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