

Top Tips for a Successful Start to the School Year



Council for Children's Rights

Disclaimer

The information provided in this training does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice. Instead, all information is provided for general informational purposes only.

What We Do

- * Education Advocacy for Individual Families
 - * Individual representation for students and their legal guardians in need of legal assistance regarding special education, Section 504 Plans, and school discipline.
 - * Families can contact gethelp@cfcrights.org or 704-943-9609 for assistance.
- * Education Navigation
 - * A service centered on students involved in the juvenile court of Mecklenburg County that is intended to address issues related to their education rights, such as inappropriate disciplinary actions, inadequate IEPs or Section 504 Plans (or a total lack thereof), charter schools failing to meet a student's needs, etc.
 - * Families can contact ELP@cfcrights.org or 704-943-9611 for assistance.
- * Systemic Advocacy
 - * As a small team, we cannot individually assist every family that needs support with education advocacy. By devoting time to strategically elevating issues affecting some of our most vulnerable students, our work can have a greater community impact.
- * Community Trainings
 - * We offer free trainings to community partners and parent groups. Our trainings cover a range of topics related to education advocacy.
 - * Interested parties can contact ELP@cfcrights.org or 704-372-7961.

Agenda

- * 2 Quick Notes
- * Overview of Types of Education Interventions
- * Top Tips:
 1. Learn Relevant Policies & Procedures
 2. Introduce Yourself
 3. Build Positive Relationships
 4. Communicate Effectively
 5. Understand Student Progress
 6. Organize Important Paperwork
 7. Keep the School in the Loop
 8. Trust Your Gut and Advocate
 9. Encourage Academic Growth at Home

Two Quick Notes!

Special Education, aka:

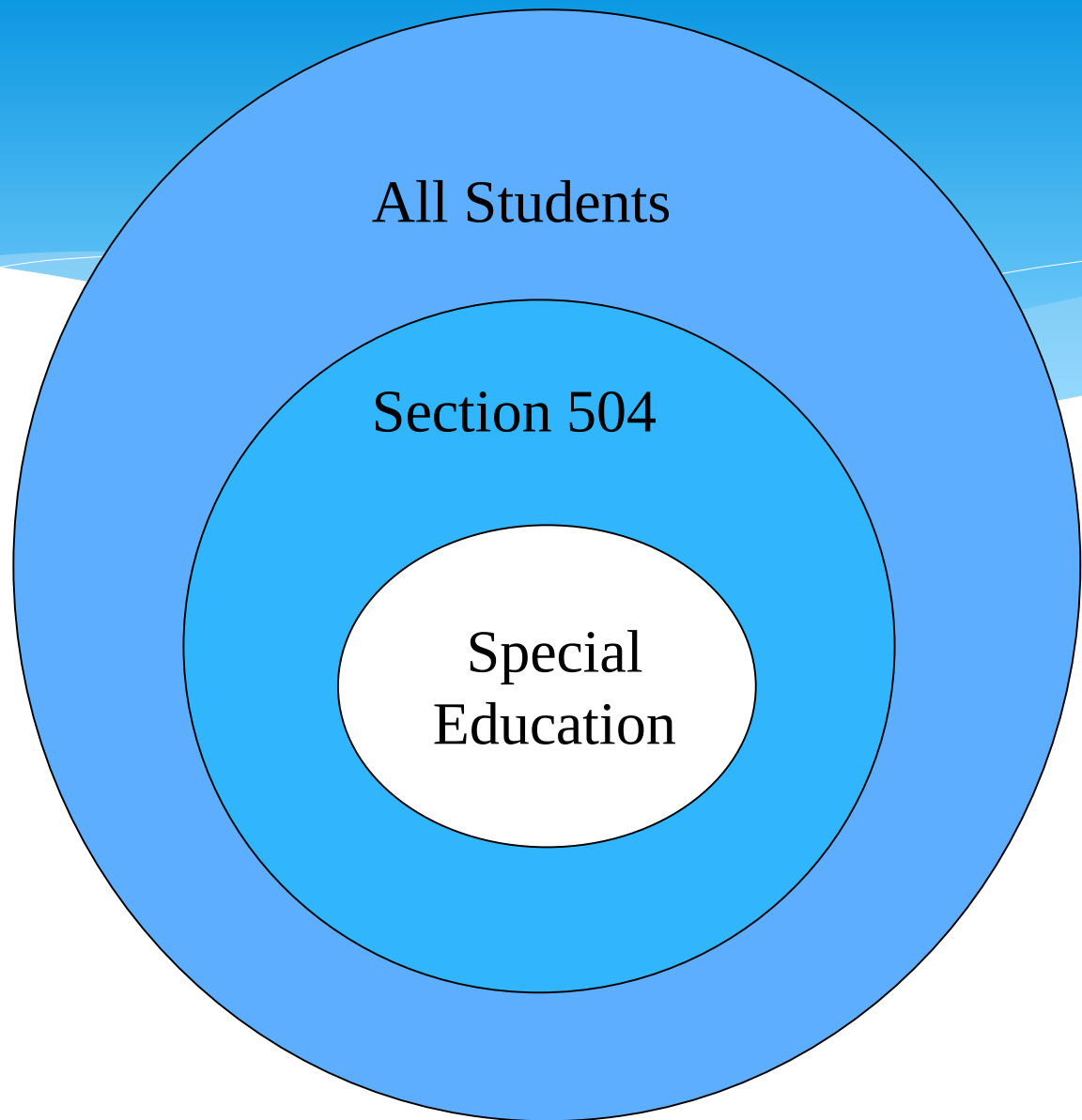
- * The terms “Individualized Education Program” (IEP), “Exceptional Children” (EC) and “Special Education” are often used to refer to the same thing and may be considered interchangeable for the purpose of this training
- * EC services = IEP services = Special Education

