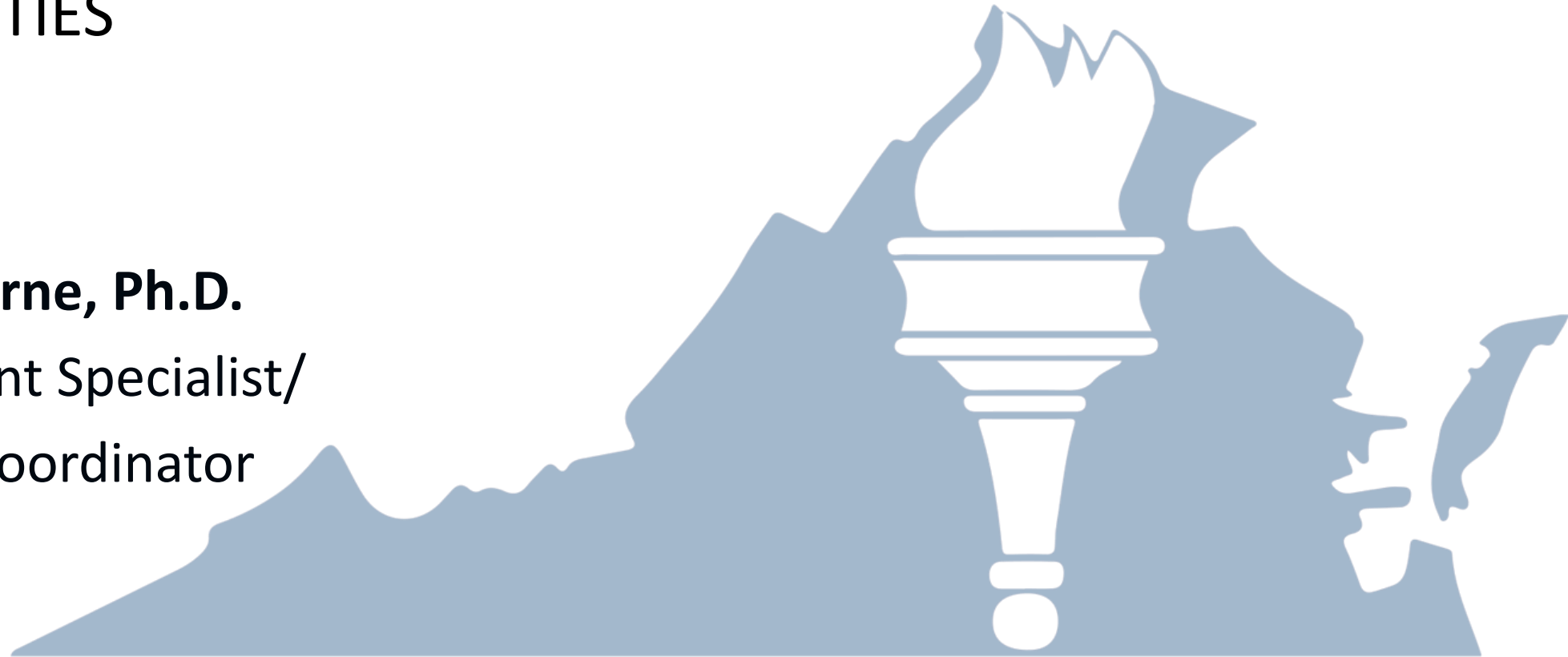


FAMILY CENTERED LEADERSHIP: ENGAGING AND EMPOWERING FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

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VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Without sharing, reflect on your own family's involvement or engagement during your childhood. How would you describe it?

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT (IDEA) 2004

- Biological or adoptive parent
- Foster parent
- Guardian
- Person acting in place of a parent (such as a grandparent, stepparent, or other relative) with whom the child lives, or a person legally responsible for the child's welfare
- Surrogate parent who is appointed by the school division if no parties can be identified who meet the definition of parent or who are willing to act as a parent
- An emancipated minor or validly married minor may also assume the responsibilities of a parent
- In the case of unaccompanied homeless youth, a temporary surrogate may act as the parent until a surrogate can be appointed.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Two-way Communication

