



Statewide Parent
Advocacy Network

SPAN

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SPAN's Policy Regarding SPAN STAFF/ Resource Parents Attending Meetings/Mediations/Due Process

The mission of the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network is to empower families and inform and involve professionals and other individuals interested in the healthy development and education of children. Our foremost commitment is to children with the greatest need due to disability; poverty; discrimination based on race, sex, language, or immigrant status; geographic location, or other special circumstances.

SPAN encourages parents to empower themselves by becoming educated in order to effectively advocate for their own children and family. Toward this end, SPAN offers telephone and email technical assistance, workshops, printed materials, access to an award-winning website, and a bi-annual conference. Because our goal is to empower families to advocate on their own behalf, SPAN *does not* generally accompany parents to IEP meetings, mediation conferences and/or due process hearings, *except in extraordinary circumstances*. In addition, SPAN has insufficient financial and personnel resources to accompany significant numbers of families to meetings.* For example, we received well over 50,000 telephone calls last year from families seeking technical assistance. Many of those families requested support at their IEP meetings, mediations, and/or due process hearings. Further, SPAN's funding sources do not fund us to provide this service to families except in limited circumstances and under certain projects, including:

- Community Education Program (CEP) – provides intensive support and case management for families residing in East Orange, Irvington, Newark, and Orange (urban communities in Essex County) who have multiple issues involving several public agencies, require a great amount of technical assistance and support, and may have disabilities or limited literacy skills.
- Parents Place/ Club de Padres (Multilingual Center in Paterson) – provides ongoing support and case management to immigrant families who have limited English proficiency in Paterson, Passaic, and other high-immigrant communities in NE NJ.
- Special Child Health Services (SCHS) – single point of entry into the state case management system for children with special health care needs and disabilities. SPAN Family Resource Specialists housed at these Case Management Units provide education and health-related case management and support for families whose children are registered with the SCHS Case Management Unit and who are referred to them for assistance by SCHS Case managers.
- SPAN Resource Parent (SRP) Volunteer Program – trained individuals who volunteer to help families located in their own communities. SRPs *may* accompany parents to meetings, based on their level of expertise, work schedule and/or other commitments. The majority of SRPs provide telephone technical assistance only. (*Most SRPs work full-time and have their own children with special needs*).

Families who receive intensive in-person TA generally will have two or more of the following features: immigrant or limited English proficient; parent with limited literacy or a disability; child involved in multiple systems (education, health, mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice); and/or low-income. **These examples translate into a relatively small number of families who are able to access in person- support at meetings, mediations, or hearings by SPAN staff or volunteers. SPAN's website provides multiple resources and SPAN workshops are conducted throughout the state to support and empower families.**

*The agencies federally funded to provide representation to families include Disability Rights NJ (800-922-7233 or 609-292-9742) and the Education Law Center (973-624-1815). Each agency has specific eligibility requirements.

Our Mission: To empower families and inform and involve professionals and other individuals interested in the healthy development and educational rights of children, to enable all children to become fully participating and contributing members of our communities and society.