



TABLE TALK

Statewide updates for children & families from
The Arc of New Jersey

Welcome to the Table Talk newsletter from The Arc of New Jersey's Children's Advocacy Program. Our April edition is filled with valuable advocacy resources as well as exciting opportunities and experiences for your family. For more information, please visit our [webpage](#).



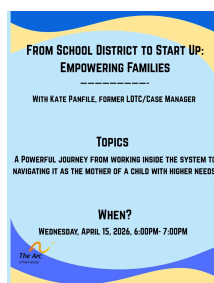
Advocacy with Adara on Facebook Live Update

Season three is back! Don't forget to view our archived episodes on Facebook.

New to the series? Each episode offers a friendly 10-15 minute chat on special education or services for children with IDD and their families. Tune in every other Monday during the school year at 12 pm on our Facebook page. No sign-ups needed, just drop by, watch, and don't forget to share your thoughts in the comments. We look forward to having you join us!

[Follow us on Facebook](#)

Upcoming Webinars



From School Districts to Start Ups: Empowering Families

Join us on April 15th at 6:00 pm- What happens when professional expertise meets personal experience? In this inspiring and practical webinar, a former LDT/C and school district case manager, Kate Panfile, shares her powerful journey from working



Self Advocacy Panel with the New Jersey Self Advocacy Program

May 22nd at 11:00 am- Join Erin Smithers, Director of the New Jersey Self-

inside the system to navigating it as the mother of a child with higher needs — and ultimately building a business dedicated to supporting and empowering parents of children with autism. Drawing from both her professional background and lived experience, she offers a unique behind-the-scenes perspective on special education, IEP advocacy, and what truly makes a difference for families. Attendees will hear one family's story and how their struggles manifested into the creation of a business whose mission is to redefine autism and to support and educate families. Whether you're new to the autism journey or looking to strengthen your advocacy skills, this session will leave you informed, encouraged, and empowered with practical tools you can use right away.

[Register Here](#)

Advocacy Project, and a panel of self advocates for an empowering session on the importance of speaking up, getting involved, and making your voice heard. Erin will share an overview of the NJ Self-Advocacy Project and how it supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in becoming confident self-advocates. Learn how taking an active role in your own life and in your community can lead to greater independence, stronger connections, and lasting impact. Whether you're just starting your advocacy journey or looking to take it to the next level, this session will inspire and inform.

[Sign Up Here](#)

Upcoming Events

Family Advocacy Opportunity

In conjunction with The Arc of the United States, we are looking for families who have filed Federal Office of Civil Rights complaints and have experienced significant wait times. If you would like to share your experience, please fill out this [survey](#).



INTERN Q&A

The Arc
of New Jersey

Welcome, Jake!
Children's Advocacy Program Intern,
Spring 2026



Jake Conrad, Montclair State University

Tell us a little bit about yourself! What led you to the CHAD program at Montclair? What are your hobbies and interests?

I am a senior at Montclair State University studying Child Advocacy and Policy. Starting out, I was very passionate about social work and helping others but was unsure of the population. After getting a position as a volunteer wrestling coach, my former high school, I realized how much I enjoyed working with children. This prompted me to switch from social work to child advocacy and policy where I still am today and hope to finish my bachelors degree this May. Outside of working, I enjoy wrestling and being outdoors for activities such as hiking and biking. I also love working on cars and getting my hands dirty with various projects around the house.

What has been the most rewarding part of your internship?

Getting to see a marginalized population get the services they need, taking stress off the shoulders of families, making true connections with everyone we work with.

What's the most difficult part?

Working through misinformation and various systems looking to take advantage of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The responsibility when working with a family that has nowhere to turn to.

What are your future goals? Do you see yourself working in an advocacy-related field?

My future goal is to become a school social worker so I can help to create a plan for students struggling in the classroom. I hope to better represent students and create strong relationships with their families to ensure they are receiving the services they need. I believe that childhood is the most impactful part of life and all children deserve and equal opportunity for education as well as the supports included in the school system.

fAMILY

MEET JORDAN EDMOND

Parent Advocate of the Month

April 2026

WHAT MADE YOU ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION?

The tip of the iceberg was when the aftercare administrators labeled our 3 year old as aggressive—even after repeatedly correcting the harmful rhetoric—and then finding out other families faced similar exclusionary treatment with after care in my particular town. My last straw was the lack of accountability allowed by the broken system.



WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE OTHER FAMILIES ADVOCATING FOR THEIR CHILD'S RIGHTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION?

Talk to other parents. See if parents in your orbit have experienced what you are going through and ask for advice. With so much information on the internet, word of mouth really helps here. Also, if you feel comfortable, see if anyone in your children's class is experiencing the same thing. When it comes to addressing administration, there is often even more power in numbers.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES?

Having a child advocate has been super helpful. And speaking to other parents (who oftentimes suggested a parent advocate) is also helpful. You're not alone.