Trust

Respect

Traditional

Non-traditional

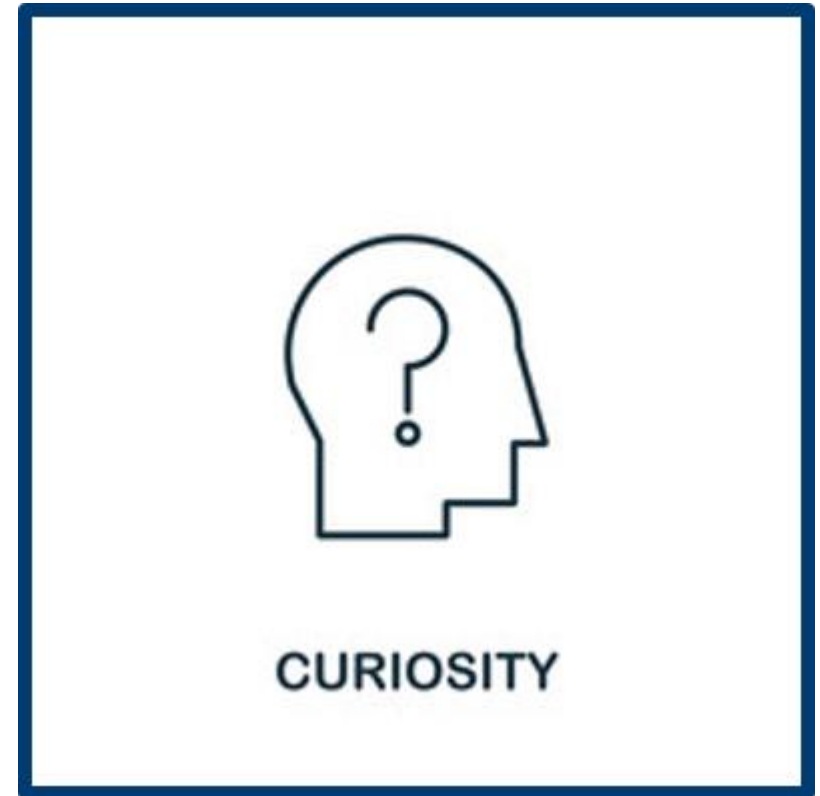
Multiple languages



- Increase student achievement and graduation rates.
- Increase attendance.
- Increase social-emotional skills.

FAMILY-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

- Child's first teacher
- Knows the child best
- Wants the best for their child
- The family or village of supports
- Want to learn more
- Check for understanding



FAMILY-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

Meet families
where they are

Emphasize positive
relationship-
building strategies
and trust

Communication and
transparency

Foster a sense of
community

Provide professional
development
opportunities for
faculty/staff

Create an “All In”
family engagement
culture

Family engagement
initiatives

IMPORTANT-TRANSFER OF RIGHTS



How will we discuss disability with our child including the transfer of rights at age 18?

Your child's role in education, as in life, will continue to evolve as maturity and growth occur. Self-determination is an important attribute for all people to possess. It is developed by acquiring a set of skills that help a person understand individual Strengths, Preferences, Interests, and Needs (SPIN).

Helping children understand that we all have strengths and that we all have areas where we need help to be successful is a good first step toward disability awareness. Conversations with your child about the diagnosed disability should:

- Be open, without being overly detailed;
- Be accurate and age-appropriate;
- Name the disability;
- Focus on the disability not being shameful or embarrassing;
- Respond to your child's questions and seek answers to questions if needed; and
- Help to find strengths, preferences, and interests.

The [I'm Determined](#) website provides tools and examples to help your child identify strengths, interests, and preferences, as well as information about how others can assist. In addition, there are regional representatives of the program who can talk to you and show you how to navigate the website and use the tools that are available.

Questions to ask the school:

- How can I begin explaining my child's disability and its potential impact?
- How can my child participate in the development of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to the maximum extent?
- Can my child effectively exercise the right to make educational decisions upon reaching age 18 and whom should I consult for advice in this area if I feel that I still need to be involved in educational decision-making on behalf of my adult child?
- Will I be able to attend IEP meetings after my child's eighteenth birthday?
- Will I be able to assist my child in making informed decisions or serve as my child's advocate after age eighteen?

When to Consider:

As soon as your child is found eligible for special education services.

Transfer of Rights

At age eighteen, education rights transfer to the child. If your child is not able to independently make decisions, you will need to take steps to continue to be involved. If your child will be able to handle this automatic transfer of rights, it will be important to engage in the preparation process for this milestone by increasing responsibility over a period of time. The IEP Team must include a statement in your child's IEP (beginning at least one year before your child turns 18) that you and your child have been advised that the educational rights transfer to the child upon reaching 18. Please refer to [Transfer of Rights for Students with Disabilities Upon Reaching the Age of Majority in Virginia](#) for more information.



