

Purposes/Goals

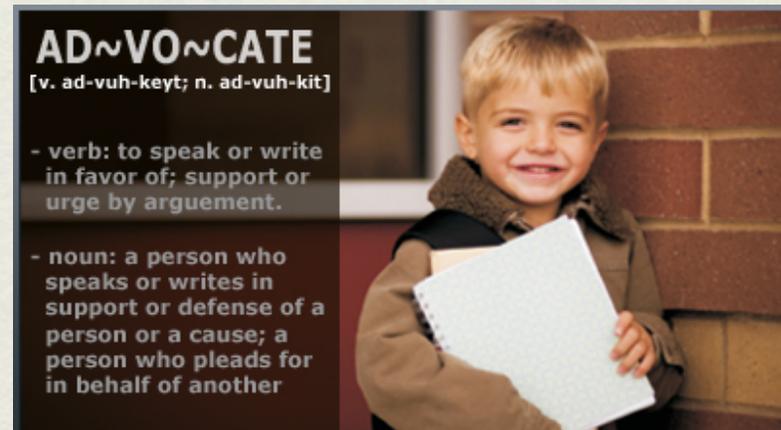
- Mr. Kish and I wanted to keep this dialog casual and comfortable
- My background
- This discussion **IS NOT** designed to supercede policy or replace the qualified guidance of the school board's attorneys
- This discussion **IS** designed to be a conversation starter, and will –ideally– give staff a better understanding of why parents seek third party support and how to manage relationships with educational layadvocates

What is external, layadvocacy?

The need for *external advocacy* arises when education services are not

- **Accessible**
 - **Available**
 - **Appropriate, and/or**
 - **Effectively Provided**
- (Schloss, 1994)**

Parents (and school staff) have an unequivocal right to invite individuals with a “special understanding of the child”



What typically causes a parent to seek an advocate?

- **Communication difficulty/breakdown (jargon, timelines, steps in process, RTI, data collection, rights, etc.)**
- **Team is –unknowingly– operating on faulty or outdated assumptions (e.g., “*well, that is what parent wanted/told me last year!*”)**
- **Parents feel unqualified or underprepared to raise or respond to specific concerns (e.g., Parent has to triple task; at the meeting, “*I’m not going to say anything*”)**
- **Meetings can be overwhelming from parent POV (“*They made me cry, so I want you to make them cry...*”)**
- **Options are not fully explained to parents and parents aren’t informed of what they can request (“*We don’t know, what we don’t know!*”)**
- **Parents do not feel they are participating/collaborating meaningfully in the process**
- **Parents and school often see different versions of the student, and may have competing theories of how the child learns best**

Advocates likely needed after a meeting like this...

- Parent had no clue what the meeting was about, who was at the table, and what was proposed
- Parents expected to triple task: listen, take notes, and digest new information on the fly
- Meeting suppressed the opinions of the staff and or the parents, and only the 1-2 staff were talking
- There are team members who never spoke up at the meeting... on anything
- Feedback and documentation broad, general, and loose, with clear pride of authorship reflected in proceedings
- Meeting went well over budget; staff came and went without introduction or explanation
- Items discussed and agreed to not summarized, and left to parent to follow up
- Record issued with no reflection of actual conversation

Advocates likely NOT needed after a meeting like this...

- **Parent, and LEA collaborated and agreed to purpose, agenda, format, and timeline**
- **Parents had time before the meeting to review and evaluate proposed information (goals, reports, scores, etc.)**
- **Appropriate balance between elasticity (to permit team members to extend a point) and structure (meeting accomplished objective, i.e., domain for re-evaluation)**
- **Team members stop frequently and check for understanding**
- **Team members have avoided the “love-in” and disingenuous compliments**
- **Meeting did not exceed appropriate time limit**
- **Follow up items were recapped, “timelined”, and issues deferred to another meeting encapsulated**
- **Ideally, additional comments were projected for parents to see or read back. Alternatively, parents were invited to contribute to proceedings under “parent concerns”**

Your questions...

- *What trends are you seeing for parents who seek an advocate?*
 - Initial eligibility for services
 - IEP vs. 504 Plan
 - Transition services and graduation/termination anxiety
 - Navigating and understanding Response to Intervention (RTI)
 - Strengthening transitions between buildings/grade levels
 - Mitigation of clinical and educational recommendations
 - Lack of independence in homework
 - Inconsistency in performance
 - Severe emotional dysregulation at home/school
 - Executive functioning deficits (time management)
 - ASD, Emotional Disability, and Other Health Impairment

Your questions...

