



Connecticut Parent

M A G A Z I N E

September 2018 | FREE

**Special Education
Strategies**

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Special Education Strategies for the New School Year

by Atty. Jeffrey L. Forte

The shelves of local stores everywhere are emptying fast as parents complete their last-minute “Back to School” shopping spree, with cute backpacks and new sneakers high on their agenda. For parents of children with special needs, however, the priorities at the beginning of a new school year may look a bit different.

For some parents, the beginning of the academic year is already kicking off with Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings — meetings that you have been planning for months, and waiting to schedule all summer. As a parent of a child with special needs, you must prepare thoroughly. Here are a few pointers to help parents obtain the most helpful and advantageous special education strategies for their children.

Be sure to request your child’s school records. In particular, be certain to request any evaluations, progress reports and proposed goals and objectives well in advance of the IEP meeting. These documents can be cumbersome, and you will need sufficient time to review all the details and have time to dissect the information provided. Request that the documents be provided to you at least three to five days prior to the IEP meeting.

Consult with your outside community service providers regarding the information supplied. It is important to get their input on the results of the evaluations and any proposed goals and objectives. It is completely appropriate for you to get a second opinion from experts who know your child best.

Organize your child’s education records. It is best to create a binder to quickly access information that may be relevant to the decision-making process at an IEP meeting. It is a new school year, so this means a new binder with current information about your child’s education. This binder will come in handy when preparing for an IEP meeting or when discussing your case with outside experts, or perhaps with a special education attorney.

Communication with your child’s IEP team should never be limited to just the annual review. Be proactive and establish effective methods of communicating with your child’s IEP team on a regular basis right from the beginning of each school year and, of course, at your child’s annual review.

As a parent, you are a member of the school team and as such should be actively and thoroughly informed about your child’s education on an

ongoing basis. It is important to promote effective communication with your child’s IEP team:

- Establish a daily or weekly home and school communication log (via electronic student portal or on paper). The communication log is a method for school team members to broadly share information about the learning, social and physical activities your child participated in across the school day (including services delivered by special service providers). As a parent, you should participate in the development of the communication log so that it captures the information that is important to you.

- Set up regular parent meetings (monthly or quarterly depending upon your child’s level of need) with your IEP team. Parent meetings can serve multiple functions, but generally speaking can be a time for team members to share information about your child’s progress, discuss ways to promote the generalization of acquired skills in the home/community setting, share and review data, troubleshoot and discuss changes in the home setting, to name a few.

- Effectively communicating with your IEP team also means that you should be prepared to participate in the discussion about your child’s progress and/or evaluations. This means you will need to formally request (in writing) that you receive any progress reports, evaluations, data, or related documents that will be reviewed at your child’s IEP meeting ahead of time. This is a critical request and one that should be done before each and every IEP meeting.

- Be sure to always formally request any methods of communication at an IEP meeting to be included on the IEP. Remember, if it is not included on the IEP, then it is likely not to happen. Parents often make the mistake of not formally making these requests, and leave the IEP meeting without a clear

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solution to the communication issue. It is important to not only clearly share the concern with the IEP team with regards to communication, but also propose a solution by making a formal request to include the solution (e.g., communication log, parent meeting, data review meeting, etc.) on the IEP.

• If you have a concern, question, or simply something to share with your school team about your child, do not hesitate to contact them. It is critical to your child's education and overall wellbeing that you establish an open line of communication.

In my experience, some families have expressed frustration with establishing effective methods of communication with their IEP team or have encountered other stumbling blocks preventing the smooth application of special education services. If this is your case, then do not hesitate to contact an outside advocate to discuss how you can move forward with promoting effective communication methods with your child's IEP team, and making sure your child receives the education to which he or she is entitled by law. ♥

Attorney Jeffrey L. Forte is certified in special education advocacy. For more information visit www.fortelawgroup.com, (203) 257-7999. Forte Law Group is one of only a very few law firms within Connecticut that is dedicated to exclusively representing families and children with special needs.



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Contact: Carrie Hartman, M.S., BCBA & Licensed Behavior Analyst, Clinical Coordinator, ACES Behavior Services and Autism Programs
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Ben Bronz Academy is a day school for students with learning disabilities in grades 2-12 offering a full-time State of Connecticut Approved Private Special Education Program. The academy provides a ratio of approximately one teacher for every three students. The program is based on Mediated Learning, an educational approach that develops strong thinking habits and problem solving skills. Ben Bronz Academy provides remedial help along with regular classes. Students benefit from a full eight hour day of academics only. Our goal is to help each student return to his/her home school or district as soon as possible. Ben Bronz Academy is located at 11 Wampanoag Drive in West Hartford. For more information, call 860-236-5807 or visit www.benbronzacademy.org.



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Constellation Health Services is located at 14 Westport Avenue in Norwalk and 240 Indian River Road in Orange. For more information, call 203-663-6742 or visit their website at www.constellationhs.com.



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