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PARENT ADVOCACY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION:
CRITICAL PRINCIPLES AND ACTION STEPS

A MASTER'S PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF BETHEL UNIVERSITY

BY

AMANDA MUSOLINO-OLSON

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

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BETHEL UNIVERSITY

PARENT ADVOCACY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION:
CRITICAL PRINCIPLES AND ACTION STEPS

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MAY 2022

APPROVED

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This paper is for all the parents of children with disabilities who want appropriate, ambitious, and inclusive special education services and supports.

Further, it is for parents who want to perform well on behalf of their child, with increasing clarity and confidence, in the face of many adversities and challenges.

May your stories be filled with one small victory at a time, persevering with tiny habits, repeated over time, compounding into many tiny ripples of momentum, and progress for futures that matter to many.

Abstract

Parent advocacy in special education is currently an expectation built into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). The Individualized Education Program (IEP) process requires families and school personnel to work together to develop and implement appropriate special education and related services for eligible children. Positive family-professional partnerships are critical to the provision of effective programming with high expectations for students with disabilities and quality student outcomes. However, barriers to successful family-professional partnerships persist. Institutionalized hierarchies in the decision making process of special education programs, limited perceptions of ability, and tracking practices based on disability deficits puts parents at a disadvantage for their voices being heard. Parents may also be disempowered by one's own understanding of their personal role in the special education process and the level of influence one has on the child's education journey. Discovering one's rich capacity for being a parent advocate happens when learning what other parent advocates know and do while working with schools to develop an education program and plans for the child. A review of the literature on parent advocacy, organized into a high performance personal development framework of basic principles and action steps, can make the knowledge and actions of parent advocacy accessible and doable. This research-based parent advocacy framework can be used by parents and other special education advocates in the field to have powerful impacts on the educational outcomes of children with disabilities.

Keywords: parent advocacy, family-professional partnerships, special education

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The current political climate of the times persists with a feeling of chaos. The lives of average Americans can be influenced by a turbulent and unpredictable society with ever changing values and rule systems. What does this mean for the average American child who has a disability? Sixty eight years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public education is a right that must be equally available to all. This ruling set the stage for the American civil rights movement, which inspired a wave of social transformations within the nation and the public education system. Only forty seven years ago, U. S. Congress passed The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 to ensure children with disabilities would have the right to an education and enacted a set of rules and procedures that would protect the rights of those children and their parents (Phillips, 2008). This marked the beginning of an era where citizens, government leaders, and educational experts and professionals would be in perpetual debate on the most appropriate way to educate children with disabilities.

The most recent legislation is titled Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004). It grants individual parents of individual children the final say in the debate of how the child will access his/her “free appropriate public education” (FAPE) and to what extent “special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for education, employment, and independent living” (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. §1400) are provided by the school. This final say for parents is granted in a series of procedural safeguards that require parents to participate in the development and planning of an individualized education program (IEP), give consent to evaluations, annual program plans, and changes in the form of

formal notices and signed agreements. The legislation even gives parents rights to educational records and due process hearings. IDEA not only assumes parents are willing and able to advocate for the child, it expects them to. Phillips (2008) explained that even though, in essence, the federal law gives every eligible child access to special education, “As with many government-provided services, however, individuals often must take affirmative action in order to receive program benefits” (p. 1806).

Definitions of Terms

Important terminology, used in this paper, is defined as follows:

Family-professional partnerships are also referred to as parent-school partnerships which are used interchangeably in this paper and through-out the literature. Positive and trusting family-professional partnerships are recognized as a benefit for all stakeholders, especially students. Beneficial family-professional partnerships can be characterized and facilitated by open and honest communication, meeting needs and facilitating belonging, competent and inclusive school leadership and staff, empowering family participation and involvement in decision making (Francis et al., 2016).

High performance habits are defined by Burchard (2017) by first explaining high performance as “succeeding beyond standard norms, consistently over the long term” (p. 14) and the habits are what help someone “*excel in and enrich* the full spectrum” of one’s life (p. 16). The high performance habits are practices which are “precise, actionable, repeatable, scalable, and sustainable” (p. 16).

IDEA is abbreviation for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act which is federal legislation that regulates how states provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities who qualify (IDEA, 2004).

IEP is abbreviation for Individualized Education Program which is developed after a student has been assessed by a multidisciplinary team and meets criteria for having a disability. It is a document that describes the student in terms of achievement levels, measurable goals, and any specialized and related services that will be provided to meet the student's needs and make progress on goals. The IEP is revised annually to ensure the child continues to make progress (Phillips, 2008).

Parent advocate may be defined as someone who openly pleads, recommends, and supports on behalf of another person. Phillips (2008) describes how American law tends to assume parents will serve as the best representative for one's child. Wright and Wright (2006) stated parents of a child with a disability need to focus on two goals. The first is making sure the school provides an appropriate education as set forth in the provisions of legislation. The next is to shape and maintain healthy relationships with the school professionals.

Transition is the process intended to prepare students with IEPs to be ready for post-school adult life in the areas of secondary education and training, employment, and independent living. The expanded IEP team including school and adult service agency personnel, parents and students, develop a comprehensive plan so students can receive appropriate supports and services as they exit high school and enter adult life (Cooney, 2002; Rossetti et al., 2016).

Rationale

Rossetti et al. (2021) reported that parent advocates had mixed perceptions of the advocacy expectation. Some viewed advocacy as a moral duty to ensure appropriate services for the child, and others perceived it as unreasonable and that it disadvantages culturally diverse families. A majority of the Rossetti et al. (2021) parent participants reported advocacy activities felt difficult and overwhelming, especially because of the intense demands.

Maintaining an optimistic vision for the child's future and sharing the intimate knowledge and understanding of the child is a critical task for having a positive influence on the student's post school outcomes (Burke et al., 2018; Cooney, 2002; Rossetti et al., 2021). As a part of this, parents must also be active participants in the IEP process, the school community, and the transition stage to adulthood (Cooney 2002, Love et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2004). Families work on navigating restrictive policies, procedures, and unhelpful services across the school age years and into adult services (Burke & Sandman, 2015; Cooney, 2002). Many families face structuring and balancing the family life around employment, income needs and sacrifices, and attending to physical, mental, and spiritual health care (Burke et al., 2017; Dykens et al., 2014; Ocasio-Stoutenburg & Harry, 2021; Rossetti et al., 2021; Wang et al. 2004). When networking and communicating with other parents and service providers inside and outside of the school, parents feel supported managing all aspects of the child's development (Francis et al., 2016; Hess et al., 2006; Rossetti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2004). Some of the heaviest obstacles include: trying to learn legislation and policy and how to use professional level knowledge and negotiation strategies (Francis et al., 2016; Hess et al., 2006; IDEA, 2004; Love et al., 2017; Rossetti et al., 2021; Wright & Wright 2006), facing inaction and lip service by the school

professionals, being powerless and excluded from decision making in hierarchical education systems, and having ongoing disagreements over services (Burke et al. 2018; Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Love et al., 2017, Want et al., 2004; Wright & Wright, 2006). Advocating for the child is made even harder as the schools face scarce funding, lack of resources, and high demands (Phillips, 2008; Wright & Wright, 2006).