WHAT DOES BEING YOUR CHILD'S BEST ADVOCATE MEAN TO YOU?

It means speaking up for our child and other children like him. It also means, doing the best I can, and asking for help, feedback, and support from others. You go further when you have a team.



Paterson Fire Dept. to Host Autism Acceptance Touch-A-Truck Event and Carnival

We Can Do That! Challenge

Join our social media campaign with Community Access Unlimited (CAU) with a 5 to 10 second video featuring individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities teachers, parents and guardians showing off their talents and showing what they can do!

Click [here](#) to send us your video!

The Paterson Fire Department, in partnership with the Binder Autism Center, will host an Autism Acceptance Touch-A-Truck Event and Carnival at Pennington Park later this month, offering families hands-on experiences with fire trucks, equipment, and a variety of activities. The event will take place April 23 and 24 from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m., and April 25 from noon to 10 p.m. A special Touch-A-Truck event at Fire Headquarters, 300 McBride Ave., is scheduled for Saturday, April 25, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., rain or shine. Read full article [here](#).

Want to show the world exactly what people with disabilities can do when entering adulthood?

Join our social media campaign with Community Access Unlimited (CAUNJ.ORG) with 5-10-second videos featuring teachers, parents, guardians, and especially individuals with developmental disabilities showing off their talents and showing what you can do!

Some examples include:

"I can ride the bus!"
 "I can create a sculpture with clay!"
 "I can take a college class!"

Send in your WE CAN DO THAT! to helpdesk@planningforadulthood.org

Join us at PALS Programs

PALS New York
 • June 14 - June 20
 • Fordham University
 • Ages 18-30

PALS New Jersey
 • June 21 - June 27
 • TCNJ
 • Ages 12-30

PALS Boston
 • July 5 - July 11
 • Stonehill College
 • Ages 12-30

About PALS Programs
 PALS Programs creates inclusive camp experiences for individuals with and without Down syndrome. Our volunteer led programs change attitudes, transform lives, and inspire a world of belonging.

Summer 2026
 Our program pairs individuals with and without Down syndrome together for a week of new adventures, while learning more about themselves and others as they build transformative friendships. Participants spend a full week together (7 days, 6 nights) living in dorms, participating in on-campus activities, and taking on attractions in the local area. The cost is \$2300 for one week, and tuition support is available.

www.palsprograms.org 267-477-7257

PALS Summer Camp

PALS Programs mission is to create inclusive camp experience for people with an without Down Syndrome. Their volunteer-led program changes attitudes, transforms lives, and inspires a world of belonging. Learn more [here](#).

The Great College Fair

April 22nd at 5:30 PM- Please join The Arc of New Jersey's Planning for Adult Life (PFAL) and The Arc of Monmouth at this wonderful in person event. Dinner will be provided. Representatives and current students from NJ college transition programs will be available to answer all of your questions about postsecondary education. Click [here](#) to register.

Join Planning for Adult Life for
The Great College Fair

- ✓ Talk to professors and students
- ✓ Come when you want. stay as long as you like!
- ✓ Figure out which schools and programs work for YOU
- ✓ Dinner and swag
- ✓ For more information and to register. click here or scan below!

A LIVE EVENT!
Wednesday, April 22, 5:30-7:30pm
 at The Arc of Monmouth
 1158 Wayside Rd, Tinton Falls, NJ 07712



Special Education Resources

To learn more about the special education process and current issues, take some time to explore the resources below. Gaining a deeper understanding of the process can help us better support students with disabilities. Click the links for helpful information

and guidance.

- [Little Falls Parents Raise Concerns Over IEP Support, Literacy Services and Nurse](#)
- [School District Employees Fired After Special Education Concerns, Lawsuit Says](#)
- [Sherrill Budget Will Propose Record K-12 School Funding as NJ Stares Down \\$3B Deficit](#)
- [Paying for Special Education](#)
- [Key Definitions in IDEA: A Reference List](#)



CSOC Summer Camp Application & Information

Are you looking for an inclusive summer camp experience for your child? The Children's System of Care (CSOC) summer camp application is open! CSOC application click [here](#).

Please check out these resources from The Arc of New Jersey's Family Institute:

[A Guide for Families](#)
[CSOC Summer Camp Services Checklist](#)



Summer EBT is a Federal Child Nutrition Program that provides qualifying families with a one-time \$120 EBT card per eligible child to help purchase groceries during the summer. Eligible students will receive a new Summer EBT card each year!

Remember, Summer EBT benefits have a strict time limit. Eligible Families who receive Summer EBT funds have 122 days (approximately 4 months) to use their benefits. If benefits are not used within the 122-day time period, the funds will be returned to the federal government and cannot be reissued.

Dual participation in the Summer EBT program is prohibited. This means that children may not receive multiple benefit allotments from the same State, or from more than one State, each summer.

To see if your child is eligible to receive a NJ Summer EBT benefit card this summer, use the Summer EBT Student Eligibility Look-Up Tool.

HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT:	WHO DO I CONTACT?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activating My Card My Summer EBT Balance Changing My PIN Reporting a Lost, Stolen, or Damaged Card Request a Replacement Card Lock/Unlock My Card 	EBT Card Customer Service 1-800-997-3333 ConnectEBT Mobile App Available on Apple and Android/Google	EBT Connect Create Parent 1-800-997-3333
If your child attends a participating school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My Child's Eligibility Status The Address Where My Card Was Mailed The Date of Birth Listed for My Child 	Scan Here to Confirm Your Child's Eligibility Or Call Your Child's School to Confirm Eligibility	
If your child <u>does not</u> attend a participating school or is home-schooled and between the ages of 6-18: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My Child's Eligibility Status The Address Where My Card Was Mailed The Date of Birth Listed for My Child 	Scan Here to Confirm Your Child's Eligibility Or Email: ENJSummerEBT@aai.gov	
To Opt Out (Decline Receiving Summer EBT Benefits)	Scan the QR code to Find the "Opt Out" Form And Click This Button to Opt Out	

Summer EBT is Back!

Summer EBT is a federal child nutrition program that provides qualifying families with a one time \$120 EBT card per eligible child to help purchase groceries during the summer. Eligible students will receive a new card each year. Learn more [here](#).



Take Action! Cuts to Special Education are Happening NOW

The rights of students with disabilities are at serious risk following cuts to the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), which enforces IDEA and supports youth with disabilities. Without proper enforcement, states may neglect their responsibilities, putting millions of students in jeopardy. Tell Congress to protect OSERS—students with disabilities can't afford to lose these critical services.

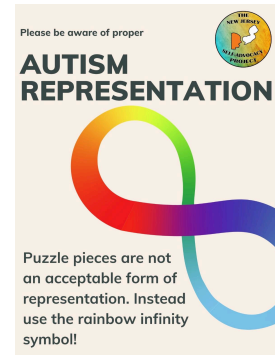
Click [here](#) to email your lawmakers!

'Perfect Storm of Awful'

Families have made almost 3,000 requests for information about an agency that's supposed to help students. Parents and some legislators are saying that the state Office of Special Education doesn't function as it should. Many families don't know that the office even exists and when they do, they say their investigation requests are brushed off. Read full article [here](#).

In Honor of Autism Awareness Month

Autism Awareness Month, observed each April, is dedicated to increasing understanding and acceptance of people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). It highlights the importance of inclusion, support, and celebrating neurodiversity in our communities. The month also encourages education and advocacy to help create a more accessible and accepting world for everyone.





Here's an [article](#) from Kids Included Together highlighting the importance of understanding and celebrating invisible disabilities.

In this [article](#) by Behavioral Innovations, you can read about 20 famous people with Autism.

Children's Advocacy Zoom Office Hours

Do you have questions about your student's IEP or 504 plan? Do you need help getting started? Join us on Thursday, May 18th from 12-2 pm. Due to the anticipated volume of participants, we will be offering 20 minute sessions with Adara Hellmann, Director of Children's Advocacy. Sessions will be granted on a first-come, first-served basis, ensuring we can accommodate as many families as possible.



Please scan the QR Code to register!

732-248-4897 education@arcnj.org



Children's Advocacy Virtual Office Hours

Virtual office hours are here to stay! Due to anticipated volume, sessions will be limited to 20 minutes and given on a first come, first served basis to ensure that we can accommodate as many families as possible.

Upcoming Virtual Office Hours:

April 16th, 23rd, & 30th 12-2 pm
May 7th, 14th, & 28th 12-2 pm

[Click to sign up](#)



Missed our kick off meeting? No worries- we still have room!

Are you a teen or young adult with a disability who's passionate about making a difference? We invite you to become part of our Youth Advisory Board — this is a space where your voice matters!

Our board will meet monthly, with our first information sessions kicking off in the new year. Together, we'll focus on building advocacy and leadership skills, and influencing systems that truly support youth with disabilities.

By joining, you will:

- Gain confidence in self-advocacy and community leadership.
- Collaborate with other motivated peers.
- Provide valuable input to improve resources and initiatives for youth with disabilities.

Come learn, lead, and make your voice heard. Your perspective can help create real change! Our March Meetings are scheduled for:

Teen Advisory Council (ages 14-17): Tuesday May 12th at 6:00 pm

Young Adult Council I: Tuesday May 12th at 7:00 pm

Young Adult Council II: Wednesday May 13th at 1:30 pm*

**ideal for transition classes!*

To join our Youth Advisory Board, please fill out this [form](#).

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter from The Arc of New Jersey's Children's Advocacy Program. You are encouraged to share this information with others who may also be interested. However, if you are forwarding this email, please delete the "unsubscribe" link at the bottom of this page. If you do not remove the "unsubscribe" option and a person who receives your forwarded email clicks "unsubscribe," it would result in *your name* being removed from our distribution list. Happy Sharing!



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