Charter Schools

- * Everything discussed in this training applies to charter schools, as well as traditional public school systems
- * Charters must:
 - * Follow NC and federal law for special education and Section 504 Plans, and
 - * Follow NC law on school discipline

Overview of Types of Education Interventions

- * All Students:
 - * Intervention Team/Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)
- * Students with disabilities:
 - * Section 504
 - * Special Education



Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS)

A Regular Education Initiative

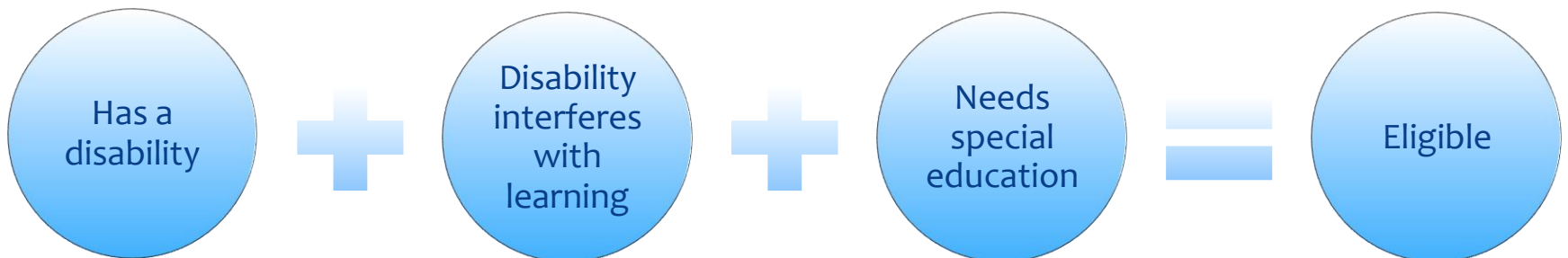
- * Tier 1
 - * All students receive the same academic instruction
- * Tier 2
 - * Tier 1 Services, plus
 - * Small Group Intervention
 - * May include increased time for assignments or more narrowly focused instruction
- * Tier 3
 - * Tier 1 & 2 Services, plus
 - * Intensive, Individualized Supports
 - * Likely includes progress monitoring, 1:1 instruction and “wrap-around” services

MTSS

- * Key Components
 - * High quality instruction (Tier 1 - All students)
 - * Universal screening to identify students in need of supplemental support (Tier 1 - All students)
 - * Multiple tiers of academic and behavioral support that are progressively more intensive (Tier 2)
 - * Evidence-based interventions matched to student need (Tier 3)
 - * On-going progress monitoring of student performance (Response to Intervention (RTI))
- * Parent participation in this process is important to ensure the student receives the most appropriate supports possible

Who Gets Special Education?