Biklen (2011) concluded that if positive change happens in the field of disability and education, it is because the work is “linked to social movements, like self-advocacy, disability rights, the deinstitutionalization movement, and inclusion movement” (p. 12). Most schools and communities are burdened by financial restrictions and obscured by limited perceptions of ability in those with disability labels. Congress understood parents would be needed to keep schools accountable for implementation of equitable education services (Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Phillips, 2008; Wang et al., 2004). Parents can be empowered because one’s participation in the child’s special education journey, through policy procedures and basic action steps, can have unpredictable positive impacts for the child (Burke et al., 2017; Burke et al., 2018; Francis et al., 2016; Love et al., 2017; Rossetti et al., 2016; Rossetti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2004). The literature review in chapter two demonstrates how basic action steps such as having high expectations for the child’s future, knowing one's rights, being organized and prepared, using new skills and focusing on overall positive growth, lighting the way with dedication and intimate knowledge of one's child, and embracing struggles, makes a parent part of a social movement and mission of making a difference for the child, which role models a way for many.

Statement of the question

The vocation of the parent advocate navigating a special education journey with the child can seem extraordinarily daunting and formidable. This level of work calls for a definitive guidance system that clears a pathway forward. While there are many widely available texts about parent advocacy, the researcher desired to create a research-based, yet simplified and empowering model that she could share with families on the journey as a parent advocate. The literature review seeks to answer the following research question: What do parents need to know and be able to do to be an effective advocate for the child in special education? The researcher understood the answers would be overwhelming and that each family's case is diverse and complex. A strategic and impactful way of organizing the answers was necessary.

Burchard (2017) tackled the problem of perpetual overwhelm for people in all walks of life, through his book called *High Performance Habits*. Burchard's dedicated career of research and coaching in the field of personal and professional development enabled him to define high performance as "succeeding beyond standard norms, consistently over the long term" (p. 14) and he consolidated all the actions of top performers world-wide into the set of habits described in the book. The researcher set out to create an alignment of Burchard's habits with parent advocacy principles in order to give purpose and power to the intimidating tasks described in the literature review on the parent experiences and perspectives of advocacy.

After flushing out answers to these questions in chapter two, the researcher condensed the topics and gave form to the alignment of the Burchard habits with parent advocacy principles and action steps. This application is explained in the application material found in chapter three and is demonstrated in Appendix A with a diagram titled Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework.

The researcher extended the application further by exploring how parents seek assistance from a special education advocate and how that research can be applied to a Special Education Advocate Business Model as shown in Appendix B.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

High Performance Parent Advocacy Habits

This chapter is organized into six sections. Each section provides an overview of one of six Burchard (2017) High Performance Habits then describes the parent advocacy mindsets, strategies and tasks that relate to the Burchard habit. Each section has been given a name to align with the synthesis of Burchard's habit and to be understood or interpreted as a broad parent advocacy principle.

Visualize the Future

This first section addresses parent advocacy practices that align with Burchard's (2017) first high performance habit called "seek clarity" (p. 52). This habit represents practices people use to get concrete and specific about fundamental values, goals, and perspectives. It is about having self-awareness, knowing oneself, what one wants, how to get it, and what one finds meaningful and fulfilling. Burchard said to seek clarity, high performers use several specific practices routinely, throughout projects, and across the lifetime. First, a person envisions the future by setting specific intentions and goals for themselves, including how they want to treat others, the skills they need to develop, and how they can make a difference. Next, high performers determine the feeling they want in a situation and generate it. They are aware of one's present emotion, but "override it by defining what they want to feel" (p. 80). Third, high performers distinguish what is most meaningful by targeting what gives them a deep sense of enthusiasm, connection, satisfaction, and coherence. Burchard stated "*focus on these things more consistently than you ever have before*. That's what moves the needle. With greater focus will come greater clarity, and with greater clarity will come more consistent action and, ultimately,

high performance” (p. 88). Without a detailed vision and goal, people float, waiting for something to happen, then nothing happens. They become reliant on being reactive, resulting in increased frustration. Burchard asserted that seeking clarity connects people to the future and offers the fulfillment and drive needed to persist with forward action.

Rossetti et al. (2021) reported how parents in the study used their capacity to maintain an optimistic vision for the child’s future as an asset for the advocacy efforts. When giving suggestions for practices that enhance family-professional partnerships, Rossetti et al. recommended that school personnel need to listen to the parents’ perspective about the student to better understand the child’s strengths, interests, and needs. “Participants’ aspirational capital included high expectations for the child and an asset-based rather than deficit-oriented approach” (p. 454). Parents have a unique opportunity to turn their hopes into optimism and meaningful life experiences for their children. Parent advocates can articulate one’s own intentions and the child’s ideas to administrators, teachers, and specialists and hope the personnel commit to purposefully integrating these visions into Individualized Education Program (IEP) transition goals and services that enable positive future outcomes.

When examining parent participation in the transition phases of a child’s school career, Cooney (2002) recommended including the students in choice making and having a say in directing their own future. Additionally, parents explained how the child’s capabilities and personality traits could be matched to appropriate adult activities and jobs, and parents had a keen sense of what situations or opportunities were not a good fit for the child. When looking toward adulthood, both parents and students wanted authentic work, self-directed time to spend with friends, family, or leisure, and an individual living space. Instead, families faced a multitude

of restrictive policies, procedures, and often, unhelpful services. In Rossetti et al. (2016), one parent participant was quoted on her perspective for being responsible for her son's post-school outcomes. "I came up with an alternate life. I said, 'This is what I'd like his life to look like.' ... So, I pretty much did it." (p. 267). Parents in Rossetti et al. (2016) had children with intellectual developmental disabilities (IDD) and pervasive support needs, so the children were even more dependent on the parent's advocacy and understanding of their needs. When facing complicated service systems and the demanding coordination of care requirements, another parent was quoted as saying, "We've still got to carve it out. We had to make it be a success." (p. 267). High expectations and strong parental advocacy was significantly correlated to successful post-school outcomes in community participation, self-direction, and employment. For the parents in this study, high expectations meant focusing on what was typical for other students his/her child's age and envisioning post-school activities and opportunities to mirror that of a typical young adult.

