



Work with parent advocates in virtual 504 meetings

Working with parent advocates during virtual Section 504 meetings is not much different than it is during in-person meetings, said Gwen J. Zittoun, a school attorney at Shipman & Goodwin LLP in Hartford, Conn. That being said, there are a few additional steps, outlined below, that a district might take when parents invite an advocate to attend an online meeting.

Step	Importance of step
<p>Address parents directly.</p>	<p>Even when an advocate is present, continue to address questions to parents and family members, Zittoun said. Also seek input directly from parents, she said. "There certainly are circumstances when advocates speak on behalf of families, [but] I encourage districts to continue communicating with families, even when an advocate, attorney, or otherwise steps into the picture," she said. "It's important to keep those lines of communication open."</p>
<p>Consider inviting your own legal counsel.</p>	<p>If the parent gives you advance notice that they will be inviting an attorney or advocate to attend the meeting, decide if you want to have representation at the meeting as well, Zittoun said. Some districts feel more comfortable having a meeting with an attorney advocate if they are also represented by an attorney.</p>
<p>Share time frame at start of meeting.</p>	<p>Say up front, "Here's the time period we have for this meeting," Zittoun said. Because you never want it to appear that you're limiting a parent's ability to participate in the meeting, it might be helpful to also add something along the lines of, "This should be a reasonable period of time based on the contents of the meeting. However, if we need to reconvene to have more time we can."</p> <p>"Sometimes it's helpful focusing the discussion if all the parties know the time period they're dealing with," she said.</p>
<p>Maintain confidentiality.</p>	<p>Remind advocates and all parties on the call about the need to maintain confidentiality, Zittoun said.</p> <p>"This goes for staff as well," she said. "During this process, we're not always able to know who's physically present in a home or location." Advise all participants to attend the meeting in a reasonably private location. Encourage them to use headphones if possible so anyone else in the area can't hear what's going on.</p> <p>"An advocate or attorney in the same physical location with a client would be a different circumstance, but it's reasonable to ask that only individuals participating be able to view and hear the meeting over the virtual platform," she said.</p>

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