



# PARENTS' RIGHTS:

## Understanding the Procedural Safeguards Notice

Parents of children who receive or who may be eligible for special education services have rights under a law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This brochure provides a summary of those rights. The *Procedural Safeguards Notice* provides a more detailed explanation of those rights.

Local educational agencies (LEAs), which include school districts, charter schools, early intervention agencies, and intermediate units (IUs), where appropriate, must give parents a copy of the *Procedural Safeguards Notice* at least once each school year. Parents can also obtain a copy from their school at any time. The *Procedural Safeguards Notice* is available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education.

There are several organizations that can help parents understand their rights and how to navigate the special education system. For assistance, parents are encouraged to call any of the organizations listed on the back of this brochure.

### Parents Have Rights

Some basic rights you have as a parent are:

- To have your child receive a free, appropriate public education
- To be a member of the team that develops your child's education program and to attend meetings about that program
- To understand every document you sign
- To pursue other options if you disagree with your LEA
- To know and understand your rights in the language you understand best

## AS A PARENT, YOU HAVE THE RIGHT . . .

### *To Receive Prior Written Notice*

You have a right to receive written notice (called the *Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP)/Prior Written Notice*) in the language you understand best before the LEA changes (or refuses to change) its decision about:

- Your child's eligibility for special education services;
- Determining your child's disability;
- What services your child will get; and
- Where your child will get services.

### *To a Fair and Accurate Evaluation of Your Child*

You have the right to ask your school to evaluate your child to see if your child has a disability and needs special education services in school. Your child must be assessed using tests and procedures that do not reach wrong conclusions because of your child's disability or ethnic background. For example, a test written in English should not be given to a child whose primary language is Spanish.

### *To Refuse to Consent*

The LEA cannot evaluate your child for the first time without your written permission unless a special education hearing officer has ordered an evaluation. Even if the evaluation team decides that your child is eligible for special education services, you do not have to accept those services for your child.

### *To Receive an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE)*

You may want an independent educational evaluation if you think the school's evaluation was not done properly. You can ask the school to pay for an educational evaluation of your child by an approved evaluator who does not work for the LEA. However, if the district believes that an independent evaluation is unnecessary and a hearing officer decides that the school's evaluation is appropriate, you can still pay for your own evaluation.

### *To Participate*

You have the right to participate in developing an education plan for your child (called an Individualized Education Program or IEP). **You are an important part of the team that makes decisions about your child's education.**

You have the right to share information and express your opinion at any team meeting or anytime you feel it will help your child's education. The team decides how much and what kind of services your child needs and where your child's services will be provided. Other members of the team should include your child's teachers and school administrators. If you have concerns or ideas about your child's program, you should first talk to your child's teachers or other people who work with your child.

Talking with the other members of the team early on can often prevent problems later. Open, mutual communication between you and members of your child's team is encouraged in order to provide an appropriate program for your child.

### *To Mediate a Dispute*

You can also ask for "mediation" to settle a disagreement with the school about your child's special education program. Mediation:

- Is overseen by a neutral party (the mediator);
- Is free;
- Is voluntary on the part of the parents and the school;
- Can be used without requesting a hearing or can be tried after a hearing is requested; and
- Can help you and school staff come to agreement.

**For more information about mediation, call the Office for Dispute Resolution at 800-222-3353 or go to <http://odr.pattan.net>.**

### *To Keep Your Child in the Same Program While You Are Waiting for Mediation or a Hearing to be Completed*

If you or your school have requested mediation or a hearing, your child must "stay put" in his or her current program until the disagreement is

resolved. That means that the school can't change the program until the mediation, hearing, and any court actions have ended.

To make sure your child "stays put," you **must**:

- Check the box on the *Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP)/Prior Written Notice* form that indicates that you request either mediation or a hearing; **and**
- Ask your school for a *Due Process Complaint Notice* form. Fill it out and send it to the Office for Dispute Resolution in Harrisburg, and send a copy to your LEA. **Your child does not have "stay put" protection until you have filled out and "filed" your hearing request.**

### ***To Be Given a Hearing if You Disagree with the IEP the LEA has Offered for Your Child***

You can ask for a hearing if:

- You believe that the IEP the LEA has offered your child does not meet his or her needs;
- You believe that your child should be educated in a different place; or
- There is any other important point on which you and your LEA disagree (related to evaluation, identification, FAPE, or educational placement).

This hearing is called a **due process hearing**. You have the right to:

- Bring an attorney to the hearing;
- Have experts give their opinions or to speak yourself;
- Give the hearing officer important records; and
- Ask questions of the school's witnesses.

A "hearing officer," provided at public expense, decides the case. If you disagree with the decision, you can ask a court to reverse it.