- *What are common mistakes schools make that lead to parents seeking help from an advocate?*
 - **First off, I don't believe teacher "mistakes" necessarily cause a parent's need to seek advocacy...**
 - **When the "informal meeting" turns suddenly "formal"**
 - **When parents feel blindsided by a new agenda**
 - **When data conflicts (good teams "reality test" with new info)**
 - **Typing and other nonverbal signals during meetings with a parent**

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Your questions...

- *How can educators feel positive about the parent advocacy experience? (especially after dealing with difficult advocacy situations?)*

Part of being a confident professional educator is knowing where your specific competencies begin and end. Affirm reasonable concerns and listen actively.

- *Laws and expectations related to IDEA are always evolving, what is the most effective way for schools to stay current and in compliance with this important act?*
 - www.Wrightslaw.com
 - <http://isbe.net/spec-ed/>
 - <http://www.fetaweb.com/free.htm>
 - <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/index.html>
 - <https://sec1.isbe.net/sedsinquiry/dueprocessdecisions.aspx>
 - Conferences: LRP, IAASE, NASP, CEC

On the subject of advocate behavior...

- *How would you handle an advocate that says, “I just want to win”? (this has happened)*
- *What is the best way to handle an advocate that acts without the direct instructions from the parent?*
 - **ALWAYS keep parents informed of any actions requested/ taken**
- *What can a school do when an advocate makes unreasonable requests?*
 - **Is the request truly unreasonable? If so, document and recap alternatives**
 - **What does the data tell us?**
 - **What alternatives are more effective or efficient at addressing this need?**

On the subject of advocate communication...

- *Phone communication without parents on the line? Email communication without parents included?*
 - **Begin with parents asking them their preference**
 - **Recap and briefly synthesize any discussions with advocate to parent/advocate**
 - **Best practice suggests ccing parents on all communication with the advocate; even if advocate did not include them initially**
- *When the advocate speaks, how do we know that they are actually speaking in representation of what the parents want and not more of what the advocate is feeling?*
- *When there is an advocate hired, when is it appropriate to speak to the parents vs. advocate?*

Advocacy in general...

- *What do you suggest teachers do when they feel an advocate has made the working relationship more a power struggle vs. a problem solving/ collaborative effort?*
 - **Try to work the advocate out of a job**
 - **Be a strong and credible “internal advocate”**
- *How many IEP meetings would you suggest an advocate attend before agreeing to hire them?*
 - **Parents should ask, and advocates should accurately disclose**
 - **http://www.isbe.net/spec-ed/pdfs/lay_advocate_guideline.pdf**
- *Illinois does not require special education advocates to be certified, there are training opportunities available to them but not all that are hired have taken advantage of this training. How can D200 encourage the use of our advocacy list?*
- *What is the difference between a hired advocate and a family friend that calls themselves an advocate?*
- *What can a school do when the advocate presumes they know the child better?*
 - **Encourage the advocate to observe the student**

Some important, effective words overhead at effective meetings...

“I’ve been wanting to try something new. What do you think about this?”

“We’ve put a great deal of time and energy into this plan: I think we should stick with it.”

“Would the team be open to trying...”

“What does the data suggest?”

“Would you be willing to give us a little more time on this plan? We’ll make a commitment to come back and evaluate this on...”

“Have you asked Billy what he thinks about this change?”

“Can you think of other ways we can support Johnny?”

“I saw your kid do the coolest thing the other day...”

“We can do better than this, and I’d be willing to offer...”

“What option we’ve discussed is the ‘least dangerous assumption’ for the kid? What are the pros? What are the cons?”

“Suzie has shown us she is really ready for this...”

FOR STUDENT SERVICES

- Virtually all of the referrals I receive involve some degree of substantial communication breakdown between home and school
- Many parents perceive changes or shifts in service delivery that are not adequately explained. Many parents are confused school based approaches to foster independence when a skill is not consistently generalized between home and school
- Consent for release of information should be established (and even re-established) at the onset of every school year to ensure third parties who work with the child with students are a functional part of the intervention team
- Translating clinical terms to educational terms is an important skill to develop; parents and advocates often need to be gently or firmly reminded of the difference
- Add some translator for AIMSWEB (percentiles); teach parents about the relationship between percentiles and also ROI