SELDA
Family Engagement Outreach

Dr. La Tanya Barkley Washington, Program Manager
Anne Ladd, Family Engagement Specialist
Elise James, Program Specialist
The Role of Ombudsman

- Serves as a designated neutral party who advocates for a fair process
- Provides confidential, informal assistance and support to parents, guardians, advocates, educators, and students with disabilities
- Serves as a resource to parents and school districts in non-legal special education matters
KEY FUNCTIONS OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION:

• Independent of the formal dispute resolution options of mediation, state complaints, and due process hearings
• Serves a key function of reporting to leadership at the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) regarding the issues experienced by parties served
• Does not disclose personal information, discussions, and interactions.
SPECIFIC DUTIES OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION:

• Provides information and support to parents of students with disabilities to help them understand and navigate the special education process
• Provides communication strategies to parents and school districts for resolving disagreements and special education issues
• Assists parents in developing strategies and informal options to address issues and concerns
• Promotes collaboration and positive communication between parents and school district personnel in addressing special education issues
SPECIFIC DUTIES OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION:

- Serves as a resource for:
  - information and referral regarding state and federal laws and regulations governing special education
  - options for dispute resolution, such as mediation, state complaints, and due process hearings when collaboration efforts fail
  - disability related information and referrals to available programs and services for individuals with disabilities.
IEP Team Meeting Facilitation

• Optional process
  • not required by the IDEA
  • highly suggested for state educational agencies (SEA) or local education agencies (LEA)

• Same as other IEP Team meetings, except that a facilitator joins the meeting

• Collaborative dispute prevention and resolution process when:
  • history of communication challenges
  • meeting is expected to be complex or controversial
Role of the facilitator

• Helps IEP Team members develop group norms, an agenda, and desired outcomes for the meeting
• Guides discussions by asking student-focused questions
• Keeps the IEP Team on task and the meeting on schedule
• Asks questions to clarify points of agreement and disagreement and assists parties in identifying workable solutions
• Does NOT make decisions and is NOT a member of the IEP Team
• Does NOT address issues unrelated to the IEP and does NOT draft the IEP
Benefits of IEP Team Meeting Facilitation

• Build and improve relationships among IEP Team members
• Team members feel heard
• Allows all members of the IEP Team to participate fully
• The IEP Team works together more effectively and efficiently
• Keeps decision-making with the IEP Team members who know the student best
• Helps resolve disagreements more quickly than other dispute resolution processes
Requesting a Facilitated IEP Team Meeting

• Parents or district personnel may initiate the process by completing the IEP Team Meeting Facilitation Request form.
• Both the parties (district and parents or student if 18 years or older) must agree to participate.
• A complete and signed request form and notice of meeting must be submitted to the GaDOE at least 7-10 days before the scheduled IEP Team meeting.
• Upon approval, a facilitator will be provided at no cost to the parent or district
What are the benefits of the FIEP Process?
Special Education Helpdesk

- Answers questions
- Explains the procedural safeguards
- Discusses options for addressing concerns or disagreements
- Provides information about, access to, and assistance with the dispute resolution processes;
- Provides resources and informational materials

404-657-9968
SPEDhelpdesk@doe.k12.ga.us
Questions?
Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

An Overview of the Support to Districts and Parents
The Basics

• All schools and school districts receiving Federal financial assistance from the United States Department of Education (USED) MUST COMPLY.

• Students who meet the definition of an individual with a disability under Section 504 (not IDEA) are eligible.

• Students must have an equal opportunity to participate in athletics and extracurricular activities.

• Students must not be bullied or harassed based on their disability.
Disability Defined Under Section 504

• A person or students who:
  • (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity;
  • (2) has a record of such an impairment; or
  • (3) is regarded as having such an impairment.

