

Special Education Advocacy - Families

Lakehead Public Schools

Committed to the success of every student

www.lakeheadschoos.ca



Special Education Advisory Committee



What is Advocacy?

In essence, advocacy is speaking up for yourself, or acting on behalf of another person. SEAC advocates do not tell people what they should or should not do. Rather, they provide information so that families can make their own choices and decisions and speak up for themselves. Sometimes they may refer clients to other agencies who provide advice.

Advocacy can help families by:

- helping them to clarify their own views and wishes;
- helping them to express their views and wishes in a way that ensures they are understood by others;
- providing them with all the options so they can make decisions and take their own action;
- helping them to get independent advice; and
- enabling them to negotiate and resolve conflicts.

Advocacy Can Be Helpful and Useful

Advocacy is useful in situations in which people feel unable to speak up for themselves because:

- they feel they do not have enough time, energy or information;
- they do not know their rights;
- they feel no-one will listen to them anyway, or that it will not make any difference;
- they do not understand the jargon or language being used; and
- they feel intimidated by people in authority and do not want to make a fuss.

Natural Supports

Natural supports consist of the family and community relationships that families and individuals have in their day to day life. Some examples of natural supports might be grandparents, aunts and uncles, family friends, neighbours or co-workers. Families are encouraged to access their natural support system to act as advocates as they navigate the special education system.

Regulation 181/98

This regulation states that a person who is attending a special education meeting has the right to have a representative present that can speak on behalf of him or her or otherwise support them.

Confidentiality

Families can feel confident that SEAC advocates will treat them with respect and dignity. All personal information will be treated as confidential.



Special Education Advocacy

Families

Current SEAC Member Associations/Agencies

Anishnawbe Mushkiki
Autism Ontario, Thunder Bay & District

Children’s Centre Thunder Bay
Dilico - Anishinabek Family Care

Easter Seals
Fetal Alcohol Support Information Network
George Jeffrey Children's Centre

Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario
OPTIONS Northwest
VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children

Two Community Representatives

More Information
www.lakeheadschoools.ca
(807) 625-5126

Models of Advocacy

Models of advocacy vary in the way that the advocacy is provided, and whether the advocate is a paid worker or a volunteer.

Collective Advocacy

SEAC is a collective advocacy group that advises the Board of Education on matters relating to Special Education. This is where a group of service users campaign on their own behalf, or on behalf of others, to resolve an issue that affects them collectively. Collective advocacy is a useful way of representing service users' opinions to a statutory body (for example) in order resolve a local issue and bring about change.

Individual SEAC members have volunteered their services to act as Advocates to parents/guardians of students with special needs.

Self-advocacy

Students are encouraged, where possible, to feel comfortable with and understand their individual learning needs in order to communicate those needs to school staff and ensure that their needs are met. Parents can encourage students to learn about their disability, to understand their own personal learning needs, and to practice speaking up for himself or herself at school. Parents can help students to learn to be assertive while maintaining a respectful attitude.

Parent Advocacy

When students are not ready or are unable to communicate their own needs, for a variety of reasons, parents act on behalf of their children to ensure that their learning needs are being addressed by the school. Parents are encouraged to be active in their child's education, communicating with the school about the day to day challenges and successes that their child encounters. When all parties involved in a student's education have knowledge and understanding of a child's strengths and needs, the best possible educational experience can be achieved. Parents are a valuable source of education for teachers as parents have “expert information” about their child.

Professional Advocacy

Involves a paid worker with specific knowledge of systems and services who supports a number of clients. SEAC does not provide professional advocacy services.

