

Parent Advisory Committee

O a k l a n d S p e c i a l E d u c a t i o n S c h o o l s

Early Resolution is the Best Solution!

Five organizations collaborated to create a new parent-friendly helpful document entitled: *Special Education Informal Dispute Resolution Processes, An Oakland County Parent's Guide*. In only three pages, the basics of communicating effectively between home and school, requesting a service for your child, IEPT meetings, Facilitated IEPT Meetings, Local Resolution Processes and Mediation are explained.

The goal of the complete guide is “*to encourage early and meaningful collaboration between home and school in order to facilitate the best possible outcomes for every student receiving special education services.*” Targeted primarily to parents, the guide can assist all who need information about how to resolve disputes by collaborative means. It reflects in part the proposed dispute resolution policy developed in 2007 by the Michigan Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services. The guide is now available thanks to the financial support of the Autism Society of America- Oakland County Chapter.

When accessed through a web site, the guide is interactive with hot links that take you directly to the specific page of a site that is needed to make a request in Oakland County or review the information you need. The color-coded flowcharts and hot links will take you on a straight path through the confusing special education advocacy maze.

The guide notes that informal dispute resolution processes as described throughout the brochure can be used before or after filing a complaint. It also notes that training in collaborative communication and conflict resolution skills can help parents and educators use these processes more effectively.

The guide provides contact numbers and web sites for readers wanting more information or assistance. The five organizations that contributed to the guide are:

- The Oakland Schools Special Education Parent Advisory Committee
- Oakland Schools
- The Autism Society of America – Oakland County Chapter
- The Arc of Oakland County
- Michigan Special Education Mediation Program

You can access the hotlinks or download the guide on your home computer through the following links:

- www.asaoakland.org on the Home Page,
- www.thearcoakland.org under Advocacy,
- www.oakland.k12.mi.us under Families, Special Needs, Special Education, Compliance, Dispute Resolution, under Commentary click Informal Dispute Resolution Processes. The quick link is <http://www.oakland.k12.mi.us/Portals/0/SpecialEd/Oakland%20County%20Parents%20guide%20for%20disput%20resolution.pdf>

Special Education Informal Dispute Resolution Processes



An Oakland County Parent's Guide

Early Resolution is the Best Solution!
Because in the Life of a Child, Time Matters

*The hope is to encourage
early and meaningful collaboration
between home and school
in order to facilitate
the best possible outcomes
for EVERY student
receiving special education services.*

The contents of this brochure were created by:

The Autism Society of America – Oakland County Chapter

The Arc of Oakland County

The Oakland Schools Special Education Parent Advisory Committee

Oakland Schools

The Michigan Special Education Mediation Program

Printed February 2008

This brochure may also be downloaded from the following websites:

<http://www.asaoakland.org>

<http://www.thearcoakland.org>

<http://www.oakland.k12.mi.us>

Paid for by the Autism Society of America – Oakland County Chapter

An Oakland County Parent’s Guide to Special Education Informal Dispute Resolution Processes

Standard Home-School Communication Methods

Progress Reports, Report Cards, Disciplinary notification

Daily logs, Emails, Grades on assignments, Progress notes

Phone calls, Teacher conferences

IEPT meetings and related paperwork, Evaluations

What if you have a concern about Special Education Services?

You may choose to contact your teachers or ancillary staff in writing or by Email if you believe your child needs a different behavior plan, a different transition plan, an additional service or other course of action. Your letter should explain your concern or request.

Using a dated letter or Email, you may choose to send a request for an **IEPT Meeting**. Send an additional copy of your request to someone else on your IEP Team or in your district. Explain in detail the purpose for convening the IEPT meeting. You do not need to wait for the annual review.

You may choose to contact the Intermediate School District for guidance or assistance at its website, by phone, Email or in writing. Contact Oakland Schools at <http://www.oakland.k12.mi.us> or phone 248-209-2343. These services are free and can be very helpful.

You may choose to contact your Special Education Supervisor, the school’s principal or the Special Education Director and explain your concerns by phone, Email or through dated written correspondence.

If you use dated written correspondence first, the individual is likely to contact you with a reply. If you begin any of the processes above by phone or through a meeting, follow-up with a written account of the conversation as an acknowledgement of your understanding. Be sure to mention your concerns, any action or responsibilities that were discussed and the date for reviewing progress of the situation. This idea applies below as well.

What if you still have concerns about Special Education Services that have not been resolved?

You may choose to request a **Facilitated IEPT Meeting** using a dated request form, Email or a phone call. The trained facilitators are neutral and free.

You may choose to request the use of a **Local Resolution Process** through a dated letter or Email. This process is free.

You may choose to request **Mediation** using a dated request form, Email or a phone call. This process is free and the signed agreement is enforceable in court.

Informal Dispute Resolution refers to a number of collaborative methods for resolving special education concerns or formal complaints. These methods enable those with concerns to seek solutions through direct discussion and written correspondence. Learning collaborative communication skills and dispute resolution techniques will help parents, educators, and service providers become more effective in planning and decision making. Neutral individuals who facilitate communication and problem solving may be called on to support discussions, while allowing the parties to make their own decisions.

Informal dispute resolution processes may be used in lieu of filing a formal complaint. They also can be used after filing a formal complaint as outlined in the Resolving Special Education Disputes document from the Michigan Department of Education. The website link is: <http://www.michigan.gov/mde>. At this site, type “Resolving Special Education Disputes” in the search box and click go. Regardless of whether an informal process is used, the formal complaint process is always available.

