



From Parent to Advocate

Collaborating for school success

Charisse N. Montgomery, M.A., M.Ed., GPAC





Objectives

- Differentiate the roles of parents and advocates
- Apply the systems thinking framework to the process of advocacy
- Identify the basic actions involved in setting goals and monitoring progress



Speaker's bio

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Parent/Family

- Son, age 5, medically complex, diverse learner
- Rare condition: RYR1 mutation, congenital fiber-type disproportion myopathy
- Sibling with same disability

Advocate

- Former secondary teacher, Master's in Educational Psychology
- Family Leadership Representative, State Support Team 3
- Developed the Family Advocate Network model
- Vice-president, Patient and Family Partnership Council, Rainbow Babies & Children's, Cleveland, Ohio
- Former member, Lucas County Board of Developmental Disabilities



Definition: Parent

- Noun.
 - a father or a mother.
 - an ancestor, precursor or progenitor.
 - a source, origin or cause.
- Biology.
 - any organism that produces or generates another.
- Physics.
 - the first nucleotide in a radioactive series.
- Adjective.
 - being the original source: a parent organization
- Biology.
 - pertaining to an organism, cell or complex molecular structure that generates or produces another: parent cell; parent DNA.
- Verb (used with subject)
 - to be or act as the parent of:



Definition: Advocate

advocate. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved January 31, 2017 from Dictionary.com website <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/advocate>

Verb

- (used with object)
 - to **speak** or **write** in favor of; **support** or **urge** by argument; **recommend** publicly: He advocated higher salaries for teachers.
- (used without object)
 - to **act** as an advocate: a father who advocates for his disabled child.

Noun

- a person who **speaks** or **writes** in support or defense of a person, cause, etc. (usually followed by of): an advocate of peace.
- a person who **pleads** for or on behalf of another; intercessor.
- a person who **pleads** the cause of another in a court of law.



Why does advocacy matter?

Phillips, Erin. When Parents Aren't Enough: External Advocacy in Special Education. Yale Law Journal. Jun 2008, Vol. 117 Issue 8, p1802-1853

Parents

- Are partial and have specific knowledge about the child
- Have limited awareness of the services and options available for educating their children
- Are usually unable to diagnose problems they see
- Don't always know the procedures for making changes

Advocates

- Provide greater support for student learning
- Develop a more positive attitude about education and educators
- Help children achieve higher test scores and lower dropout rates
- Feel more empowered



What an advocate does

- Know the members of the team
- Set the vision
- Stay engaged and focused on the vision
- Monitor progress
- Revisit the vision



How an advocate does it

A roadmap to the destination

- How do we go from parenting to advocating?



- Speak
- Write
- Urge
- Recommend
- Support
- Plead
- Act



Know the members of the team

- Names, responsibilities and contact information of everyone on the child's educational team
- Chain of command
 - Whom to contact if something needs to be changed, and the next person to contact if you don't get what you need.
 - Teacher, principal, district-level director, superintendent
- Bring your own champion
 - Someone who knows the child well and can be an extra set of ears and eyes on the process
 - Does not have to be a relative



Systems thinking

Connecting the dots

Parts of the child's system

- Community
- Family
- Education
- Health and safety

Each part of the microsystem contributes to the child's outcomes.





Systems thinking

Why does it matter?

Why is it important to consider the entire system?

- Distributes responsibility and accountability
- Empowers each participant
- Saves time, effort and money

Each part of the system contributes to the child's outcomes.





Set the vision

What is the destination?

- What do you want your child's future to look like?
- Big picture vision: Dreams and aspirations
- Short-term SMART goals
 - Specific
 - Measurable
 - Attainable
 - Realistic
 - Time-based
- From here to there
 - What do we see now? What do we want to see by age ____?





Activity 1: Set the vision

Set at least one big-picture action for each concern.