THE COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

“Partnerships are not hard work, but heart work. Not more work, but the work. Not harder work, but smarter work to mobilize all available resources that will contribute to student success.”- Dr. Joyce Epstein



PARTNERSHIPS

Focus on a common
goal

Organization

Long term thinking

Problem solving

Trust

**Each person
contributes**

COMMUNICATION ACTIVITY

- Name
- State of residence
- Occupation
- Share one fact about yourself

Hearing

- Accidental
- Involuntary
- Effortless

Listening

- Focused
- Voluntary
- Intentional

SELF-AWARENESS FOR LEADERS



What is my default tone of communication?



Am I using communication shut-downs?



Am I actively listening?

EMPOWERING FAMILIES

Family strength

Competence

Decision-making

Leadership opportunities

1. Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS)-Family Members Serving on Teams
2. Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)
3. State Special Education Advisory Committee (SSEAC)

VIRGINIA'S CDP CURRICULUM

Critical Decision Points (CDPs) for Families of Children with Disabilities


Critical decision points

Keys to academic success

Questions to ask

CRITICAL DECISION POINTS

What decisions will you need to make regarding your child's educational path?



At what point will you be making these decisions?



What information will you and your child need to make the most well-informed decisions?

CRITICAL DECISION POINTS

I disagree with an Eligibility/IEP Team decision. How should I proceed?


What options should we begin discussing and implementing with respect to overall transition planning, including Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)?

How will we discuss disability with our child, including the transfer of right at age eighteen?

KEYS TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS

- Supporting continual learning and development.
- Regular attendance.
- Being engaged in my child's education.
- Understanding our rights.
- Promoting my child's independence and self determination.
- Keeping long term goals in mind early in your child's educational career.

CDP ONE PAGER LIBRARY



Understanding Your Rights

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates parents' involvement in their child's education. Parents serve a vital role in the decision-making process, and it is important to have an understanding of your Parental Rights. This list is not all-inclusive. Please refer to the [Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities](#) in Virginia for additional information.

You have the right to:

- Advocate for your child without fear of retaliation.
- Receive advance notice/invitation to meetings.
- Have meetings at a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location.
- Audio record eligibility, Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and manifestation determination meetings.
- Request to video record meetings. (If there are concerns, ask to review the school division's policy on video recording.)
- Discuss your concerns and have your input considered during meetings.
- Bring and have reviewed any type of documentation.
- Bring individuals, who at your discretion have knowledge or expertise concerning your child and can provide you with supports, and have them assist you during meetings.
- Receive a copy of procedural safeguards document once per year and any time upon request.
- Receive an independent educational evaluation (IEE) when you disagree with the results of a school-based evaluation, at no cost to you.



What is Prior Written Notice?

Prior Written Notice must be provided to you whenever the school division proposes or refuses any action related to the following:

- Identification
- Evaluation
- Educational Placement
- Provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Prior Written Notice must contain the following information:

- Description of the action proposed or refused by the school division
- Explanation of the school division's proposal or refusal to take action
- Description of other options considered and the reasons for their rejection
- Description of the evaluation, assessment, record, or report used as a basis for the action
- Description of other relevant factors
- Statement regarding procedural safeguards protections
- Sources for assistance

Understanding Diploma Options and their Relationship to Post-Secondary Goals

The diploma your child chooses to work toward, as well as the courses taken, needs to align with the planned career to provide maximum opportunities for success.

Assist your child with planning with the end in mind by:

- Selecting the necessary courses in middle and high school to earn the diploma that will best prepare your child for the planned career goal;
- Discussing the career goal with the school counselor and IEP Team;
- Encouraging your child to research careers and participate in career exploration activities.

Academic and Career Planning

While in elementary and middle school, your child will explore career clusters and pathways and create an Academic and Career Plan. That Plan can serve as the roadmap to help your child achieve post-secondary goals. Your child will also be receiving instruction in Career Investigations.



This instruction will be delivered in different ways by different schools, but your child will be learning important skills for post-secondary education and a career that includes:

- Workplace skills
- Teamwork
- Career clusters and pathways
- Goal development and planning
- Public speaking
- Self-advocacy
- Examining labor market data
- Interest assessments

Reminders

Make sure to speak to your child's school counselor about the best diploma for your child's possible career goals, then begin collecting the necessary information about the job to know what courses must be taken to best prepare for that career.