Examples of informal dispute resolution include, but are not limited to:

IEPT MEETING

Parents or the public agency may request a meeting at any time to address issues of concern. Contact your child’s caseload teacher in writing to schedule an IEPT meeting.

- The dated written request should include details of the concern, the needs of your child that you hope to address at the meeting and may suggest possible outcomes.
- Parents or the public agency do not need to wait for the annual review to address a concern.
- Parents may bring someone that is knowledgeable about special education to the IEPT meeting for support.
- Parents may provide documentation from outside sources such as medical information, MDE information, caregiver observations, or reports from previous service providers for support.

FACILITATED IEPT MEETING

A neutral, trained facilitator may be requested to support the IEPT process and can help ensure that all viewpoints and ideas are heard.

- Facilitator services are free and available from the Oakland Mediation Center.
- The Oakland Mediation Center (OMC), a member of the Michigan Special Education Mediation Program, is a source for information and free Facilitated IEPT Services. To request a facilitator for your IEPT meeting, contact the center through its website: www.mediation-omc.org or by phone at 248-338-4280.
- Both parties may choose to allow the OMC to assign a facilitator to the case or mutually agree to choose someone from the qualified facilitator roster.
- General information about IEPT facilitation and other forms of compliance support may be obtained by contacting Oakland Schools at <http://www.oakland.k12.mi.us/Departments/SpecialEducation/ComplianceSupportServices/Facilitation/tabid/1730/Default.aspx> or by phone at 248-209-2007.
- Parents may also bring someone that is knowledgeable about special education to the Facilitated IEPT meeting for support.
- Parents may provide documentation from outside sources such as medical information, MDE information, caregiver observations, or reports from previous service providers for support.

LOCAL RESOLUTION

Parents and district staff may resolve issues directly with each other. They do not have to agree on what happened or why, but may agree on steps to address the concern.

- If an action plan is developed, this agreement must be documented in writing and signed by the participants.
- The agreement could be written in a letter format or in a new IEP.
- Local resolution is not a required step before initiating mediation.
- Oakland Schools, an Intermediate School District, has staff that may help the district and the parents to reach this agreement. Contact Oakland Schools at <http://www.oakland.k12.mi.us/Departments/SpecialEducation/ComplianceSupportServices/tabid/341/Default.aspx> or by phone through Oakland Schools Compliance Support Services at 248-209-2002 for more information on how this process works.

MEDIATION

Mediation is a voluntary process in which both parties must mutually agree to participate. During mediation, a trained, neutral mediator assists the parent(s) and district to discuss the issues, generate options, and negotiate resolution.

- Mediation is free of charge, it is confidential and it is voluntary.
- Mediation frequently occurs within one month of the mediation request.
- The mediator has no authority to impose an outcome.
- Mediation may result in a written agreement signed by both parties. This agreement is enforceable in court.
- For more information, you may contact the Michigan Special Education Mediation Program by calling 1-800-8RESOLVE or use their website: <http://www.cenmi.org/msemp>
- For local information or to request Mediation, contact through Email, the website or by phone:
Camelia Ureche, Oakland Mediation Center
550 Hulet Drive, Suite 102, Bloomfield Hills MI 48302
Phone: 248.338.4280 • Fax: 248.338.0480
Email: camureche@mediation-omc.org
Website: www.mediation-omc.org
- Both parties may choose to allow the OMC to assign a mediator to the case or mutually agree to choose someone from the qualified mediator roster.
- Parents may bring someone that is knowledgeable about special education to the Mediation meeting for support.
- Parents may provide documentation from outside sources such as medical information, MDE information, caregiver observations, or reports from previous service providers for support.



Autism Society of America Oakland County Chapter

The ASA-OCC advocates for meaningful participation in all aspects of life for individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders and their families who reside in Oakland County, Michigan.

The Oakland County chapter was founded in 1985 by a group of concerned parents. Today it is one of over 200 Chapters of the Autism Society of America (ASA). The ASA is the oldest autism advocacy group in the country. The Oakland County chapter membership is open to all those who care about people with autism. The Board of Directors is a volunteer body elected by the membership.

To learn about autism or join ASA-OCC, go to the website at: www.asaoakland.org



We advocate for the rights and full participation of all children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We strive to improve systems of supports and services; connect families; inspire our community and influence public policy. We are a non-profit United Way agency serving individuals and their families throughout Oakland County.

The Arc provides direct legal advocacy, respite, information and referral, community awareness and recreational programs for children and adults with intellectual impairments and their respective families. Our primary advocacy focus areas are: special education law, government financial benefits, estate plan counseling, guardianship and alternatives, along with information and referral.

The Arc has expert, experienced professionals with knowledge on matters of special education law. Our staff provides experienced assistance and support to parents or guardians in preparing and understanding the Individual Education Plan (IEP) based on current federal and state laws and regulations.

To find out more or become a member, visit our website at www.thearcoakland.org

Our office is conveniently located at Coventry Place: 1641 West Big Beaver Road, Troy, Michigan 48084-3501. Phone 248-816-1900 • Fax 248-816-1906

Oakland Schools Parent Advisory Committee

The Oakland Schools Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) represents families in Oakland County public school districts and public school academies. These parent volunteers have a child/children with a disability and are appointed by their School Board. The committee participates in the development and review of the Oakland Schools County Plan for Delivery of Special Education Programs and Services. The PAC also advises the Intermediate School District on matters regarding improvement of Special Education services.

To learn more, go to the website at:

<http://www.oakland.k12.mi.us/Departments/SpecialEducation/ParentAdvisoryCommittee/OaklandSchoolsPAC/tabid/931/Default.aspx>