Hess et al. (2006) found that many parents were both empowered by the role as an advocate and could still have wavering awareness and feelings about the future and unknowns. One parent stated that it was difficult to think about the future for her child. While the future can be full of uncertainties and elicit much insecurity, one of the main purposes of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is to "ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education" and "prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living" (IDEA, 2004). In Burke and Sandman (2015), they examined parent desires for future IDEA reauthorizations and many parent participants (30.61% or n = 15) wanted more sound transition provisions in the law. The parents said this would help

the children develop better self-advocacy skills at a younger age and better connect the students with disabilities to adult opportunities.

In the IEP process, transition planning is meant to be a results-oriented planning process and services often start late and are frequently not clearly defined or executed by qualified providers. So, parent advocates need to assist the special education team to articulate a post-high school vision for the child that includes components of what might be most appropriate, yet ambitious, in the areas of independent living, community participation, training, and employment (Cooney, 2002; and Rossetti et al., 2016).

Sustain Momentum

This section addresses parent advocacy practices that align with Burchard's (2017) second high performance habit called "generate energy" (p. 90). This habit focuses on practices that give people lasting physical, mental, and emotional stamina. High performers are consistently happy in the pursuit of one's success, despite facing not unusual high risks and stressful situations. Burchard explained the top three practices that effectively generate and improve energy in all areas of a high performer's life. The first is to learn to "master transitions" between tasks, events, or stages of life (p.98). The key here is to develop small mini-meditation habits of releasing tension and then setting intentions before a new task or challenge. The next practice is to deliberately choose thoughts and behaviors that produce positive emotions. Burchard said feelings are "the interpretations you have about the emotions you sense" and one can consciously choose their feelings (p. 105). High performers visualize, anticipate, imagine, and reflect on positive emotions such as joy and gratitude, which with practice, promotes more positive emotion. People with this mindset even plan out how they will respond to negative

emotion when it happens. Finally, if someone wants to be a high performer, they must do better with the following: exercise, nutrition, and sleep, and take them very seriously, no excuses. The first two practices for generating energy addressed mental and emotional vitality, which are just as important as the common-sense, widely understood, physical practices of diet, exercise, and sleep pattern.

According to Rossetti et al. (2021), the advocacy role is repeatedly reported as overwhelming and burdensome. The amount of time required is so taxing, many parents decide to give up employment and income to devote the extensive time needed to train themselves and communicate with school personnel so they can advocate for what the child needs.

Wang et al. (2004) explored the impact of advocacy and found some parents expressed how the demands of advocating led to some positive consequences for the family quality of life. With all the new skills parents needed to learn, they reported gaining confidence as they applied skills they were learning to the advocacy process. Parents also reported gaining comfort and advantage from networking with other parents, joining parent support groups, and collaborating with professionals. Parent advocates used these positive experiences to fuel their efforts. One parent was even quoted as saying “I’ve decided this is a lot of work, but I’m not going to not enjoy my children. And I actually have to make a conscious effort to go put all this behind me” (p. 149). While this statement was made when assessing her stress, it seemed to reflect mindful intent and personal choice to focus on the joy her children bring her instead of the conflicts with school personnel.

Burke et al. (2017) examined the impacts of mindfulness strategies used by parent advocates. Parent participants completed a mindfulness intervention program and reflected on

the mindfulness strategies they used to combat stress associated with attending IEP meetings and the effects. Participants used the following strategies: “being nonreactive, being ‘in the moment,’ breathing techniques, focusing on the overall picture, taking a break” (p. 172). These strategies helped the parents to feel calmer, enabling better communication, which kept parent-professional relationships positive. Parents reported less stress and negative emotions, feeling better overall, and increased the effectiveness of the advocacy. This increased efficacy led some to get improved services for the child.

Dykens et al. (2014) studied how Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and Positive Adult Development (PAD) techniques reduced stress in mothers of children with autism and other disabilities. Using clinical inventories and scales for depression, anxiety, insomnia, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction, the study results confirmed significant positive results for parent participants using these mindfulness and positive psychology interventions. Examples of strategies taught in these interventions include: breathing, meditation, and movement techniques or, neutralizing guilt and worry, focusing on strengths, and practicing things like gratitude, forgiveness, and optimism. Dykens et al. (2014) concluded accessible health services for parents of children with disabilities is critical to improving one’s mental health and sustained caregiving abilities.

In Ocasio-Stoutenburg and Harry (2021), they concluded a significant part of what the advocates in the case studies did to become great advocates was “self-work” (p. 190). This self-work involved reading stories from other parents, journaling about their feelings and experiences, and using faith, prayer, and spirituality. These practices were fundamental in dealing with negativity in a constructive and positive manner.

Establish Standards

This section addresses parent advocacy practices that align with Burchard's (2017) third high performance habit called "raise necessity" (p. 126). This habit provides practices that drive or demand a person to act. High performers have an identity that is tied to high standards of excellence for themselves and a strangely dangerous level of obsession with one's field of interest. High performers are fueled by a greater purpose and call to service beyond themselves. This strong sense of purpose creates urgency and is additionally supported by having accurate measures of timeliness and awareness of what needs to be done now and what can wait.

Burchard (2017) goes on to make *raise necessity* attainable by giving three specific areas for people to work on. The first is knowing who one is serving and what one needs to do to deliver excellence and make a difference. The second is affirming to oneself and others why excellence is a must. The last area is seeking out and connecting with others who are positive, who have high expectations for themselves, and who share similar values, experiences, and expertise.

When high performers do these things, they know that showing up and being amazing, right now, is a must.

Congress outlined the primary purpose for IDEA legislation is "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education . . . and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living;" and "to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected" (2004). Effective parent advocates understand the framework of the law and the rights granted to them and the children. Wright and Wright (2006) emphasized how learning to do legal research gives parent advocates critical knowledge and power. One parent, in the Burke et al. (2017) study, spoke about being

informed about her special education rights. “You have to find out your own rights ... knowing that I have rights and just calmly enforcing those and [saying] ‘Look, we are going to do what I want to do because really I have the last say’” (p. 171).

Learning about their rights and feeling guilty when realizing they could have advocated for more sooner was an important theme in the Rossetti et al. (2021) data. Hess et al. (2006) found that parents tend to realize over time the need for them to be the child’s advocate. One parent said, “It took me several years before I realized, I am his advocate. I have to speak up and say, ‘okay, wait a minute, slow down, what does that mean, what did you say?’” (p. 153). Love et al. (2017) described how parent participants used their rights as a way to influence decisions about the child’s education. Some of the ways they did this included: making multiple requests to see draft IEPs before meetings, refusing to sign IEPs until one’s requests are taken into account, and demanding multiple hours of IEP meetings over a short period of time to put pressure on personnel.

In Rossetti’s et al. (2021) findings, the parent participants used skills and behaviors that challenged the school professionals, which made the advocacy role feel burdensome and the parents expressed a shared feeling that they wish it did not have to be this way. It was common that the parents felt responsible to hold school personnel accountable for following the law and service delivery. This theme of needing to hold school personnel accountable required parents to learn discipline, assertiveness, timelines, processes, and skills to navigate and negotiate in the complex realm of the education system.

