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Parent Advocate of the Month
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WHAT MADE YOU ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION?

I believe that every child deserves access to a quality education that prepares them for the future and provides opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed. Education is an ongoing journey, and every child deserves the support and resources necessary to reach their full potential. When I realized that my child's needs were not being adequately addressed and that my voice as a parent and advocate was not being heard, I knew I needed to seek additional support. Unfortunately, navigating the system can be overwhelming, particularly for families who are already struggling to obtain the services their children need. Too often, the process discourages parents and advocates, causing some to give up. I knew that giving up was never an option for me. My child deserved to have his needs recognized, his rights protected, and access to the appropriate educational services and supports. That belief continues to motivate me to advocate for him and to help ensure that his voice is heard.



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

The best approach is to explore every available resource and remain proactive. Start by researching information online, connecting with local parent advocacy groups, contacting your school district, and reaching out to organizations which provides resources and support for families navigating special education. Do not hesitate to ask questions, seek clarification, or request referrals to individuals and organizations with the appropriate expertise. Special education regulations and available services can vary by state, county, district, and individual circumstances. It is important to ensure that the information you receive applies to your child's specific situation. I have learned that knowledge is one of the most powerful tools a parent can have when advocating for a child. Stay informed, seek guidance when needed, and continue asking questions until you understand your options. Most importantly, remain proactive. The more you educate yourself, the more confident and effective you can become in advocating for your child's rights and ensuring that their needs are addressed.

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

My advice is to remain persistent, even when the process feels overwhelming. Advocating for your child can be time-consuming, emotionally exhausting, and frustrating. The system does not always make it easy for families to access the services they need, but it is possible to make progress when you remain engaged and continue to explore your options. Reach out to parent advocacy groups, online support communities, and organizations that specialize in special education. Involve everyone who plays a role in your child's care and education, including teachers, healthcare providers, and your child's primary care physician. Whenever possible, ask providers to document their concerns and recommendations in writing. Keep copies of evaluations, reports, letters of support, and other relevant records, and bring that documentation to meetings and appointments. Explore every available resource, apply for appropriate services, and place your child on relevant waiting lists. Most importantly, do not be afraid to ask questions or challenge decisions when you believe your child's needs are not being met. Remember that advocacy is a process, and progress may take time. However, when you begin to see your child grow, develop new skills, and receive the support they deserve, the effort becomes worthwhile. Finally, understand that you are not alone. Your child is not alone, either. Connect with other families who understand your experience, and remember that taking breaks is okay. Self-care is essential because we cannot effectively advocate for our children if we become completely burned out. Taking care of yourself allows you to continue showing up for your child.



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

Being my child's best advocate means being persistent, informed, and willing to speak up, even when doing so is difficult. It means being his voice when he needs someone to stand beside him and ensuring that his needs are not overlooked or dismissed. Advocacy requires patience and determination. At times, you have to be as persistent as a toddler and just as loud when necessary! However, persistence alone is not enough. It is equally important to educate yourself, ask questions, research available resources, and understand your child's rights. The more informed you are, the better equipped you will be to make decisions, challenge barriers, and advocate effectively. To me, being my child's best advocate means never losing sight of what he deserves and never allowing obstacles to prevent me from pursuing the support he needs.