- * To receive special education services, a student must:
 - * Be between the ages of 3 -21
 - * Meet criteria for at least one of the 14 disability eligibility categories
 - * Have a disability that:
 - * Adversely affects their educational performance, and
 - * Requires specially designed instruction



Who Gets Special Education?

Disability Eligibility Categories

1. Autism Spectrum Disorder
2. Deaf-Blindness
3. Deafness
4. Developmental Delay
5. Hearing Impairment
6. Intellectual Disability
7. Multiple Disabilities
8. Orthopedic Impairment
9. Other Health Impairment
10. Serious Emotional Disability
11. Specific Learning Disability
12. Speech or Language Impairment
13. Traumatic Brain Injury
14. Visual Impairment

What is an IEP?

- * **Individualized Education Program**
- * The IEP document must include:
 - * Student's strengths, weaknesses, and needs
 - * Measurable goals for the student to achieve in the course of a year
 - * The accommodations, related services, and specially-designed instruction necessary to help the student reach the IEP goals
 - * Where the services will be provided (i.e., regular education or special education setting)
- * IEPs are developed by the IEP Team, which includes the Special Education Decision Maker
- * Students with IEPs are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE)

IEP vs. Section 504 Plan

- * IEP
 - * Each public school child who receives special education and related services must have an IEP
 - * Allows students to receive specialized instruction
- * Section 504 Accommodation Plan (Section 504 Plan)
 - * For a student with a disability who does not require specialized instruction, but needs accommodations to make sure they receive equal access to their education
 - * Broader definition of disability
- * If a student has an IEP, they do not require a Section 504 Plan

IEP vs. Section 504 Plan

IEP

- * Sam has a Specific Learning Disability. His IEP provides services with a special education teacher several times a week to address his individual goals in reading, writing, math, and organization. He also receives modified assignments, extended time on tests, and takes tests in a room with fewer students.

Section 504 Plan

- * Erin has severe Myopia (nearsightedness). Her Section 504 Plan requires seating near the teacher/board and all printed materials presented in a larger font.

IEPs & Section 504 Plans

- * Both IEPs and Section 504 Plans are required to be reviewed annually
- * Very important for the SEDM/Legal Guardian to attend these meetings and advocate for changes to help their student
- * SEDM/Legal Guardian may request an IEP/Section 504 meeting at any time during the year
- * SEDM/Legal Guardian should follow up with teachers to make sure services, accommodations, and modifications are being provided as written

Top Tips for a Successful Start to the School Year

Tip #1

Learn Relevant Policies & Procedures

- * Where to Find Them
 - * District Resources
 - * Parent-Student Handbook
 - * Code of Student Conduct
 - * Board of Education Policies
 - * School Resources – review the school’s website!
 - * Faculty/Staff Contact Information
 - * School Events
 - * Teacher-Specific Websites
 - * Relevant documents/forms may be found online or at the school’s main office

Tip #1

Learn Relevant Policies & Procedures

- * Parent-Student Handbook
 - * Addresses topics like:
 - * Attendance
 - * Communications
 - * Student Services
 - * Legal Rights
 - * School Food Services
 - * School Calendars
 - * Graduation Requirements

Tip #1

Learn Relevant Policies & Procedures

- * Code of Student Conduct
 - * Contains school rules and disciplinary procedures
 - * Did You Know?: Discipline
 - * Students may be disciplined for conduct that happens off campus if it has “a direct and immediate impact on the orderly and efficient operation of the schools or the safety of individuals in the school environment”
 - * There is no right to appeal short-term suspensions, but you may request the opportunity to complete assignments and make up tests
 - * If the student is suspended, review the suspension paperwork to ensure it aligns with the Code of Student Conduct

Tip #1

Learn Relevant Policies & Procedures

- * School Websites:
 - * Get to know the student's faculty & staff
 - * Familiarize yourself with the school calendar
 - * Be aware of the school's own report card

Tip #1

Learn Relevant Policies & Procedures

- * Bullying
 - * Find and review policy: all schools required to have a policy prohibiting bullying/harassing
 - * Report bullying in writing every single time it occurs
 - * Anyone who has knowledge of bullying is required to report it

