



# 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 March edition is filled with valuable advocacy resources as well as exciting opportunities and experiences for your family. For more information, please visit our [webpage](#).



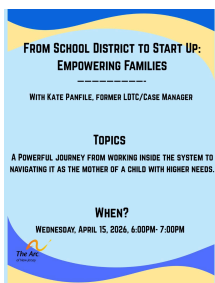
## Advocacy with Adara on Facebook Live Update

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 LDTC and school district case manager, Kate Panfile, shares her powerful journey from working inside the system to navigating it as the mother of a



### 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-Advocacy Project, and a panel of self

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](#)

advocates for an empowering session on the importance of speaking up, getting involved, and making your voice heard.

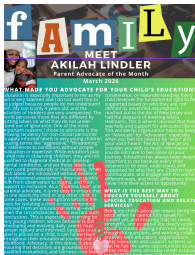
Erin will share an overview of the NJ Self-Advocacy Project and how it supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in becoming confident self-advocates. Learn how taking an active role in your own life and in your community can lead to greater independence, stronger connections, 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](#).



## Parent Advocate of the Month

The Children's Advocacy Program at The Arc of New Jersey has launched a new spotlight segment called Parent Advocate of the Month. This feature will recognize parents who go above and beyond in advocating for their children and supporting other families navigating services, education, and resources. We look forward to sharing their stories and celebrating the impact of parent advocacy throughout New Jersey. Click [here](#) to read more about Akilah and the journey with her son, Abdou.



## Special Quest After School Program

Looking for an after school program for your child? Join The Arc of Bergen & Passaic's. This program is jam packed full of ideas to keep your child busy until pick up! Learn more [here](#).

## 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!

Send your video to [helpdesk@planningforadulthood.org](mailto:helpdesk@planningforadulthood.org)

### 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](mailto:helpdesk@planningforadulthood.org)



## Federal Autism Advisory Board Cancels First Public Meeting Since Overhaul

A federal committee that advises scientists, health agencies, and Congress on autism policy has canceled its first public meeting since new members were appointed earlier this year. The Interagency Autism Coordinating Committee was scheduled to meet March 19, but a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services said the meeting will not take place and no reason was provided. The cancellation comes amid controversy over new appointments by Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Continue reading [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.

## 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.


- [EPIC: Building Inclusive Futures](#)
- [Comparing the Placement of Students with Disabilities 3-21](#)
- [Paterson, NJ Special Needs Student Allegedly Given Hot Sauce by Teacher as Discipline](#)
- [The Most Prevalent Disability in Classrooms may be FASD](#)
- [Student Digital Wellness NJ](#)
- [Mastering Self-Disclosure: An Essential Skill](#)



### Sherrill names Texas Official as Education Commissioner

Lily Laux, a former senior official at the Texas Education Agency, has been selected by New Jersey Governor-elect Mikie Sherrill to serve as the state’s next Commissioner of Education. Laux previously spent seven years as Deputy Commissioner of School Programs in Texas and has also held leadership roles with Teach For America. Sherrill said Laux’s experience will help strengthen schools statewide and expand programs such as mental health services and high-impact tutoring. Read full article [here](#).

**NVLL CHALLENGER LEAGUE**  
PLAYER REGISTRATION  
2026 SEASON



**Place:**  
North Vineyard Little League Clubhouse  
Dr. Charles Cunningham Park  
North West Avenue and West Road  
Vineyard, NJ 08360

**Registration Dates & Times:**  
By Person:  
Saturday: March 7th, & 14th 2:30 to 4:00  
Wednesday: March 4th, & 11th 6:30pm to 8pm  
On Line:  
Go to [www.VineyardRotary.org](http://www.VineyardRotary.org), click Challenger League tab at top of page, print Vineyard Program Registration Form and Personal Contact Form, photo release form and email completed forms to [lvll@comcast.net](mailto:lvll@comcast.net). Forms can also be mailed to Vineyard Challenger League at 3637 Oak Road, Vineyard NJ 08360. All completed registration forms should be received not later than Wednesday March 19th.

**Registration Fees:**  
Registration is free for all participants of the challenger league.

**Divisions and Ages:**  
Challenger Division: Ages 5 years to 18 years of age.  
Senior Division: Ages 15 years of age and older.  
Season opens Saturday April 11th with games at 10:00 and 11:30

**Eligibility and Requirements:**  
Any physically or mentally challenged boys and girls are eligible to participate. All participants must bring proof of age and those under 18 must have a parent/guardian present during registration. There is no age limit for the senior division.

**Demographic Information:**  
Players can live in Cumberland, Salem, Gloucester, Cape May or Atlantic Counties.

**General Information:**  
For additional information please call: Joe (609)381-0450  
or  
Visit the Vineyard Rotary Website at:  
[www.vineyardrotary.org/challenger-league](http://www.vineyardrotary.org/challenger-league)

NVLL is sanctioned by the City of Vineyard Recreation Commission. The City does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, age, sex, marital status, familial status, religion, affectional or sexual orientation, physical handicap or disability, genetic information, disability, liability for service in the United States Armed Forces or any other classification protected by Federal or State Law.

### NVLL Challenger League Player Registration

It's that time again! If you're in Cumberland, Salem, Gloucester, Cape May, or Atlantic Counties get ready to play ball. This league is free for people between the ages of 5 and 18 that have a physical or intellectual disability. Sign up [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!

Dare to Dream Student Leadership Conferences Spring 2026

In Honor of Disability Awareness and Women's History Month

The New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education is sponsoring regional conferences that highlight strategies and information to promote self-advocacy skills for middle and high school students. Each conference will feature keynote presentations from accomplished students and young adults with disabilities who have demonstrated exemplary self-advocacy and leadership skills. Read and sign up [here](#).



March is both Women's History Month and Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, a time to recognize the achievements, leadership, and resilience of women, including women with disabilities. This month highlights the importance of inclusion, equal opportunity, and amplifying the voices of women and girls with disabilities in our communities. It's an opportunity to celebrate progress while continuing to advocate for accessibility, equity, and representation. Here's an [article](#) featuring famous women with disabilities.



### 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 Heilmann, 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!

732-246-4897 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 :

March 19th & 26th 12-2 pm  
April 2nd, 16th, & 23rd 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 April 14th at 6:00 pm**

**Young Adult Council I: Tuesday April 14th at 7:00 pm**

**Young Adult Council II: Wednesday April 8th 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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