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Beginning the Special Education Process

By Sandy Gauvin

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Like anything else in life, there's a method to the special education process. It was put in place to help people who deal with learning disabilities get the best services possible. In order to help you understand this method, here's a simplified version of the Special Education process.

1)Request for evaluation

Someone sees that the child is having difficulty in school and asks that testing be done to find out what's causing the problem. This request can come from parents or educators. If the parents make the request, the district must agree to give a full and individual evaluation. If the request is made from someone else, such as a teacher, a team of educators and an administrator will meet to review the reasons and decide whether to pursue testing. No matter who makes the request, you as the parent, must give written permission for this testing to be done. At this point, you will be informed of your rights and those of your child.

If the district decides not to test, then it must let you know that and inform you of your rights. You can continue to pursue the option through a due process hearing if you wish.

2)Results of the testing

You have the right to be notified of the results of the testing before the meeting. If you don't understand what is being said in the report, you have the right to have someone explain the results to you.

When the testing is done, you will meet with the team of professionals to be told of the results. If your child is found to have a learning disability, and you agree that he should receive special education services, then you must give written permission for this to happen.

If he is not found to have a learning disability, you and his teachers will still have valuable information about him and the ways he learns best.

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If you disagree with the results either way, you have the right to have him tested by someone outside the school district. The district must pay for the evaluation or show at a special hearing why it refused.

3) Placement

If you and the school district agree that a learning disability was found, then you and the team will decide the best program for your child. The team will make up an Individualized Education Program (IEP) that will include goals and ways to measure those goals during the year. It will also list the services your child will get and any special aids or helps your child can get, such as special transportation or speech therapy if he needs it.

Your child is entitled to receive his services in the "Least Restrictive Environment." That means that he

will receive the services that are best for him in the place that's best. For example, he won't be placed in the resource room for help with math if he needs help only with reading. He won't be asked to stay in the mainstream for spelling if he has a learning disability in that area. In other words, he will only receive help in things he needs help in.

It's important to be active in this process for your child. If you know the process, you can make sure that it's followed correctly and that your child's rights are recognized. This doesn't mean that you always have to be on the attack, but it does mean that you need to keep a watchful eye. Again, it all comes back to acting on behalf of your child, since he can't do that for himself. And, in the long run, he will be more successful because of you.

For more plain talk about learning disabilities, please visit us at www.ldperspectives.com.

Sandy Gauvin is a retired educator who has seen learning disabilities from many perspectives – as the parent of a daughter with learning disabilities, as the teacher of children with learning disabilities, and as an advocate for others who have diagnosed and unrecognized learning disabilities. Sandy shares her wisdom and her resources at www.LDPerspectives.com.

Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance

By Stacy Andell

The Orange County Schools ' Special Education Alliance was created by the 28 districts in Orange County in 2003. The primary goal of the Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance is to meet the need for a countywide system that can focus on special education. This includes offering staff development and training to school employees, creating leadership in advocating for legislative and administrative change, overseeing the decisions and rulings rendered by administrative agencies, offering a way to fund the litigation and appeals of administrative and judicial decisions and rulings especially when the outcome has a countywide significance or precedent setting in its implications for all students.

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The Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance was created with the intention of addressing all the concerns of all students regardless of if the student has any manner disability. Any student that is not receiving the full services they need changed because of lack of funding to support mandates created under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The main problem that Orange County Schools faces with meeting this federal mandate is drawing funds from the regular education program. Funds are often taken from the regular education program to support the needs of special education students. Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance aims to provide the services all students need to be successful in meeting academic standards.

Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance plans to accomplish this goal by providing staff development to its practitioners, use the legislative process to seek adequate funding to provide these high quality services, and when necessary, support litigation to achieve these goals. Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance also encourages staff members, parents, advocates and organizations to get involved by using their voices and contact the local officials and hold them accountable for promises and mandates for which regular education and special needs children are entitled.

Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance is lead by an Executive Committee that is composed of Superintendents from different school districts across Orange County. The actual carrying out of the goals is the responsibility of the Review Committee. The Review Committee is comprised of five Superintendents regionally nominated, Orange County Schools' legal counsel, two private attorneys representing school districts in special education matters, two SELPA directors, and one business administrator. The Review Committee has been working hard for the past two years in order to try and meet the goals of the Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance. Even though the focus of the Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance is in the areas of legal and funding, it tries hard to work closely with teachers and staff members so that its members are informed about the needs of the schools at root levels.

Since the Orange County Schools' Special Education Alliance was created it has accomplish a great deal to meet the needs of the school districts across Orange County.

Stacy Andell is a staff writer for Schools K–12, providing free, in–depth reports on all U.S. public and private K–12 schools. For more information on Orange County schools visit



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