

# Evidence Snapshot: The Need for a Statewide Special Education Family Advocacy Program in Vermont

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## 1. The Need

Families of children with disabilities often face barriers in understanding and navigating the special education process. These challenges lead to frustration, inequities, and inconsistent outcomes across school districts.

Key data points:

- A 2022 national survey by the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) found that more than 60% of parents felt unprepared or unsupported during IEP meetings and it was difficult for them to get clear and accurate information regarding special education service.
- The U.S. Department of Education reports that IEP-related disputes are among the most common sources of due process complaints nationwide.
- According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (2021), parents who receive advocacy or training are significantly more likely to report positive relationships with schools and satisfaction with their child's IEP.
- In Vermont, families in rural areas often have limited access to advocacy and legal support, leaving many without the help they need to effectively participate in the IEP process.
- According to a qualitative dissertation out of Walden University (2024) High special education and general education teacher turnover rates have been linked to teachers not feeling they have enough training, support, and collaboration to support students with disabilities leading to burn out.

## 2. The Impact of Advocacy

- Research in the Journal of Disability Policy Studies (2019) found that trained parent advocates reduce conflict and increase IDEA compliance by improving communication between families and schools.
- U.S. Department of Education data (2020) on Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) show that families receiving advocacy support are more likely to resolve disputes early and achieve appropriate educational services.
- States such as Massachusetts and Minnesota that implemented regional special education family advocacy or engagement centers have reported reductions in due process filings and improved collaboration between schools and families.

### 3. Vermont's Opportunity

Vermont already has strong family engagement infrastructure, including the Vermont Family Network (VFN) and regional Parent Child Centers. However, there is no statewide program dedicated to providing trained IEP advocates to families. By establishing such a program, Vermont can strengthen equity, ensure compliance with IDEA, and improve outcomes for children with disabilities.

### References

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