

Why Your PTA Needs a Special Education Representative

While it is the prerogative of each local PTA unit to decide which committees it needs, each board should strongly consider appointing a special education representative or committee chair to represent the substantial proportion of students who receive special education services. The issues faced by the families of those students are extremely diverse and complicated. Very few parents who have not personally dealt with special education understand the implications of acronyms such as IEP, IDEA, FBA, BIP, ABA, *etc.* In order for your PTA to serve all parents and students in your school community, at least one member of the board must be familiar with and respond to the concerns of parents of special education students.

A special education representative or committee chair will help ensure your PTA can provide the following necessary member services:

- Ensure that PTA events are inclusive and accessible, both physically and socially, to all students and parents.
- Provide resources to parents who are new to the special education process or who need additional support as they negotiate the system.
- Educate parents of students in general education about special education.
- Help parents of special education students form working partnerships with the school staff. The IEP (Individualized Education Plan) process, like any negotiation, brings together parties with very different perspectives who may not always agree. The PTA should actively foster avenues of effective, open communication.
- Provide opportunities for parents to become involved in constructive ways that benefit the school as a whole. Parents who actively contribute to their school community achieve a more positive perspective on their children's educational experience.
- Make the PTA relevant to all parents and students. PTAs must be willing to consider the difficult issues faced by the parents they represent and respond with understanding and assistance.
- Welcome all parents served by your PTA. Parents of students who attend a special program at your school, but who come from a different base school, may not think of joining the PTA unless they are specifically invited. Others may have become alienated from their own neighborhood because of their children's circumstances and may need to be drawn back into the PTA fold.

Parents of typical students may not understand the advantages of inclusion of children with disabilities. Such parents may be unaware of the value of differentiated instruction

to all students in a classroom. In addition, they may not have considered the importance of early socialization with typical peers for creating productive members of society. Special education services are mandated by federal laws that exist to ensure that all students benefit from their public education. The PTA plays a crucial role in building a community in which all children achieve their life goals.