To file a request for a due process hearing, call the Office for Dispute Resolution at 800-222-3353 or go to <http://odr.pattan.net> to get a copy of the *Due Process Complaint Notice* form.

### ***To See and Keep Private Your Child's Education Records***

You have a right to see all of your child's education records. You also have the right to prevent the LEA from sending the records to someone else without your written permission (with some exceptions). The school must give you a free copy of your child's IEP.

### ***To File a Complaint Against Your LEA***

If you believe your child's school has violated the law, you can file a written request (called a "complaint") for the Pennsylvania Department of Education to investigate. For example, you can file a complaint if your school fails to provide a service included in your child's IEP. Within 60 days of receiving the complaint, the Department must investigate and give you a written report with the results of its investigation and how it will fix any problems it has found.

### ***To Special Protections in School Discipline***

Your child is expected to follow his or her school's code of conduct. However, children receiving special education services have certain rights when it comes to school discipline. Some rules a school must follow are:

- The IEP team must decide if the child's disability caused the misbehavior for which the school wants to discipline the child. This is called a **manifestation determination**. This decision must be made before the school can:
  - ◆ Suspend a student with an IEP for more than 10 school days in a row or 15 total school days in a school year;
  - ◆ Transfer the student to an alternative school for more than 10 school days in a row; or
  - ◆ Exclude a child with mental retardation for any amount of time.
- If the offense involved drugs, weapons, or serious injury to someone, the school can move the child to a different school for no more than 45 school days without parent permission, even if the behavior was caused by the student's disability. The district must provide an appropriate special education program for your child, although not necessarily in the same school setting.

**The rules about discipline of students with disabilities are complicated. You should talk to your school if you have questions about the process. You can also call one of the organizations listed at the end of this brochure if you want more information about your rights.**

### **To Know Your Rights if Your Child Attends a Private School**

Parents can choose to educate their child at a private school. However, the school district is not required to pay private school tuition for a child with a disability if it is the parents' choice to place the child in the private school.

Some exceptions to this rule are:

- Parents can ask a hearing officer to order a school district to pay for tuition at a private school if the school district did not provide the child with an appropriate special education program, and the private program meets the child's needs.
- Parents can request that the regional intermediate unit (IU) in which the child's school is located conduct an evaluation of the child. If your child is eligible for special education, you can:
  - ◆ Enroll your child in your local public school district to get services; or
  - ◆ Keep your child in the private school and he or she may be able to get some limited services (but not an IEP) from the IU, based upon the private school agreement regarding the use and availability of equitable participation (EP) funds. When EP funds are depleted, services are no longer required or provided under EP.

## **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The Bureau of Special Education publishes the **Pennsylvania Parent Guide to Special Education for School Age Children**, which provides an overview of the special education process. Visit [www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net) for the Guide and other useful information, or call 800-441-3215.

To get more information about your rights or how to resolve disputes with your school district, including how to request a hearing, contact the Bureau of Special Education's ConsultLine at 800-879-2301.

You can also contact the following organizations to learn more about your rights, receive training, or receive advocacy services.

### **Statewide Organizations**

#### **Bureau of Special Education ConsultLine**

800-879-2301

#### **The ARC of Pennsylvania**

*(Advocacy & Resources for Citizens With Cognitive, Intellectual, and Developmental Disabilities)*

800-692-7258

[www.thearca.org](http://www.thearca.org)

#### **Disability Rights Network of PA (DRN)**

800-692-7443 (Toll-Free Voice)

[www.drnpa.org](http://www.drnpa.org)

#### **Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN)**

800-441-3215 (King of Prussia)

[www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)

800-360-7282 (Harrisburg)

800-446-5607 (Pittsburgh)

### **Regional Advocacy Organizations**

#### **Central and Eastern Pennsylvania:**

##### **Parent Education Network (PEN)**

717-600-0100 (V/TTY) 800-522-5827 (V/TTY)

[www.parentednet.org](http://www.parentednet.org)

800-441-5028 (Spanish in PA)

#### **Western Pennsylvania:**

##### **Parent Education and Advocacy Leadership (PEAL) Center**

412-281-4404 (Voice) 866-950-1040 (Voice)

[www.pealcenter.org](http://www.pealcenter.org)

#### **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania:**

##### **Hispanics United for Exceptional Children (HUNE, Inc.)**

215-425-6203 (Voice) 215-425-5112 (Helpline)

[www.huneinc.org](http://www.huneinc.org)

#### **Northwestern Pennsylvania:**

##### **The Mentor Parent Program**

814-563-3470 (Voice) 888-447-1431 (Voice in PA)

[www.mentorparent.org](http://www.mentorparent.org)

800-855-1155 (TTY)