

Parent/Guardian Resources



Parents are their children's first and most important advocates, especially when navigating the complexities of special education. Their deep understanding of their child's strengths, needs, and aspirations makes them essential partners in shaping meaningful educational supports and services. In Illinois, families and individuals with disabilities have access to a range of organizations dedicated to helping them understand the special education system, build effective self-advocacy skills, and foster strong, collaborative relationships with schools. These resources empower families to participate confidently in decision-making and ensure that every child receives the support they need to thrive.

[Illinois Attorney General's Disability Rights Bureau](#)

The Attorney General published [Guidelines for Choosing a Lay Advocate in Special Education](#) and [Guidelines for Choosing an Attorney for Special Education Representation](#). The Bureau investigates complaints, eliminates barriers to accessibility, defends individuals from discrimination based on disability, provides education and assistance, and provides advocacy through commissions, boards, and committees.

[U.S. Department of Education – Office for Civil Rights](#)

Individuals who experience disability-based discrimination in educational settings may report their concerns to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The [OCR Complaint Assessment System](#) guides users in determining whether filing an OCR complaint is appropriate and, when it is not, directs them to alternative resources that may better address their situation.

[Parent Training and Information Center – Family Matters](#)

Parent Training and Information Centers are authorized in Part D of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and are funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Programs. Family Matters serves all counties in Illinois. **Family Matters no longer provides advocacy services; however, it may be able to refer parents to advocates.**

[Equip for Equality](#)

Equip for Equality empowers individuals with disabilities to advocate for themselves and their families. Through legal services, independent monitoring, and specialized training, the organization works to eliminate systemic barriers and advance equal rights and opportunities for people with disabilities.

[Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living](#)

If your child is at least 14 years old, you may wish to contact one of Illinois' 22 Centers for Independent Living. These centers provide community-based, non-residential support for individuals with disabilities to promote independence at home, work, and school. Most centers have a youth advocate who can attend IEP meetings with families.

[The Arc of Illinois](#)

The Arc of Illinois advocates for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families, and community organizations to ensure full inclusion in all aspects of community life. The organization provides information and resources, supports families in advocacy efforts, and offers training and education for people with disabilities, their families, and professionals.

[National Association for Down Syndrome](#)

The National Association for Down Syndrome provides families and self-advocates with information and resources to help them access appropriate services and actively participate in educational, vocational, residential, and community support. While direct services are limited to the Chicago metropolitan area, many of the organization's programs and resources are available to a broader national and international community.



[Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children \(CASA\) of Illinois](#)

Illinois CASA for Children provides information, research, and best practices in advocacy for students with different abilities in the special education environment.

[Illinois Assistive Technology Program](#)

Education-related services are a core component of the Illinois Assistive Technology Program's (IATP) work. The organization advocates to expand access to assistive technology for students and provides evaluations, equipment loans, and training to support effective learning and communication from preschool through high school. IATP also offers statewide educational support, including free advocacy services for any student or family seeking assistance.

[Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities](#)

The Illinois Council on Developmental Disabilities is a state agency that promotes the full inclusion and participation of people with developmental disabilities. Rather than funding direct services, the council invests in systems-change initiatives that support the goals and priorities outlined in its state plan. At least 60% of council members are individuals with developmental disabilities. Representatives of other state agencies are also part of the council.

[Illinois Early Learning Project](#)

The Illinois Early Learning Project provides evidence-based, reliable information to support high-quality early care and education for families, caregivers, and teachers of young children across Illinois. Its resources include practical tip sheets, instructional videos, podcasts, and blogs designed to promote effective early learning practices and strengthen adult engagement with young learners.

Disclosure Statement:

It is not the intent of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to qualify, rank, or otherwise indicate the quality of service provided by any of these agencies. Verification of the advocate's skill and/or level of special education knowledge is the responsibility of the user. Further, ISBE is not responsible for payment of fees for the use of advocates.