Hess et al. (2006) asserted the belief that families benefit from support from other families who have been successful in the special education process and who can help them

understand benefits and disadvantages of placement options, services available to them, and the parent role in the decision-making and IEP process. Parents need others who can explain what they need to know so they can exercise their rights. In Rossetti et al. (2021), it is reported that some parents joined local Special Education Parent Advisory Councils, other parents made efforts to connect with other families of children with disabilities for support and advice.

Execute Plans

This section addresses parent advocacy practices that align with Burchard's (2017) fourth high performance habit called "increase productivity" (p. 172). Effective individuals make goal achievement consistent and satisfying over time. High performers are skilled planners, set priorities, avoid distractions, and get things done, all while staying healthy and maintaining a high level of excellence. The major players in productivity are goals, energy, and focus. Burchard laid out the three most important practices for getting the most done without burning out or compromising happiness and wellness. The first is to decide what tasks are the most fruitful, the tasks that produce the richest, most quality outcomes and spend 60% of one's time or effort on those few things. Burchard called these things "prolific quality output" and the "golden proportion of 60/40" (p. 192). The second productivity practice is to make a plan choosing the five most important projects that move a person toward goal achievement and putting them on a calendar with steps and deadlines. High performers do this with "discipline" and "focused execution" (p. 203). The last practice is to get really good at key skills. This is about figuring out what skills will make one better and stronger at what one does and to work explicitly and methodically on developing those skills. Burchard gave great examples of what these practices

look like and left the reader with a sense of empowerment for starting a journey of work for which they can be proud.

Wang et al. (2004) found parents reported working on the following tasks the most: phone calls, writing letters, following up on commitments, contacting leadership personnel or administrators, and educating professionals about the child's needs and strengths. The parents believed adding these tasks to already busy schedules was essential to improving services for the child. A parent from Burke and Sandman (2015) was responding to the paperwork provisions in IDEA and she expressed how receiving regular progress updates, data logs, and evaluations was necessary for her to be a successful advocate on the IEP team. She needed these to coordinate appropriate services for her child. Many parent advocates also add and manage specialists and services outside of the school system as another active step to get the child what they need (Love et al., 2017).

Wright and Wright (2006) used the metaphor of "project manager" to help the reader understand the role of a parent advocate. They described duties to include: collect records and information, learn official procedures, figure out steps and make plans, document all communication, identify challenges, and share solutions. As these authors guided the parent reader to prepare them for advocacy, they also provided a list of office supplies they will need for the journey. Items like binders, sticky notes, envelopes and stamps, a calendar, journal, and contact log are all necessary. Wright and Wright also stressed the importance of parents learning new mindsets, attitudes, questioning, problem solving, and negotiation tactics. They described how project managers anticipate conflicts and obstacles, and have plans to minimize them and

preserve relationships. They focused on facts and model respect. They have specific, attainable goals and plans and are prepared and organized.

Be the Light

This section addresses parent advocacy practices that align with Burchard's (2017) fifth high performance habit called "develop influence" (p. 214). 'Being the light' enables a person to work with others in a cooperative and empathetic way. Instead of seeing others who have opposing viewpoints as enemies or adversaries, high performers see themselves as successful and capable in being a true team player. High performers are bold in asking for what they want and do not worry about what other people think. They also are good at asking questions that get other people to talk about themselves, their ideas, feelings, needs, desires, and goals. Once they understand the people they are working with on a deeper level, they give careful thought to the ways they can be helpful, show appreciation, and give others genuine trust and encouragement. Burchard leveled up by explaining the three most impactful ways a person can leave lasting influence on others. The first way is to show others how to think about something (other people, themselves, or the world) in a new way. The next is to challenge people to rise to the occasion by giving or acting on something important or worthy. Finally, high performers are role models, and they intentionally put time and effort into planning what they can do so others will want to do the same thing. In short, Burchard's "develop influence" habit can be summed up with instruction to *be the light*, pointing others to safety, in the disorderly and tragic world.

Biklen (2011) explained when he and his colleagues were studying families, they discovered and documented how some students with the most severe disabilities experienced high expectations and belonging within the context of the family.

These were families where the person with a disability was involved in all aspects of family life, where there was never a question of abandoning inclusion of the child, where the child was known for his or her personality, and interestingly, where competence was presumed. (p. 7)

In these parents' minds, the child was capable, smart, strong, fun, and persistent. These parents set an intention and path for discovery and possibility instead of focusing on the child's challenges and precarious future outcomes.

Cooney (2002) found that the parent participants in his study approached the child's case inductively pointing to the student's strengths and capabilities as ground for building strategies, plans, and a promising future. The professionals in schools and adult service agencies seemed to approach the process more deductively by basing recommendations and decision making on formal evaluation results, effects of the child's disability, experiences observing inconsistent abilities in the child, and trying to make realistic matches between child's skills and practical options. Cooney pointed out how all parties were working toward the betterment of the young adults, but approached the process from starkly different perspectives. Neither party acknowledged the differences in perspectives. Cooney recommended a more collaborative approach.

When discussing partnerships between parents and professionals, Wang et al. (2004) demonstrated how parent participants attest to the power of positive relationships to alleviate the weight and pressure of the advocacy demands adopted by the parents. In Burke et al. (2018), parent and professional participants agreed that when communication between parents and

professionals happens frequently and in a positive manner, as opposed to demanding and aggressive communications, there may be better results.

Francis et al. (2016) highlighted some of the simple and effective ways in which parents' communication with professionals strengthened positive relationships between school personnel and families. These communication strategies include: sharing contact information and preferences, expressing personal dedication and care to the student's success, showing gratitude and note writing, visiting classrooms before and after school for quick conversations, sharing when things happen at home that may impact the child's school day, and being open and honest about concerns as they arise. Also, using data, examples, and pictures when communicating about the child, along with a positive attitude and a focus on strengths were all noted as methods for building trusting relationships. Finally, volunteering, participating in school activities, and serving on parent committees also demonstrate reliability, commitment, and equality for creating increased trust, connection, and interdependence in the school community.

No matter how positive and collaborative some parents and professionals are, there are still many reports of parents experiencing high levels of anger and frustration with how they are treated and the lack of change or impact they desire from the schools. Parents in Burke et al. (2018) reported teachers expressed approval or support of services or strategies, but never took action. Professionals reported the feasibility of a request is not doable based on the request not being a proper match for the child's ability level or not being able to balance meeting the needs of all students.

