How an advocate can help

PACER Center is the place where Minnesota families of children with disabilities and young adults with disabilities can gain information, training, and support. PACER advocates operate on the principle of helping parents and families find success for their children through training and advocacy.

What we can do:

- Provide information to help you understand special education and other education programs for students with disabilities.
- Help you understand your rights as the parent or guardian of a child with a disability.
- Assist you in advocating for your child and resolving issues with the school district.
- Discuss your options without telling you what to do.
- Help you learn to communicate effectively with the school (i.e. how to state your concerns, who to contact).
- Refer you to helpful trainings and resources.
- Help you identify available educational options for your child.
- Assist you in a confidential manner.

When to contact an advocate:

- If you are new to special education for your children with disabilities and want to understand the process.
- While problems are still small.
- Anytime you see a need related to your child’s education.
- When you and the school disagree about special education services, support, or placement.

How to contact an advocate:

By email or phone (voicemail) at (952) 838-9000 and mnparent@pacer.org

- Provide the following information:
  - your child’s age and disability label, if you know it
  - a brief summary of your questions or concerns
  - primary phone number
  - email address

An advocate will return your call or email you within 3-4 business days.

Let us know if you’d prefer to talk to a multicultural advocate: African American, Southeast Asian, Somali, or Hispanic/Latino.
Before you talk with an advocate:

- Gather and review your child’s records (for example: evaluation reports, Individualized Education Program (IEP), or Section 504 plan).
- Make a list of questions or concerns.
- Have something to write on to take notes.

After your conversation with an advocate, you might:

- Send educational records for the advocate to read (if requested by advocate).
- Follow through with a plan of action discussed between you and the advocate.
- Call back with additional details or concerns.

PACER advocates are not:

- Attorneys that can give legal advice or represent you or your child in court or in the special education hearing process.
- Typically able to attend IEP meetings.
- Educational consultants who case manage your child’s educational process.