- Quick case study

1. Physical disability, frequent falls, uses a walker
2. Speech delay with unclear speech
3. Difficulty with reading comprehension
4. Frequent respiratory illnesses that lead to absences from school
5. Anxiety disorder that contributes to school absences
6. Covering ears and crying when the environment is loud
7. Single-parent home with limited parental interaction

– **The community organization will _____.**

Groups

- Condition-specific community organization
- Family
- School/school system
- Health care provider



Activity 1: Set the vision

Prioritizing

- Within each group, prioritize the top three actions.
- Be prepared to explain your choices.



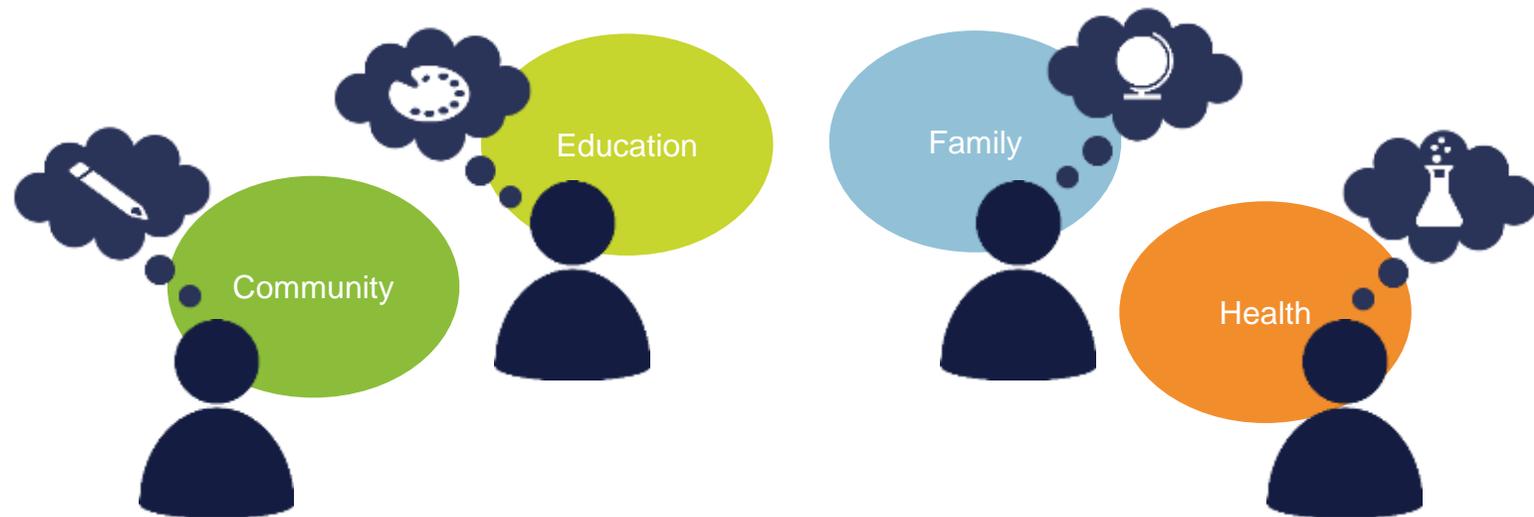
Groups

- Condition-specific community organization
- Family
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Stay engaged and focused on the vision

- Communicate
 - Communicate the vision to all stakeholders.
 - Talk and listen.
 - Plan communication at regular intervals.
- Exchange ideas
 - Resources
 - Innovation
- Discuss challenges
 - Limitations

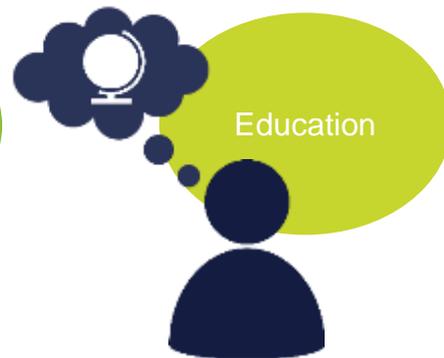


spea **wri** **ur** **recomm** **support** **plea** **act**



Activity 2: Stay engaged and focused

- How do we prioritize?
 - Replace at least one item from your group's top 3 for an item in another group's top 3.
 - Explain your choices.





