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MEET RACHEL & ANTHONY CASTELLANO

Parent Advocates of the Month

June 2026

WHAT MADE YOU ADVOCATE FOR YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION?

For me, it came down to realizing that no one knows my child better than I do. I trusted the process at first and assumed that if my child needed something, it would naturally be provided. Over time, I learned that parents often need to be the voice that ensures their child's needs are truly understood and addressed. I decided to advocate because I saw gaps between what my child needed to be successful and what was actually being offered. When I realized that services, accommodations, and placements can have a significant impact on my child's future, I knew I couldn't just sit on the sidelines. Every child deserves an education that gives them the opportunity to reach their potential.

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

Start by learning the basics of your rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and your state's special education regulations. Attend workshops, webinars, and parent trainings offered by advocacy organizations. Read your child's evaluations, IEP, and progress reports carefully, and don't hesitate to ask professionals to explain terms or recommendations. I have also found that some of the most valuable learning comes from connecting with other parents who have gone through similar experiences. Their insights can help you understand what questions to ask and what services may be available. The more informed you are, the more effectively you can participate in decisions about your child's education and ensure they receive the support they need to thrive.



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

My biggest piece of advice is to trust your instincts and don't be afraid to ask questions. You know your child better than anyone else. Learn as much as you can, keep organized records, communicate in writing whenever possible, and remember that you are an equal member of the IEP team. Don't be intimidated by educational jargon or the process. If you don't understand something, ask for clarification. If something doesn't feel right, seek a second opinion, connect with other parents, or consult an advocate or attorney. Most importantly, remember that advocacy is a marathon, not a sprint. Stay focused on your child's needs and long-term success, not just the issue in front of you at the moment.

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

Being my child's best advocate means being their voice when they cannot fully speak for themselves and ensuring their needs are not overlooked. It means educating myself, asking questions, and holding schools and service providers accountable for delivering the support my child is entitled to receive. Most importantly, it means refusing to accept imitations others may place on my child. My job as a parent is to help create opportunities, remove barriers, and make sure my child has every chance to succeed, both in school and in life. If that requires difficult conversations or standing firm when something isn't right, then that's what I will do.