



PACER Parent Advocates are Here to Help

PACER Center is the place for **Minnesota parents of children with disabilities** to gain information, training, and support.

Parents can connect with PACER’s “Parents Helping Parents” advocates to:

- Gain information to help you understand special education and other education programs for students with disabilities
- Help clarify your educational concerns
- Help you understand your rights as the parent of a child with a disability
- Assist you in advocating for your child and resolve issues with the school district; PACER advocates can explain your options
- Help you learn to communicate effectively with the school
- Refer you to helpful training and resources
- Help you identify available educational options

When you might want to contact an advocate:

- If you are new to education for your children with disabilities and need 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 services, support, or placement

When you contact PACER:

- Use either email or a phone call
- Be prepared to give your child’s age and disability label, if you know it, and a brief summary of your questions or concerns
- Tell the receptionist when the best time to call back is and give cell and home phone numbers and an email address; a PACER advocate will return your call or email you within 36 to 72 working hours
- Let PACER know if you’d prefer to talk to a multicultural advocate: African American, Southeast Asian, Somali, or Hispanic

How to prepare to talk with an advocate:

- Gather and review your child’s records such as evaluation reports, Individualized Education Program (IEP), or Section 504 plan
- Prepare a written list of questions or concerns
- Plan to take notes during the conversation

A PACER parent advocate can:

- Help you understand your and your child's educational rights
- Respect confidentiality; the PACER advocate will not talk to school personnel without your permission
- Clarify and restate your concerns or issues
- Help you phrase or rephrase your concerns or questions for communicating with school staff
- Refer you to training and resources
- Help you decide who to contact at the school to resolve issues
- Discuss your options without telling you what to do

After your conversation, the PACER parent advocate might ask you to:

- Send educational records for the advocate to read
- Follow through with a plan of action discussed between you and the PACER advocate
- Call back with additional details or concerns as they arise

PACER advocates are not:

- Functioning as attorneys
- Able to 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