Monitor progress

- Get organized
 - Binder, email files
 - Take notes for every meeting, phone call
 - What's happening? Who's doing what?
- Keep track of changes
 - Time intervals (e.g., every month)
 - School work, video records
- Identify weak links
 - Did everyone follow through on what they said they would do?
- Accountability
 - How can we make sure _____ will be completed by _____?



Revisit the vision

Stay on track

- Have we moved closer to the vision?
- Do we need to adjust?
- What else do we need to get there?
- Who else can help us get there?
- What else can I do?





Best practices for parent advocates

THE “I” IN IEP

I am the chief advocate for my child
I will know my and my child's rights in the process
I will research District/State Education policies
I will bring support as required
I will defend and fight for my child
I will not back down over their needs
I will never surrender their right to FAPE
I will be prepared for possible questions
I will keep a professional tone
I will ensure the plan is “Individualized” and is not generic in nature
I will ensure the school remembers that this is about a person, not a process

~militaryautism.org

- Be realistic
 - Be honest about limitations, challenges
- Be persistent
 - Ask for help
- Know your rights
 - Stay informed about specific needs and issues that affect the vision
 - IDEA, ODE, other parents
- Know who can help
- Involve the child



Combining roles

Bringing parenting and advocacy together

Parent

- Based on relationship
- Guided by duty and love



Advocate

- Based on action
- Guided by the vision for the child's future





Best practices for educators and leaders

- Follow legal guidelines and evidence-based practices.
- Understand and support the parent advocate's vision.
- Create systems to capture student and family perspectives.
- Meet challenges with curiosity and empathy, not judgement.
- Contribute to holistic and innovative solutions.
- Offer information, resources and support.
- Remember why we're here.

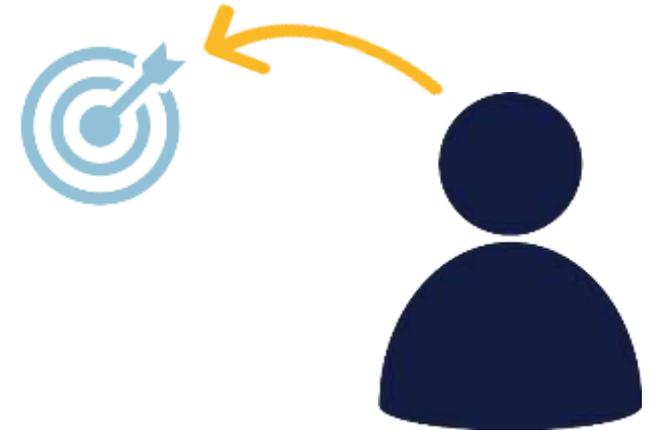




Signs of success

How do we know our advocacy is working?

- Everyone participates in working toward the vision.
- **Everyone's voice is heard, especially the child's.**
- Steps toward the goal are being achieved in the agreed upon time frame.
- Family feels supported and understood.





Resources

Local and Regional

- Ohio Department of Education – Education.ohio.gov
- Educational Service Center (by county)
- State Support Teams

National and International

- U.S. Department of Education – ed.gov
- Ted Talks Education



Special thanks to:

- My family
- Euclid City Schools
 - Dr. Charles Smialek, Superintendent
 - Mrs. Sherrell Benton, Director of Student Affairs
- Members of the Euclid Family Advocate Network

Contact

- Charisse N. Montgomery, M.A., M.Ed., GPAC
 - www.madvocator.com
 - @madvocator – Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest
 - Articles: *Complex Child* magazine, *The Mighty*, ProMedica HealthConnect