

QUICK FACTS

Developing Your Parent Leadership Skills and Knowledge

Parents of children with disabilities do not need to have a college degree or work experience in the education field to be involved in school improvement efforts or to provide input on special education matters impacting their children. To build confidence and abilities to effectively advocate for change, parents need to be actively involved in groups and activities that support their parent leadership skills and knowledge. Here are some suggestions.

District Level:

- ☀ Join your local **Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG)**. Every school district in New Jersey is required to have a SEPAG. A SEPAG is an advisory group that provides an opportunity to create systemic change to improve outcomes for students with disabilities and their families.
[Find your group](#)
- ☀ Get involved in your local **Parent Teacher Organization, Parent Teacher Association, and Board of Education** to stay informed on current issues and decisions impacting families in your community. Speak out on behalf of students with disabilities in your community for services, for inclusion, against budget cuts, etc.
- ☀ Participate in or provide input to **various committees** in your child's school district. Examples include the School Climate Committee, Health and Safety Committee, Title 1 Advisory Committee, Bilingual Parent Advisory Committee, Early Childhood Advisory Committee, etc.

County Level:

- ☀ Get involved in the [County Council for Young Children \(CCYC\)](#) to partner with other parents, service providers, and community leaders to positively impact the health, education, and well-being of children from pregnancy/birth to age 8.
- ☀ Connect with [Regional Family Support Planning Council \(RFSPC\)](#) in your area and add your voice to improve state systems that serve people with disabilities.
- ☀ Connect with [Center for Independent Living \(CIL\)](#) in your county for information and referral, skills training, advocacy, and other services for individuals with disabilities.

State Level:

- ☀ Enroll in the [New Jersey Partners in Policymaking](#) leadership development and advocacy education program to learn how to advocate for people with disabilities in our state, to become an effective member of advisory boards and committees, and to work alongside policymakers and state agencies to create meaningful change.
- ☀ Attend the [New Jersey State Board of Education](#) meetings to provide comments on proposed rules to implement state education law.

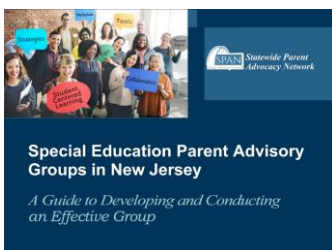
- ☀ Attend the [State Special Education Advisory Council \(SSEAC\)](#) meetings to learn about the latest state initiatives related to students with disabilities and comment publicly on proposed rules and regulations.

SPAN Resources:

- ☀ Contact **SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)** for information and resources as well as individual assistance to build your parent leadership and advocacy skills. Call 1-800-654-SPAN (7726) or visit <https://spanadvocacy.org/>
- ☀ Attend **SPAN** workshops to learn about special education and how to be a more effective advocate across multiple systems that serve children and families. Check [What's Happening @ SPAN](#) for upcoming events or [subscribe to SPAN News You Can Use](#) for weekly updates on current SPAN workshop offerings.
- ☀ Connect with the [START-Engaging Parents of Students with Disabilities in Schools \(START-EPSD\) Project](#) for resources and assistance with starting or developing your group. Read the [New Jersey's SEPAG Guide](#).
- ☀ Join your regional [Special Education Parent Leader Facebook Group](#) to connect with other parent leaders and SEPAG members.
- ☀ [Subscribe to SPAN Parent Leadership E-news](#) to receive quarterly updates on best practices in family engagement.
- ☀ Complete the [SPAN Resource Parent \(SRP\)](#) training program to understand your rights and responsibilities under federal and state laws and to learn effective skills and strategies to advocate for appropriate services for children and youth with disabilities.
- ☀ Become a [Special Education Volunteer Advocate \(SEVA\)](#) to mentor families of students with disabilities in building their own advocacy knowledge and skills during their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings.

Additional Resources:

- ☀ Read:
 - ☀ [Parental Rights in Special Education \(PRISE\)](#) Booklet,
 - ☀ [New Jersey Administrative Code 6A:14 Special Education](#) and
 - ☀ New Jersey Education Law Center's ["The Right to Special Education in New Jersey: A Guide for Advocates."](#)
- ☀ Contact your school district's director of special education, [county education office](#), or [SPAN](#) if you need help understanding your rights in special education.



For a complete guide to starting and supporting a SEPAG in your school, district or community, visit the START-EPSD Project web-page (bit.ly/startepsd) and/or connect with a Parent Group Specialist in your region.

Access the SEPAG Guide: tiny.cc/SEPAGguideEnglish

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