EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
NC Department of Public Instruction

Parent and Family Updates

Exceptional Children | NC DPI

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction Office of Exceptional Children website contains resources for parents, teachers, and administrators.

September 2026

When and How to Request a Team Meeting

A parent can request an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meeting at any time during the school year. When is it appropriate to request a meeting?

- Your child is not making gains or not meeting their IEP goals;
- Your child has a new medical diagnosis, shows regression, or needs new or different accommodations; and
- You want to request new evaluations or discuss a change in educational placement.

If you want to ask a team to meet, make the request in writing. An email is the best form of communication for this request. Include your child's teacher, case manager, the exceptional children's teacher, and the school principal. The exceptional children's teacher is often the case manager. Explain why you are requesting the meeting and which topics you want to discuss. If you do not get a response in a reasonable time, follow up with another email.

NC College Connect

The NC College Connect program offers all North Carolina public high school seniors a simplified pathway to higher education. In Fall 2026, graduating seniors will receive direct admission to select colleges and universities participating in the NC College Connect program. Each student's tailored list of admitted institutions is based on their weighted GPA at the close of their junior year, along with being on track to graduate, completion of a fourth-level math course, and fulfillment of program requirements. Note that the higher a student's GPA, the more schools to which they will be directly admitted!
This year, all students on track to graduate will be eligible – yes, everyone! Here you will find resources about this program.

We are also hosting a webinar for students to answer questions in real-time – please join us on

September 17, 2026 at 6 p.m.

Get Ready for the STEAM Career Showcase

The North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences is hosting the 13th Annual STEAM Career Showcase for Students with Disabilities on October 13, 2026, at the Nature Resource Center in Raleigh. Students in grades 6-12 will meet role models with disabilities who work in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM). Students will learn about role models' individual experiences, strategies for success, and future career paths and attend the Opportunity Fair with exhibitors. This event is free and requires registration.

For those unable to join in person, the welcome and keynote speeches will be livestreamed on the Museum's YouTube channel.

ASL interpretation and live captions will be provided for welcome, keynote presentation, and breakout sessions. If individual accommodations are needed, email Accessibility@NaturalSciences.org or call 919-707-9824.

Parent Advisory Council Meetings for 2026-2027

The Council on Educational Services for Exceptional Children (CESEC) meets quarterly and advises the NC State Board of Education (SBE) with respect to the unmet needs of children with special needs and in the development and implementation of policies related to the coordination of services for students with disabilities.

The Council quarterly meetings are open to the public. The agenda and a link to the meeting are posted on the Resources for Families and Students web page 10 business days prior to the meeting. Public comments are an essential and necessary part of CESEC fulfilling its role to advise the SBE.

The Council will meet during the 2026-27 school year on:

- September 17, 2026
- December 17, 2026
- March 16, 2027
- June 17, 2027

Interested parties are encouraged to submit written comments at any time or attend the CESEC's quarterly meetings and register for public comment. Fifteen minutes will be reserved on the CESEC agenda for public input at each meeting.

Public comment is limited to no more than five minutes per person in the first fifteen minutes of the morning session. Sign-in must occur by 9:30 a.m.

Any individual may submit a comment via written letter or email, which must be received at CESEC Email or Johanna Lynch, Office of Exceptional Children, 6356 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-6356 by 4 p.m., 10 business days prior to the quarterly meeting. Any comments submitted after that time will be read and/or distributed at a later date.

Additional information and requirements specific to public comment can be found on the CESEC website.

One Parent can Make a Difference: Are you Interested in Joining the Council?

The Council is seeking one parent to fill a vacant parent representative. CESEC provides recommendations to the State Board of Education (SBE) on matters related to the education of children with disabilities. Members play an important role in supporting students and families across the state. Appointments are for four-year terms.

The Council meets quarterly via Webex and occasionally in person. Member representation includes parents, school district personnel, community partners, and representatives from other agencies.

If you are interested in being considered for the appointment, please complete the Member Interest Form. If you have questions, please email Johanna Lynch.

Wrightslaw Training Coming to North Carolina

The Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) is hosting a full-day, in-person Wrightslaw training session to help parents take an active role in their children's learning. There is no cost to attend. Topics include key sections of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), how to participate in meetings, prepare for meetings, develop SMART Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), maintain healthy relationships with their team, and disagree.