Kalyanpur et al. (2000) argued the parent-professional partnership premise is directly contradicting established professional hierarchies and status structures enabled by specialized

knowledge in the education system. According to Love et al. (2017), families still experience being excluded from decision making and being told budgets and restricted funding justified lack of services, qualified teachers and options. In some situations, parents try to overcome obstacles by working hard on relationships, seeking and paying for services outside of the school system, finding ways to bring in-service training to the child's team, even providing training and education themselves. Some teachers are warm and welcoming to such help. Wright and Wright (2006) described how overcoming a *culture of no* is about learning the rules of the game, demonstrating preparation, professionalism, developing win-win solutions to problems, and protecting the parent-school relationship.

Inspire

This section addresses parent advocacy practices that align with Burchard's (2017) sixth high performance habit called "demonstrate courage" (p. 254). This habit has to do with taking action even when there is fear or risk involved. Burchard cautioned his audience by assuring them that courageous acts do not have to be showy or regarded as grand or heroic. Once more, Burchard has basic and achievable practices to help a person act when times are complicated and risky. The first practice is called "honor the struggle" (p. 267), which is where one trains their mindset to affirm hardship as part of the journey, instead of sensing difficulty and running from it. High performers understand that real success and better futures come from meeting adversity and failure with diligence, patience, persistence, and faith. The next real practice in demonstrating courage is to be daring in sharing authentic dreams and desires with others. Burchard said high performers do not shrink or play small, and despite being met with doubt, criticism, and judgment, they hold on to and tell others about their ambitious goals. High

performers are truthful about who they are and that helps them be connected and have trustworthy relationships with others. Finally, the third practice is to identify who one is fighting for. High performers have a noble motivation that includes making a difference for someone else. Even when facing vulnerability and uncertainty, high performers fulfill the heart's desire to show love and leave this life with the satisfaction of doing something truly valuable that will be remembered by someone special.

Rossetti et al. (2021) reported that parents' advocacy efforts are incited by making a difference for the child. For some, being a strong advocate becomes so integrated in one's social identity, it becomes a lifestyle and a source of pride because they believe the advocacy work not only benefits the child, but other children as well. Some parent advocates are determined to influence the child's education in spite of being excluded from decision making processes, uncollaborative team members, and great systematic barriers. The parents in the Rossetti et al. (2016) study did not accept the boundaries the system attempts to place on them or the children. "They made calls, got on waiting lists, and networked with others" (p. 267). Parents' high expectations for the child and willingness to do the work enabled them to carve out a life that was in alignment with meaningful vision and goals.

In Love et al. (2017), parents took it upon themselves to build relationships and took action by helping in the broader school community and in the individual child's classrooms and curriculum. Some examples of this from Love et al. (2017) included volunteering on committees, writing notes, buying small gifts to lift morale, offering to coordinate in-service professional development, even coming up with and implementing the child's accommodations and modifications on their own. Staying positive, having to accept limited options, making

concessions or agreeing to options that are not ideal but that offer the most benefit for the child based on present circumstances are some of the tough decisions parents face with courage and grace.

Parents' influence in the child's education seems insurmountable when parents are depended upon to advocate for their children while confronting scarce options and authority driven systems. Wang et al. (2004) said persistent issues caused strained relationships and included: disagreements on appropriate services, parents not being included in the IEP development process, school personnel telling parents they can not do what is required for the child, and school personnel not having the qualifications to work with students with disabilities.

In Cooney (2002), parents reported facing situations where they felt school personnel believed the child was incapable, that they as the parents were being unrealistic, inadequate opportunities for the child to show his or her strengths, and feeling alienated at meetings. Phillips (2008) attributed the failures of schools to meet full compliance with IDEA to several conditions. First, the lack of sufficient funding from state and federal governments is a true reality. Additionally, the measures used to plan, budget, and predict special education funding for highly individualized programs are unstable and fluctuate with frequent student transitions and always changing demographics. Finally, the escalating paperwork requirements, on multiple levels of the system, complicate the ability of educational teams to implement quality programs and strategies for students. These larger-than-life problems create roadblocks for professionals that force them into restrictive attitudes and positions.

Despite these institutional barriers, parents persist, and the most prevailing advocacy tactics parents utilize are sharing what they experience outside of school with the educators.

Burke et al. (2018) described how parents acted out this sharing by bringing in outside therapists and advocates, bringing in videos and materials from home to provide evidence and examples of effective practices, and then going to workshops and training and communicating new knowledge with the child's educational teams.

Despite the stress from adversarial struggles with professionals, parent participants emphasized the importance of persevering and following through. Parents understand that they can not rely on others to do the advocating for them. Parent advocates understand that in the end, it is up to them (Love et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2004).

In this chapter the literature demonstrated the range of experiences parent advocates have when challenged to serve the children with a disability in the role of parent advocate. The experiences are sorted to align with the Burchard (2017) high performance habits. The next chapter will synthesize the ideas to develop parent advocacy action steps to assist parents to perform the best.

CHAPTER III: APPLICATION MATERIALS

This chapter will demonstrate how a synthesis of Burchard's (2017) high performance habits and parent advocacy action steps can form a dynamic framework or "big-picture reference" for coaching parents through one's unique journey of advocacy for the child. Appendix A is a diagram showing the advocacy framework that aligns parent advocacy performance principles with doable action steps. Then the researcher will review findings from the literature about parents who seek assistance from a special education advocate service, what that relationship and process looks like, and apply to a special education advocate business model in Appendix B.

The Dynamic Advocacy Framework

The purpose of synthesizing Burchard's (2017) research-based high performance habits with research-based parent advocacy practices is to create a holistic and comprehensive framework that can be understood and utilized in a functional manner to demonstrate the whole of effective parent advocacy action steps and principles, as seen in the diagram in Appendix A. The literature has demonstrated that many barriers to appropriate services for children with disabilities exist and challenges for parent advocates are immense and inevitable. It is necessary to see the working parts of the advocacy journey and to set goals to maintain growth and longevity in the journey. The principles and action steps are all interconnected and explicable from one another. The framework is set up to be foundational, yet meant to be dynamic, progressive, and developing.

Visualize the Future is the first set of action principles. Burchard emphasized seeking clarity on one's values, goals, and visions, directing one's intention for emotions, and determining what is meaningful. The literature revealed how parents visualize the future by having high expectations and an optimistic vision for the child (Rossetti, 2021), articulating the child and parent's vision for the future with stakeholders (Cooney, 2002), and being active in transition planning with the child's IEP team (Burke & Sandman, 2015; Hess et al., 2006; IDEA, 2004). See Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework in Appendix A for three action steps on Visualize the Future.

