

On Target

Informing Indiana About Disability Issues
Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities
August 2009

Volume 22 Number 7

Tips for making it a great school year

All parents want their children to succeed. Patricia Howey, a Partners in Policymaking graduate who helps parents with special education services and disputes, offers 10 tips for parents of children with disabilities to help start the school year right.

- **Help with transitions.** Take your child to visit the new school or classroom before the first day of school.
- **Reread your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).** Do you understand what the teacher/school has agreed to provide? Is your child's IEP SMART (Specific, Measurable, Action words, Realistic and relevant and Time limited)?
- **Meet with your child's teacher.** Meet with the teacher to discuss your child's special needs. Take a picture of your child with you; teachers are more likely to take a personal interest in your child if they can put a face with a name.
- **Take extra copies of your child's IEP to the teacher meeting.** Leave a copy of your child's IEP with each teacher.
- **Make a list of important things about your child.** List the five most important things the teacher needs to know and explain why these things are vital to your child's success.
- **Prepare to deal with potential problems early.** You may need to explain why your child could fail if the teacher doesn't understand his/her unique needs or provide the necessary accommodations and supports in the classroom.
- **Resolve old concerns and issues.** If you have concerns not resolved during the last meeting, request another meeting to resolve these issues before your child begins to have problems.
- **Get a new assessment.** Test your child's skills early in the school year and use these scores as baseline data to compare with scores obtained at the end of the year.
- **Attend your school's open house.** In addition to giving you another chance to meet with your child's teachers, an open house gives parents an opportunity to learn classroom rules and ask questions.
- **Make a "contact log."** Use a notebook as a "contact log" to send messages to the teacher. Do not make your child the bearer of messages about problems at school.

"It is important for parents to be proactive when advocating for their child with a disability," said Howey. "Waiting until a problem occurs causes delays in a child's

education. When parents react, they tend to be more emotional. Learning to advocate without emotion is key to success.

“Special education law gives parents great power to make educational decisions for their children. Parents must learn to use this power wisely. Remember the old adage, ‘You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar’? Make this your motto!”

Howey is a member of the Wrightslaw Speakers Bureau and is an active member of the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA). To learn more, visit www.wrightslaw.com/howey/ask.htm.

Indianapolis receives \$25,000 award from NOD

Indianapolis was presented with the Accessible America Award by the National Organization on Disability (NOD) at the July 9, 2009, Access & Inclusion Awards, conducted by the Indianapolis Mayor’s Advisory Council on Disability. Nancy Starnes, vice president of NOD, presented the \$25,000 award, which will contribute to the city’s efforts to increase accessibility and inclusion.

“This award is a call for members of the Indianapolis community to continue their advocacy work. It’s an acknowledgment of the city’s progress, not an end to the efforts,” said Starnes.

The ceremony continued with the Mayor’s Advisory Council on Disability presenting three recipients with the following awards:

- Employer Award — Community Health Network
- Accessibility Award — CICOA Aging & In-Home Solutions
- James Pauley Lifetime Service Award — Janna Shisler

Higher education: plan + study = success

For high school juniors and seniors, it’s time to start considering life beyond graduation. Whether it be college, the workforce or other post-secondary training, planning ahead is crucial to success.

If you’re looking to continue your education, researching colleges or training programs that suit your expectations and desires is an important first step. Once you’ve narrowed your search to a few schools or programs, contact the disability services office at each school to find out what assistance is available for students with disabilities. If possible, visit the facilities and speak with administrators in person to get a sense of the school’s environment and academic structure.

It's also important to consider financial obligations and assistance. Generally, there are no federally funded scholarships or loan programs specifically available for students with disabilities. However, you may be eligible for local or regional scholarships established by not-for-profit or charitable organizations. Contact the financial aid offices at the colleges or education programs you're considering to ask about scholarships, including qualifications and deadlines.

Plan now to succeed later

Once you have selected a college or training program, there are a number of critical steps to consider. A program at the University of Washington called DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology) brings together individuals who are either preparing for college, participating in college or sharing their college experiences with youth who have disabilities. Through a series of interviews with mentors, scholars and ambassadors involved in the program, the University developed a list of preparation steps and suggested study skills and strategies that help students with disabilities transition from high school to higher education.

- **It all starts with classes.** Selecting appropriate courses is key to beginning a successful college career. Discuss class options with your academic advisor, disability services personnel or other faculty. Consider factors that could affect your learning, such as the class format, course requirements and the instructor's teaching style.
- **Develop a coursework roadmap for your academic career.** Complete classes required for graduation early in your program to avoid obstacles, such as scheduling conflicts or full classes, down the road.
- **Maintain contact with disability support services.** Continue to use the disability services office as a resource throughout your academic career.
- **Prepare for class in advance.** Try to obtain course syllabi and textbooks a couple of weeks before classes start.
- **Know your rights.** Students with disabilities in post-secondary education programs are protected from discrimination under Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act. This law affords protections to anyone with a disability who is enrolled in any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance.