From Emotions to Advocacy runs from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at Central Library – Forsyth, 660 W. 5th Street, Winston Salem. The training includes three books for each attendee: Wrightslaw: From Emotions to Advocacy, Wrightslaw: Special Education Law, and Wrightslaw: All About IEPs.

Participants are required to register and can find the agenda on the registration page linked here. Materials and lunch are included. Families and caregivers residing two or more hours away may be eligible for a one-night hotel stay prior to the training. If you require lodging, please indicate your interest on the registration form. An ECAC staff member will evaluate your request to determine eligibility and will reach out to verify and manage your booking, if approved.

Stay Tuned!

The Office of Exceptional Children will be offering virtual training on topics that will include transition to adulthood, how Individualized Education Program (IEP) decisions are made, how to work collaboratively with the IEP team, and how to address concerns about progress with the IEP team.

Join the 2026 Growing Well Conference at App State University – Registration Now Open!

The 2026 Growing Well Conference, "Moving Mountains for People with Special Health Care Needs," will convene October 4 to 6 at the Leon Levine Hall of Health Sciences at Appalachian State University.

Session Topics

- Meeting the needs of people on the Innovations Waiver waitlist
- Autism services resources and updates
- Medical management, behavioral therapies and communication tools, transitions from school to adulthood, and more.

Featured Speakers

Hear directly from top state and national policy leaders and autism advocates from California, Georgia, North Carolina, and across the country. Key featured leaders include:

- Kevin Tanner, Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities;
- Kelly Crosbie, Assistant Secretary of the NC Division of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities;
- Dr. Andrea Davis, autism expert, clinical psychologist, and advocate from Pasadena, CA, specializing in developmental, relationship-based intervention, and autism advocacy; and
- Healthcare providers, researchers, educators, and individuals with lived experience offering a wide range of perspectives.

Scholarships & Travel Assistance

Scholarships and potential assistance with travel expenses are available for families and individuals who need support to make the trip.

To apply for a scholarship or inquire about travel assistance, please contact Diane Coffey at coffeyd68@gmail.com.

Registration

View the full schedule, session tracks, and registration details by visiting the event page 2026 Growing Well Conference registration web site.

We look forward to welcoming you to Appalachian State University this October for a powerful weekend of community, education, and growth!

Policy Corner: Prior Written Notice

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires school districts to give parents a written explanation before they propose to initiate, change, or refuse to do something related to their child's identification, evaluation, educational placement, or provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE). The document is called the prior written notice (PWN) and should be given to parents within a reasonable amount of time after the meeting, if not at the end of the meeting.

The notice must:

- describe the action that the school proposes or refuses to take;
- explain why the school is proposing or refusing to take the action;
- describe each evaluation procedure, assessment, record, or report the school used in deciding to propose or refuse the action;

- include a statement that you have protections under the procedural safeguards provisions in Part B of IDEA;
- tell you how to get a description of the procedural safeguards if the action that the school is proposing or refusing is not an initial referral for evaluation;
- include resources for you to contact for help in understanding Part B of IDEA;
- describe any other options that your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team considered and the reasons why those options were rejected; and,
- provide a description of other reasons why your school proposed or refused the action.

The notice must be written in language that is understandable to the general public and provided in the parent's native language or other mode of communication you use unless it is not feasible to do.

The notice will include the implementation date for the IEP, or when services will start or change. If you disagree with a proposed or refused action, the PWN should document your disagreement. If you propose to initiate or change the IEP and the team rejects that proposal, the refusal should be documented in the PWN. However, the PWN is not used to document all discussions during the meeting.

These requirements can also be found in the North Carolina Procedural Safeguards: Parent's Rights and Responsibilities in Special Education.

Agencies of Interest:

Office of Special Education Programs (U.S. Department of Education)
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (U.S. Department of Education)
N.C. Department of Public Instruction

Upcoming events:

Autism Society of North Carolina
Autism Speaks
The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education
Exceptional Children's Assistance Center
Family Support Network
National Alliance on Mental Illness
NC ABLE
NC Down Syndrome Alliance
Special Olympics North Carolina
Triangle Disability & Autism Services

Do you have an event you would like to share with the community? Please email us with information.

Contact information:
Johanna Lynch, IDEA Parent Liaison
Office of Exceptional Children, NCDPI
Email: johanna.lynch@dpi.nc.gov

Historical newsletters can be found in the Parent Newsletter Google Folder.