Sustain Momentum is the next set of action principles. Burchard emphasized generating energy by releasing tension and setting intention, bringing joy by choosing thoughts and behaviors that produce positive emotions along with planning a response for negative emotion, and taking right action on exercise, nutrition, and sleep needs. The literature revealed how parents sustain momentum by structuring family life and employment/income to balance demands of advocacy and family quality of life (Rossetti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2004). Some parents learned new skills and networked with other parents who shared similar journeys and experienced new found confidence in applying new skills (Wang et al., 2004). Other parents used mindfulness strategies like breathing, meditation, gratitude, journaling, and prayer to control emotion, set intention, and focus on the positives and big picture (Burke et al., 2017; Dykens et al., 2014; Ocasio-Stoutenburg & Harry, 2021). See Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework in Appendix A for three action steps on Sustain Momentum.

Establish Standards is the next set of action principles. Burchard emphasized raising necessity by determining what is excellence and who will benefit from it, sharing with others for

accountability, and affirming right action from connecting with experienced experts. The literature revealed how parents established standards by getting to know federal, state, and local legislation and policy then leveraging negotiation, discipline, assertiveness, and documentation in the IEP process (Burke et al., 2017; Hess et al., 2006; IDEA, 2004; Love et al., 2017; Rossetti et al., 2021; Wright & Wright, 2006). The literature also provided strong reports on the positive effects on parents when they join parent advocacy organizations and find other parent experts and resources (Hess et al., 2006; Rossetti et al., 2021). See Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework in Appendix A for three action steps on Establish Standards.

Execute Plans is the next set of action principles. Burchard emphasized increasing productivity by completing tasks that have the most fruitful impact, putting the top five actions on the calendar, and engaging in personal skill development. The literature revealed how parents establish executing plans by obtaining and understanding official documents and data (Burke & Sandman, 2015; Wright & Wright, 2006) and working on tasks related to communicating and interacting with various education and service personnel (Love et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2004; Wright & Wright, 2006). See Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework in Appendix A for three action steps on Execute Plans.

Be the Light is the next set of action principles. Burchard emphasized developing influence by teaching others how to think, rallying others to contribute to a worthy cause, and planning to be a role-model for thinking and contributing. The literature revealed how parents are the light by teaching others how to understand the child (Biklen, 2011; Cooney, 2002; Love et al., 2017), being purposeful in achieving positive family-professional partnerships (Burke et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2004; Wright & Wright, 2006), and demonstrating dedication, gratitude,

kindness, openness, honesty, reliability, and equality (Francis et al., 2017; Love et al., 2017; Wright & Wright, 2006). See Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework in Appendix A for three action steps on Be the Light.

Inspire is the final set of action principles. Burchard emphasized demonstrating courage by accepting hardship as part of the journey, telling others about the dream without shrinking or acting small, and giving value by being of service to someone special. The literature revealed how parents inspire others by having a clear reason for advocating (Rossetti et al., 2021), being prepared to do hard things, and give time, resources, training, and useful data (Burke et al., 2018; Cooney, 2002; Love et al., 2017; Rossetti et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2004). See Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework in Appendix A for three action steps on Inspire.

This review and synthesis of special education advocacy literature with habits of high performers enabled the researcher to answer the research question in a clear and concise manner. Now that the researcher has identified what the most important actions and principles are for a parent advocate of a child with a disability, one can direct assistance, education, and empowerment to those key missions.

Special Education Advocate Assistance

In this section, the researcher will demonstrate how literature can be used to develop a special education advocacy business concept. The research established some of the reasons parents requested a special education advocate, the activities the advocate engaged in, the process the advocate used with parents, and the outcomes of having an advocate.

In the beginning of Goldman et al. (2020), the authors laid a foundation for the current study by highlighting the many barriers parents and caregivers face to advocate on behalf of

one's child. Much of what they discussed is referenced above in chapter two. These barriers and the voices of parents establish a need for assistance from a special education advocate. Goldman et al. (2020) participant data demonstrated that the main reason parents sought out an advocate was for the advocate to attend an IEP meeting with them. Other reasons for requesting assistance included not agreeing with the school about the amount or type of services or supports, wanting to learn more about one's rights, disagreements with schools on placement decisions, or dealing with transitions to new programs or locations. It is important for non-attorney advocates to stay within the constraints of his or her capabilities and be careful not to cross over into offering prohibited legal advice (Burke & Goldman, 2017). Appendix B outlines a list of ways a special education advocate can assist parents. The list is labeled Designation and Purpose of Advocate Services, Tools, and Resources.

Goldman et al. (2020) also found participants reported certain types of activities advocates engaged in to assist parents. The types of activities included reviewing official school documents, communicating with school personnel or guiding the parents on how to do so themselves, and attending meetings. See Special Education Advocate Activities & Services in Appendix B.

Burke and Goldman's (2017) study was conducted to learn more about the process advocates use to work with families. Burke and Goldman discovered advocates used a process with five main stages: "developing rapport with the parent, establishing clear expectations, learning about the child and the family, educating and empowering the parent, and participating in Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings" (p. 7). The important themes from the data emphasized building trust by being a good listener and having relatable experiences to share,

being able to be clear on the services and level of competency the advocate has to offer, and knowing when and where to point the parent toward other resources and services, developing a deep understanding of the child and family, explaining special education terminology, procedures, and rights, and being empathic and emotionally supportive. See Appendix B for an Advocacy Assistance Process.

Finally, when examining outcomes of using an advocate, Burke et al. (2019) reported both family and advocate participants described the same process and positive experiences. Family and advocate participants both reported positive and negative responses from the schools ranging from receptive to confrontational. Some of the positive outcomes from the advocacy process included increased services, improved student experiences, and progress for the student. Also, parents experienced improved family-school partnerships and collaborative communication, along with a sense of empowerment and improved family quality of life. In the Goldman et al. (2020) study, participants reported the outcomes of families and schools reaching compromise and the school providing what the family was requesting. However, sometimes the families continued to be unhappy with the quality of services from the school and even had to change schools. Most families who were not happy with the end result of continued disagreements with the school, still reported being happy with the advocate. While the positive outcomes are never guaranteed, it may be important to keep such unpredictable outcomes in perspective for families and advocates. See Appendix B for a list labeled items to be considered when evaluating the outcomes of the advocacy process.

Appendix B also includes a list of tools and resources that can be created and utilized by a special education advocate to assist parents with carrying out the action steps outlined in the

Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework in Appendix A. See Tools & Resources list in Appendix B.

This chapter illustrated how parent advocates can enhance the advocacy efforts with actionable steps and seek assistance in the advocacy journey. In the next chapter, the researcher will draw conclusions and point to relevant limitations and implications for the research.

CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Summary of Literature

There are many challenges to becoming and being an effective parent advocate for a child with a disability. In this review of the literature on parent experiences of advocacy in special education, the researcher explored how parent mindsets, strategies, and tasks can be aligned with Burchard's (2017) high performing habits for success. The literature demonstrated what parents need to do when interacting with schools to effect positive outcomes for children who are in need of accessing individualized instruction and support through the special education system.