Study tips and strategies

- Schedule a consistent study time each day, avoiding times when you're least alert, such as when you're tired or hungry.
- Choose a comfortable study environment that is quiet and free of distractions.
- Take part in study groups to clarify concepts and exchange ideas. Keep in mind these sessions should complement, not replace, personal study time.
- Use stolen moments of time, such as when you're riding on the bus or sitting in the waiting room at a doctor's office, to study or review materials.
- Before you dive into reading a text, scan the material and look at the pictures, graphs and headings. Look up unfamiliar vocabulary words in the glossary or a dictionary. If available, read the chapter summary and any provided study questions.

- When reading and studying, mark or highlight important information. Then go back and jot down notes about the information you marked.
- Read in short time blocks to retain more information, and take study breaks to recharge your brain.
- Contact your professor right away when you need help. Don't wait until you fall behind or fail a class.

President's initiative for Americans with disabilities

On June 22, President Obama recognized the 10th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.* by launching "The Year of Community Living," a new effort to assist Americans with disabilities.

Obama is challenging Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sibelius and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan to identify ways to improve access to housing, community supports and independent living arrangements.

As part of this effort, Sibelius and Donovan announced several new initiatives including: enhanced interagency coordination; public listening sessions; and 4,000 Section 8 housing vouchers targeted to non-elderly persons with disabilities and individuals with disabilities transitioning from institutions to the community.

These new initiatives make it easier for people with disabilities and their families to learn about and access health and long-term care options through the Aging and Disability Resource Center Program, which provides information, counseling and access to services that enable people to remain in their homes and communities.

"I am proud to launch this initiative to reaffirm my administration's commitment to vigorous enforcement of civil rights for Americans with disabilities and to ensuring the fullest inclusion of all people in the life of our nation," said President Obama.

Since the 1999 *Olmstead* ruling, many individuals have successfully transitioned to community settings, but waiting lists for community services have grown considerably and many individuals are not able to obtain them.

In response, the Obama administration provided more than \$140 million in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for independent living centers across the country.

Supreme Court strengthens parents' rights under IDEA

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), parents are now entitled to seek reimbursement for sending their child to a private school, regardless of whether the child previously received special education services through a local public school. In *Forest Grove School District v. T.A.*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled by a 6-3 vote that

parents in Oregon could be reimbursed for their son's private schooling because he was denied special education by the local public school.

The IDEA requires public school districts to reimburse families for private schooling if the public school cannot offer a "free, appropriate" education that meets the student's needs. In this case, school officials tested the child and said he did not have a disability. However, the parents were later told by outside experts that their son had attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

In 1997, Congress limited reimbursements for parents who moved their child to a private school without notifying public officials. In common situations, parents and schools who disagree about a child with a disability's education must go through a series of appeals to resolve their differences. In this case, the parents enrolled their son in a private school without conferring with the public school.

The Supreme Court ruled in the parents favor and said the limited reimbursement provision does not apply to cases in which public officials refuse to offer special education to a child with a disability.

New IDEA Web site offers valuable resources

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has created a Web site to provide a one-stop shop for resources related to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and its regulations. The Web site, <http://idea.ed.gov>, provides:

- Searchable IDEA regulations
- Access to additional laws and regulations (i.e., No Child Left Behind Act, Family Education Rights and Privacy Act)
- Video clips, webcasts, dialogue guides, and questions and answers on selected topics
- Links to OSEP's Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network
- IDEA training modules, including presentations to use in training sessions, detailed discussions for trainers and audience handouts
- Information on major issues including discipline, disproportionality, early intervention services, evaluation, funding, individualized education programs, monitoring, statewide and district-wide assessments and more.

The IDEA ensures services to children with disabilities by governing how states and public agencies provide early intervention and special education to children and youth with disabilities.

Of Note

Free college guidebook

A free publication is now available to help Indiana students and their families plan for college. The Indiana Institute's Center on Community Living and Careers recently released "Is College for You? Setting Goals and Taking Action" as a guidebook for high school students considering college. To obtain a copy, contact Susan Harris at skharris@indiana.edu or Sherry Redman at sredman@indiana.edu. Or, call (812) 855-6508 or (812) 855-9396 (TTY).

Governor's Council seeking board applicants

The Governor's Council for People with Disabilities is accepting board membership applications. If you are a person with a disability, a family member of someone with a disability or a community leader, you are encouraged to apply. Board members are appointed by the governor and are responsible for attending quarterly meetings, as well as keeping informed of disability-related issues and public policy affecting people with disabilities. For an application or more information, contact Brenda Wade at bwade@gpcpd.org or (317) 232-7770 (voice/TT).

Deadline extended for Council leadership award

The Governor's Council is accepting nominations until Sept. 7, 2009, for its annual Community Spirit Awards competition, including the Distinguished Leadership Award. Nominate a person with a disability or a parent of a child with a disability who you feel conducts exemplary advocacy work to better the lives of people with disabilities. Nominations are also being accepted for the Disability Awareness Month Campaign Award. To nominate an individual or group, visit www.in.gov/gpcpd and click on the Community Spirit Awards logo. Nominations must be postmarked no later than Sept. 7.

Save the date!

The 2009 Conference for People with Disabilities, themed "Invest in People and Share in the Profits," will take place Monday, Nov. 16, and Tuesday, Nov. 17, at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Indianapolis. Look for more details in future issues of "On Target."

On Target is a monthly publication of the Indiana Governor's Council for People with Disabilities. We welcome your suggestions for newsletter content and ideas concerning the actions of the Council. on target is made available in accessible formats upon request.