Remember, if you and your child choose the Applied Studies Diploma option, your child may be working on modified standards that have been reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity. As a result, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to reverse course later.

Promoting My Child's Independence and Self-Determination

Your child's role in education, as in life, will continue to evolve as maturity and growth occur. Self-determination is an important attribute for all people to possess. It is developed by acquiring a set of skills that help a person understand individual Strengths, Preferences, Interests, and Needs (SPIN).

Eventually, all children with Individualized Education Plan (IEPs) will be expected to provide input for the development of the IEP and attend IEP meetings. There is an important phrase you might have heard which says, "Nothing about me without me." This means that when the person with a disability is being discussed and plans are being made, that individual has the right to be at the table.

They are valued members of the IEP Team and there are strategies parents can use to assist them in preparing for this role. These include: encouraging dialogue and identification of strengths, preferences, interests, and needs; discussing supports or accommodations that are required in the learning process; and encouraging communication to express their goals and things that are important to them.

Being self-determined will help your child build self-advocacy skills.

- Your child can participate in the IEP process long before reaching the age for secondary transition.
- Your child can invite people to attend the IEP meeting.
- There are various methods for your child to participate in the IEP meeting. You can find several such resources at the [I'm Determined](#) website.


Self-determined people:

- Set goals
- Develop and evaluate plans to meet goals
- Self-regulate
- Problem-solve
- Advocate for themselves
- Make choices and decisions according their SPIN
- Believe in themselves as capable people
- Believe they can take control of their lives

Age of Majority

Age of Majority is reached when your child turns 18 and will be able to make educational decisions without you.


For example, your child would be able to grant consent for the IEP. Allowing choice-making early and encouraging participation in the IEP process will aid in the preparation for this important milestone. The IEP Team is required to inform you of this at least one year before your child reaches age 18. The [Transfer of Rights for Students with Disabilities Upon Reaching the Age of Majority in Virginia](#) document provides valuable information to help you understand this process.



CONTINUOUS SUPPORTS


- Special Education Parent Ombudsman
- Trainings
- Parent Resource Center (PRC)
 1. Activity/product subgrant funding
 2. Personnel funding
 3. Connect for Success event

**OMBUDSMAN
SPECIAL EDUCATION**



WHAT IS AN OMBUDSMAN?

An Ombudsman is a person who serves as a designated neutral party who advocates for a fair process and provides confidential, informal assistance and support to parents, guardians, advocates, educators, and students with disabilities. The Ombudsman for Special Education serves as a resource to parents in non-legal special education matters.



KEY FUNCTIONS OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION:

- **Independence** - The Ombudsman is independent of the formal dispute resolution options of mediation, state complaints, and due process hearings and serves a key function of reporting to leadership at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) regarding the issues experienced by parties served.
- **Confidentiality** - The Ombudsman does not disclose personal information, discussions, and interactions.
- **Neutrality** - The Ombudsman does not take a side on the issues and serves as an advocate for a fair process.
- **Informality** - There is no formal complaint form or documentation required to access the services of the Ombudsman.

SPECIFIC DUTIES OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION:

- Serve as a source of information and referral regarding state and federal laws and regulations governing special education.
- Provide information and support to parents of students with disabilities to help them understand and navigate the special education process.
- Provide communication strategies to parents and school divisions for resolving disagreements and special education issues.
- Assist parents in developing strategies and informal options to address issues and concerns.
- Promote collaboration and positive communication between parents and school division personnel in addressing special education issues.
- Provide information and resources on available options for dispute resolution, such as mediation, state complaints, and due process hearings when collaboration efforts fail.
- Serve as a resource for disability related information and referrals to available programs and services for individuals with disabilities.
- Identify, track, monitor, and report to the VDOE leadership on suspected systemic patterns of concerns that emerge from constituent contacts regarding special education services in local school divisions to aid in addressing noncompliance with special education laws and regulations.

Parent Ombudsman
Toll Free: (800) 422-2083
Email: SpecialEducationOmbudsman@doe.virginia.gov

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

How will you utilize today's information and resources to create opportunities for increased engagement and empowerment opportunities for students and families of students with disabilities?

CONTACT INFORMATION

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