Burchard (2017) researched and worked with people who create success and well-being over time, in both their personal and professional lives, and discovered the mindsets, strategies, and tasks that make them successful. He said these habits can be categorized into six powerful categories: seek clarity, generate energy, raise necessity, increase productivity, develop influence, and demonstrate courage. The following includes highlights from the literature in chapter two on critical principles of parents who are active and effective in advocating for their children.

Parents need to have high expectations and an optimistic vision of the child and what they are capable of (Rossetti et al., 2021). Parents who do this can visualize and describe what will be beneficial to the children and their future (Rossetti et al., 2016). Parents need to take appropriate action to balance the demands of family life and the demands of advocacy (Rossetti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2004). Parents who are intentional in engaging in

mindfulness techniques are also more likely to have sustained well-being in coping with stress and frustration (Burke et al., 2017; Dykens et al., 2014; Ocasio-Stoutenburge & Harry, 2021).

Next, it is critical for parents to understand the premise and frameworks of laws that affect the provision of special education services for the child (IDEA, 2004). Knowing one's rights, being able to do legal research, seeking support from other parent advocates, and holding school teams accountable are necessary components of the advocacy process (Burke et al., 2017; Hess et al., 2006; Rossetti et al., 2021; Wright & Wright, 2006). Because of the high volume of specialized knowledge and documentation that special education requires, parents need to learn new skills, be productive communicators, be organized, and good at following through (Burke & Sandman, 2015; Love et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2004; Wright & Wright, 2006).

Finally, parents need to be aware that professional perspectives will likely vary from their own and there may be challenges in understanding one another because of the hierarchical nature of the school system (Burke et al., 2018; Kalyanpur et al., 2000; Love et al., 2017; Wright & Wright, 2006). This means it will take extra work and skill in communicating with a positive attitude and making positive working relationships a priority (Burke et al., 2018; Cooney, 2002; Francis et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2004). Parents who persist with advocacy, despite overwhelming challenges, have an extra elevated level of motivation to make a difference for the child and are prepared to face difficulty (Cooney, 2002; Phillips, 2008; Rossetti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2004). They meet struggles by giving extra time and service to the school community and being transparent and open about sharing one's experiences,

expertise, and perspectives with the school community (Burke et al., 2018; Love et al., 2017; Rossetti et al., 2016).

Professional Application

For the application project, the researcher demonstrated how parent advocacy experiences can align with Burchard's (2017) high performing habits for success. The categories of Burchard's habits are given new names so as to be understood as parent advocacy principles with corresponding action steps. See Appendix A for a diagram demonstrating this alignment of principles and action steps. The researcher titled the diagram "Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework" because it offers a holistic guide for enacting the most effective practices of parent advocacy in the special education realm. Each practice, or numbered action step, is a direct synthesis of the data from the literature review on parent advocacy. This tells the reader what parents need to be able to do in order to carry out the most effective parent advocacy for the child.

Next, additional research revealed some of the most popular reasons parents request assistance from a special education advocate, defined some of the activities of the advocate, the process the advocate used, and some possible outcomes of having an advocate. Some of the major reasons for having an advocate included: attending the child's IEP meeting with the parent, parents having disagreements with the school or needing help with school procedures or transitions for the child to new programming, and parents desiring to learn more about their rights (Goldman et al., 2020). The types of activities the advocates do include: examining school records, communicating with parents and school professionals, and attending meetings with the parent (Goldman et al., 2020). Advocates and parents both described a similar process

the advocate used for working with the parent. Some key parts of the process were described as developing trust and rapport with the parent, being clear and explicit about what the parent can and can not expect from the advocate, learning about the child and the parent, and teaching the parent about one's rights and the special education process (Burke & Goldman, 2017). At last, there were a range of outcomes communicated in the data. Some of the positive outcomes included: increased services for the child, improved school experiences for the child, progress for the child in school, improved parent-school partnerships, improved quality of life for the family, and feelings of empowerment for families (Burke et al., 2019). Reaching compromise on proposals with the school or obtaining what the parents were requesting was also considered beneficial outcomes of having an advocate. Some negative outcomes included: members of school teams being confrontational, parents continuing to be dissatisfied with the quality of services the school was providing, having to change schools, and ongoing disagreements with school personnel (Burke et al., 2019; Goldman et al., 2020).

Limitations of the Research

Due to the qualitative nature of the research in this field, there can be no assumed or fixed way of generalizing for all disability families. The studies included here are conducted with small groups of participants so the perspectives and experiences can be examined in depth and compared with other perspectives to find commonalities and establish broad themes such as in Cooney (2002), Burke et al. (2019), Goldman et al. (2020), Hess et al. (2006), Love et al. (2017), Rossetti et al. (2016), Rossetti et al. (2021), and Wang et al. (2004). The small participant group sizes led to limited generalization to all parents of children with disabilities.

In his reflection on his career in qualitative research in the field of disability, Biklen (2011) described how he perceived qualitative methods as “a way of seeing or taking stock of how people interpret and create their worlds” (p. 1) and this kind of work enabled him and his colleagues “to develop particular understandings about the nature of the disability and its social meaning” (p. 11). A broad understanding of the social meaning and context of disability, especially through the eyes of parents, can enable a special education advocate to illuminate a way for the parent to better understand themselves in their role as the advocate for the child with a disability. The in-depth experience and knowledge of an advocate who has worked in the special education field can explain and anticipate the various precarious circumstances a parent may encounter (Burke et al., 2019; Burke & Goldman, 2017; Goldman et al., 2020; Hess et al., 2006).

Implications for Future Research

While the action steps for what parents need to be able to do to be an effective advocate is answered here, much of the research referenced has been conducted to teach educational professionals about the experiences and perspectives of parents and families of children with disabilities and to motion the educators to be more responsive to families and parent advocacy. In many cases researchers even call for professionals to examine how they can facilitate parent advocacy and take systematic measures to evoke more parental participation in the community such as in Haines et al. (2015), Hess et al. (2006), Kalyanpur et al. (2000), Love et al. (2017), Phillips (2008), Rossetti et al. (2021), and Wang et al. (2004).

However, this type of educational initiative or movement is not widely embraced. The research clearly attests to the relative impact positive family-professional partnerships have on

the advocacy process and positive student outcomes such as in Burke et al. (2018), Cooney (2002), Francis et al. (2016), Love et al. (2017), Rossetti et al. (2016), Rossetti et al. (2021), Wang et al. (2004), and Wright and Wright (2006). So, because educational professionals have a big role in influencing the outcomes of advocacy, it would be beneficial to focus more research on the strategies for explaining the role of the parent advocate and special education advocate to a child's team and how to promote or utilize the practices and structures that are needed to make the partnership work such as in Francis et al. (2016).