• Broad coverage
Major Life Activities

Includes but are not limited to:

- Caring for oneself
- Performing manual tasks
- Walking
- Seeing
- Hearing
- Speaking
- Breathing
- Working
- Learning
Whose Job Is It?
Role of Section 504 Program Specialist

• Guidance for districts and parents
  • GaDOE has no authority
  • Governance and authority belongs to the United Stated Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (OCR)

• Technical Assistance for districts
  • Support in thinking through the process
  • Provide training to follow the law and debunk myths
  • Provide information on changes and precedence set through litigation

• Provide tools and resources for districts and parents
Resources

- GaDOE Section 504 Guidance (PDF)
- GaDOE webpage for Section 504 Guidance and Forms
- GaDOE Overview Document
- USED Office for Civil Rights
- USED Office for Civil Rights -504 FAQ
- USED Parent and Educator Resource Guide to Section 504 in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools
- Public comment on proposed amendments to section 504 regulations
Questions are the path to learning
Together, We Can!

20 Years Together 2002-2022
What is Family Engagement?

Family Engagement is any way that a child’s family (biological parents, foster parents, siblings, grandparents, etc.) effectively supports the child’s learning and healthy development.
What are the benefits of Family Engagement?

What the Research Says:

One of the most comprehensive research synthesis on Family Engagement was completed in 2002 by Anne Henderson and Karen Mapp. The researchers focused on the relationship between student achievement and family-community involvement.
When Families are Engaged...

Students achieve more, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic/racial background, or the parents' education level.

and

These students also exhibit more consistently higher grades, test scores, better attendance, completed homework; and positive attitudes and behavior. (Anne Henderson & Karen Mapp)
What the Research Says

National and state evidence indicates that a high dropout rate and a wide gap in achievement cannot change without effective family engagement. (National Dropout Prevention Center)
What the Research Says

When parents understand the vital role that accommodations play in the success of their child’s classroom education, then they can partner with the IEP team to discuss if the implementations are working successful. (Epstein)
Who is Responsible for Family Engagement?
Focus Areas for Family Engagement

• Two-way Communication
• Show up at school meetings and trainings
• Provide buy-in for priorities
• Change mindset around possible outcomes (raise expectations)
• Collaborate in the IEP process
• Build partnerships
Begin to Build Your Family Engagement Toolkit

- Hierarchy of needs
- National PTA Standards
- Parent/family training
- Vital Behaviors
- Communication strategies
National Standards for Family-School Partnerships

- **Standard 1**: Welcoming all families into the school community
- **Standard 2**: Communicating effectively
- **Standard 3**: Supporting student success
- **Standard 4**: Speaking up for every child
- **Standard 5**: Sharing power
- **Standard 6**: Collaborating with community
Families of Students with Disabilities
Does Your District Have a Parent Mentor?
Sharing the Journey

- Established in 2002
- 89 districts across the state & over 101 mentors
- Family members who have the shared, lived experience
- Provide family training & support
Sharing the Journey

• Statewide reach for information distribution and stakeholder input
• Work to build capacity through collaboration with other agencies and organizations
• Promote family engagement as an integral strategy for school improvement & increased positive outcomes for students
Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership

Working to Connect Families, Schools and Communities

The Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership is parents and professionals working together to improve outcomes for students with disabilities by enhancing communication and collaboration between families, educators and the community.

Our Mission
The mission of the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership is to build effective family, school, and community partnerships that lead to greater achievement for students, especially those with disabilities.

Our Vision
The vision of the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership is Parent mentors and special education administrators will lead the way in Georgia to bridge the gap between home, school and community partnerships.

Quick Links
- Home
- About Us
- Find A Mentor

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Visit our website to Find A Mentor

Life is a journey, not a destination.
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Annual Kickoff
Parent Training and Information (PTI)

Visit the P2P website

We support Georgia families and individuals impacted by disabilities or special health care needs.
Would You Like a Parent Mentor?
Family Engagement and Outreach

LaTanya Barkley Washington
IDEA Ombudsman Program
Manager Outreach
404-450-0945
latanya.barkley@doe.k12.ga.us

• Anne Ladd, Family Engagement Specialist
  470-423-6987
  aladd@doe.k12.ga.us

• Elise James, Program Specialist,
  Transition Postschool Outcomes and Section 504
  404-326-0421
  ejames@doe.k12.ga.us