sides of the issue, and it’s seldom worth it to fight with someone who buys ink by the barrel.
ACADEMIC INTERVENTION SERVICES (AIS)
Additional time and instruction given to low-performing students to help them pass state tests and meet all requirements. Intervention may include guidance or counseling sessions and/or study skill sessions.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS
Clear outline of what students should know and be able to do in a certain subject area at stages called “benchmarks.”

ACCOUNTABILITY
A system that sets expectations for and measures performance of schools, teachers, and students. This system defines how schools or students are judged and states what the consequences or rewards are based on performance.

ASSESSMENT
A process of gathering information to measure progress.

ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT
Alternative assessment includes a broad range of assessment activities. Three of the most common approaches to alternative assessment are portfolios, performances, and projects.

ASSESSMENT (AUTHENTIC)
Measures and processes modeled after real-life or at least plausible tasks and challenges.

ASSESSMENT (PERFORMANCE)
An evaluation of student’s performance which is observed and judged by others. It involves knowledge-in-use.

BENCHMARKS
Also called learning objectives, levels or steps within each academic standard describing the specific knowledge and skills students must have at each grade.

BOCES (Boards of Cooperative Educational Services)
These boards provide services to their component local school districts, such as special education programs, vocational programs, computer services, public relations services, etc. They are designed to provide services in a more economical way than could be provided by each individual school district. They have boards whose members are elected by the local boards of education.

CHARTER SCHOOL
Public schools which are free and available by choice, approved by the state, and run privately to give families an alternative to their regular public schools.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT
Procedures and techniques used by a teacher to control the learning environment.
**COMMON CORE STANDARDS**
A clear set of national educational guidelines for English Language Arts and mathematics.

**COMMUNITY SCHOOL**
A school that shares its facilities with and provides services and activities for the neighborhood it serves. A community school might have a health and dental clinic and might offer evening events, programs for computer instruction, parenting classes, adult education, and tax forms assistance.

**CONSENSUS**
Agreement resulting from a systematic group decision-making process.

**COOPERATIVE LEARNING**
This teaching style takes a team approach by grouping together children with differing abilities to master a subject or solve problems, such as working on a big math puzzle. The goal is to allow each student to find his or her strengths within the group. For instance, top-level students can practice leadership skills, while those who have more difficulty with a subject learn from the others and are encouraged to contribute to the group project in their own ways.

**CRITERIA**
Conditions that performances or products must meet to be considered of high quality.

**CRITICAL THINKING**
The ability to think in a logical and thoughtful manner and to solve problems, analyze data, and apply learned information.

**CURRICULUM**
What is to be taught in a particular course regarding the sequence, format and content of courses; student activities; teaching approaches; books, materials, and resources used; and the way in which teachers and classes are organized, all of which enable students to reach standards.

**CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT**
A process that matches what is actually taught in each class to the academic standards.

**CURRICULUM INTEGRATION**
Teachers in various disciplines (subjects) coordinate their lessons around a single theme to give students a sense of how everything is related and make the facts and ideas they’re learning more meaningful. Each teacher tackles the theme from the angle of his or her discipline (subject). If the topic is the Civil War, for instance, students might read literature from that time period in English class, research the way people dressed in social studies, and discuss their medical capabilities in a science lesson.

**CURRICULUM FRAMEWORKS**
A broad description of the principles, topics, and modes of inquiry or performance in a discipline that provides the basic structure of ideas upon which a curriculum is based. A stepping-stone between standards and curriculum. New York State’s curriculum frameworks describe
knowledge, skill and understanding to be developed, major themes and questions to be explored, and performance standards to be attained.

**EXEMPLARS**
Models that depict desired characteristics of quality in ways that students can understand and strive to achieve.

**EXPECTATIONS**
What we hope for and believe students should produce.

**FLEXIBLE AND BLOCK SCHEDULING**
Different ways of scheduling time during the school day.

**HIGH SCHOOL REGENTS EXAMINATIONS**
Standardized tests required by the state which students must pass in English, math, social studies, and science in order to graduate.

**HIGH STAKES TESTS**
Tests used as the only factor to make an important decision for a student or school, such as whether a student graduates or whether or not a school contuse to receive certain types of funding.

**IEP (Individualized Education Plan)**
A written statement of instruction specially designed to meet the needs of an individual child. The IEP is reviewed and revised annually in a conference that includes the student’s parent(s) and teacher(s). The plan includes annual goals, instructional objectives, specific educational services to be provided, and appropriate criteria and evaluation procedures for determining whether instructional objectives are being achieved. IEP’s are required for children in special education programs.

**JOB SHADOWING**
An experience in which a student visits a worksite for the purpose of following (shadowing) an employee to learn about a particular occupation or industry. This activity provides students and teachers with an opportunity to see firsthand the kinds of jobs and the skills and knowledge required in a certain field.

**MEDIATION**
Also known as conflict resolution, as early as kindergarten this approach provides a socially acceptable, peer-driven process to deal with friction and disagreement. When students have a conflict, they work with fellow students who have been trained in mediation. The student mediators try to probe what the argument is about and help the students come to a fair solution.

**PERFORMANCE**
Consists of observable behaviors or products which feature expression of the student’s ability to use knowledge to undertake and complete a task rather than to demonstrate knowledge of facts and rules about performing the task. The focus is on what students *can* do rather than on what they *cannot* do.
**PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**
As defined in the Curriculum Frameworks, they specify what students should know and be able to do as they progress toward achieving the performance standards.

**PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**
These are broken into three levels designated as elementary, intermediate, and commencement within the curriculum frameworks. Each performance standard is composed of performance indicators that answer the question, “How good is good enough?” Clear description of how good a student’s work must be or what level of mastery is required to meet the academic standards.

**PERFORMANCE TASKS**
What students might do to show that they have acquired the knowledge and skills that performance indicators describe in the curriculum frameworks.

**PORTFOLIO**
This is a collection of samples of a student’s work done over the course of a school year (or sometimes several years). Portfolios are meant to stimulate students’ self-reflection by allowing them to look back on their progress and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Portfolios also offer parents a way to see how their child is growing and learning. In some instances, they’re used as a basis for grading.

**PROFESSIONAL OR STAFF DEVELOPMENT**
Education undertaken by individuals in order to improve themselves. It is a lifelong, continuing program of personal and professional growth.

**RUBRIC**
Scales that differentiate levels of performance—example, 1, 2, 3, 4 on report cards.

**SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING TEAM (School Leadership Team)**
Using the shared decision making process as required by the state, the team formed in each school to make decisions and develop plans to improve student achievement.

**SCHOOLS IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT**
Schools designated by the federal government as needing to improve the level of student performance.

**SHARED DECISION MAKING**
A process by which administrators work in partnership with teacher, parent, student, and community representatives on school committees or teams.

**STANDARDIZED TESTS**
Tests given under the same conditions for all students: the same questions, the same amount of time, at the same part of the academic year.
**STANDARDS**

Statements that define what students ought to know, be able to do, and be like; are observable, measurable, or inferable, and stated in results-focused terms; reflect broad goals; and are comprehensive and developmental.

**TEACHING TO THE TEST**

Focusing instruction on questions and information taken from similar tests given in the past.