Conclusion

Clearly, the researcher is seeking out the most effective way to make a difference in the field of special education, specifically for individuals with disabilities and their families. Results of this research affirm parent advocacy is one of the most valuable components of the success of children with disabilities receiving adequate and appropriate special education services. Parent participation is weighted heavily because of the expectation placed on parents to hold schools accountable to following implementation of IDEA (IDEA, 2004; Phillips, 2008; Rossetti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2004). This places a far-reaching burden on parents. Simple, clear, powerful, actionable steps can help a parent gain the confidence and energy needed to be the advocate they desire to be for their children. Assistance from a special education advocate may be a necessary help designed to alleviate and empower parent advocacy, inspire high expectations, and improve student outcomes.

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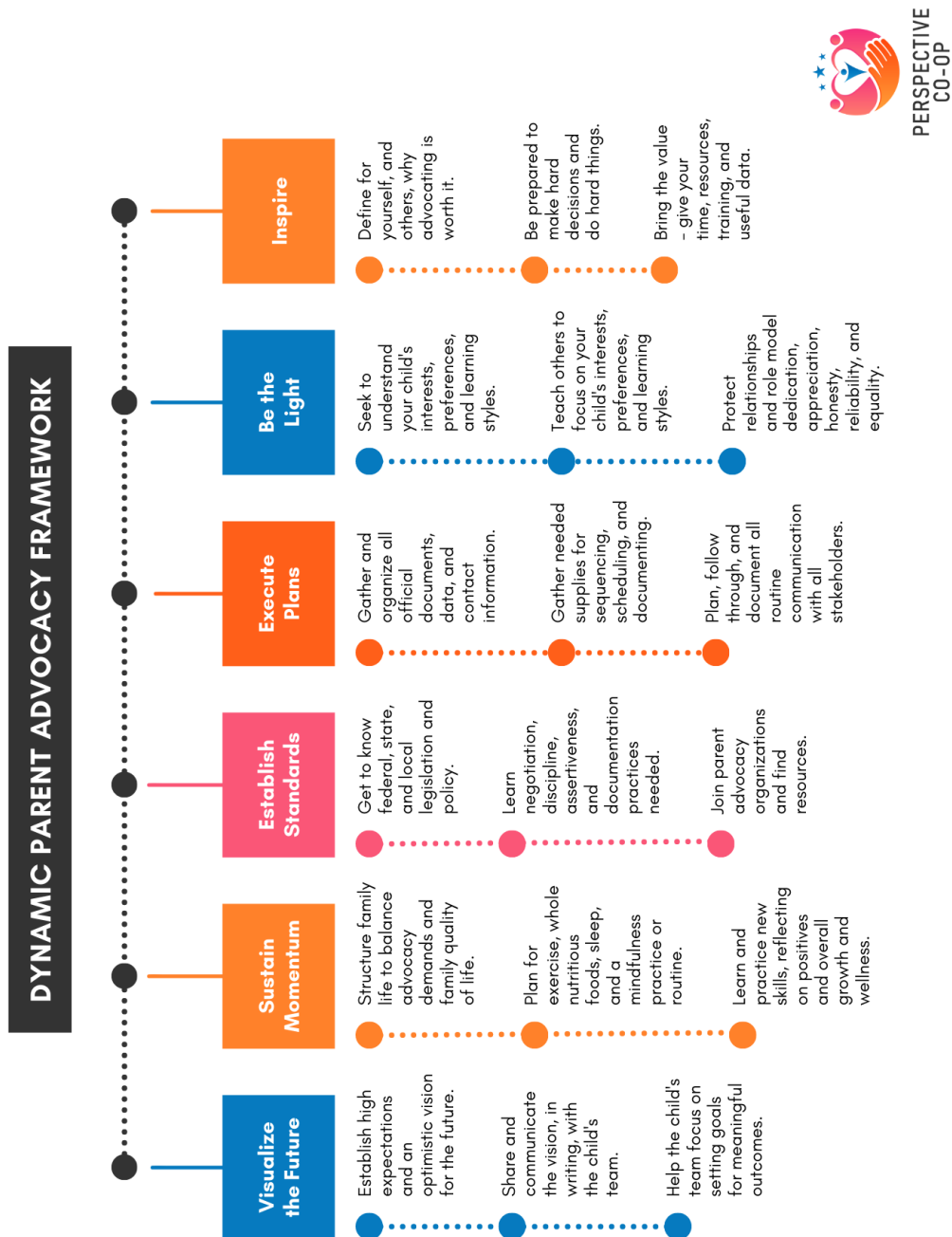
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Appendix A

Dynamic Parent Advocacy Framework



Appendix B

Special Education Advocate Business Model

DISCOVER WHAT'S POSSIBLE

I help parents of children and adults with disabilities, who desire to advocate with confidence and clarity, obtain guidance on doable practices, so they can feel successful and competent when working with education and service teams.

DESIGNATION AND PURPOSE OF ADVOCATE SERVICES, TOOLS, RESOURCES

- Help parents achieve increased confidence and clarity.
- Help parents prepare for meetings.
- Help parents prioritize desired outcomes.
- Help parents with effective advocacy strategies.
- Help parents understand evaluation and progress monitoring data, teaching strategies, curricula, etc.
- Help parents access forms, checklists, guides, guidance, etc.

SPECIAL EDUCATION ADVOCATE ACTIVITIES & SERVICES

- 1:1 Consult time
- IEP Checklist
- File Review
- Meeting Preparation
- Attend a Meeting
- Write Vision, Requests, & Refusal Letters

ADVOCACY ASSISTANCE PROCESS

- Exchange mutual sharing & listening, develop understanding.
- Gather foundational information & explain what an Initial Consult looks like.
- Set goals and plans for the consultation.
- Conduct Initial Consult and answer questions, discuss next steps, anticipate duration and possible constraints of services.
- Meet face-to-face & review records. Develop short and long term goals and plans.
- Address future options: assistance with file reviews, IEP meetings, and documentation procedures.

TOOLS & RESOURCES

- Template & Instructions for writing Future Planning Statements
- Law, Policy & Procedures Frameworks & References handouts
- IEP Binder Organizer
- Template documents for organizing service providers, contact information, communication log
- Handout on indicators of positive family-professional partnerships
- Negotiation & Conflict Resolution Strategies handouts
- Mindfulness and Personal Development Resources and handouts
- Online video tutorials and courses for skill development

ITEMS TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN EVALUATING THE OUTCOMES OF THE ADVOCACY PROCESS

- Parent's level of satisfaction with the advocate
- Changes in parent-school partnerships
- Changes in parent-school communication
- Change in sense of empowerment
- Change in special education knowledge and/or new skills
- Changes in appropriate services
- Changes in school experiences
- Changes in student progress

Note: Outcomes can not be guaranteed! No research or evidence exists to predict the school response to special education advocacy.



PERSPECTIVE
CO-OP