Tip #1

Learn Relevant Policies & Procedures

- * Bus Transportation (if applicable):
 - * CMS Transportation Department
 - * 980-343-6715
 - * transportation@cms.k12.nc.us
 - * Transportation Dept. Homepage
 - * Here Comes the Bus app
 - * Did You Know?: Bus Suspensions
 - * Student can attend school, but cannot ride the bus to get there
 - * No formal right to appeal a bus suspension

Tip #1

Learn Relevant Policies & Procedures

- * Medication at School
 - * Valid medical authorization is required for all medications taken before/during/after school
 - * New authorization is required:
 - * The first day of every school year
 - * If there are changes to dosage or directions for administration
 - * If a new medication is prescribed
 - * The school must:
 - * Provide safe, secure, and proper storage, including refrigeration
 - * Log all medications administered

Tip #1

Learn Relevant Policies & Procedures

- * Medication at School
 - * Medication must be taken in presence of designated personnel unless student authorized to self-administer
 - * Self-administration is granted in limited circumstances
 - * For Example: Asthma, Diabetes, Severe Allergies
 - * Misuse may result in disciplinary action
 - * School-Sponsored Activities
 - * Put medication needs on permission slip every time
 - * Examples: Field trips, athletic events, off-site music performances

Tip #2

Introduce Yourself

- * Introduce yourself and the student to their teachers and support staff, including front-office staff and bus driver
- * Exchange contact information with them and determine their preferred method of communication (email, text, call)
- * Take advantage of school events, such as Open House and Back to School Night, to become a familiar face and establish relationships with the student's school team

Tip #2

Introduce Yourself

- * Send an introductory email to the school, addressing the student's strengths, areas of need, anticipated issues, and strategies that work at home
 - * Consider an All About Me book (handout)
- * Share copies of important documentation as soon as possible, such as:
 - * IEP/Section 504 Plan
 - * Any recent outside evaluations
- * For a new school, request an IEP meeting or Section 504 meeting, if applicable, near the beginning of the year

Tip #3

Build Positive Relationships

- * Small gestures go a long way
 - * A word or note of thanks
 - * Provision of some class supplies (if within means)
 - * Communicate regularly, outside of problem situations
- * Think of yourself as part of the “school community”
- * Consider joining the school’s Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)
- * Attend a field trip, school activities, or sports games

Tip #3

Build Positive Relationships

Elementary School	Middle School	High School
• Read to a class • Assist in learning centers • Practice math flashcards with individual students • Quiz students on their spelling words • Chaperone field trips	• Speak about your job at Career Day • Be an assistant athletic coach • Lead an after-school club specific to one of your talents or interests	• Tutor individual students in an area of expertise • Lead a group of students in a campus-based service project, such as beautifying school grounds

Any School Setting

Help office staff fill envelopes for school-wide mailings – Join the PTO/PTA – Proctor testing – Participate in school events and programs

Tip #4

Communicate Effectively

- * Be respectful
- * Share and listen
- * Maintain appropriate emotions
- * Before a conversation or meeting:
 - * Think about what you hope to accomplish
 - * Prepare relevant questions

Tip #4

Communicate Effectively

- * Put all communications in writing (letter/email):
 - * Requests for meetings, services, records, concerns, etc.
 - * If you have a phone call, follow up via email (“Per our conversation, my understanding is...”)
 - * Keep a copy for your records, tracking “when, who, what”
- * To resolve an issue, start with the lowest appropriate level (e.g. teacher) and work your way up the chain of command as necessary.
- * Find helpful tips on letter writing at www.wrightslaw.com

Tip #5

Understand Student Progress

- * Be aware of and seek out regular reports:
 - * Class Progress Reports
 - * Report Cards
 - * IEP Progress Reports, if applicable
- * Be active online
 - * PowerSchool Parent Portal
 - * Current Grades, Attendance, Schedule and Assignments
 - * Available via Computer or Smartphone App
 - * School/Class Website – Teacher and Event Information
 - * Relevant Smartphone Apps (e.g. ClassDojo, Remind)

Tip #5

Understand Student Progress

- * Schools rely heavily on data to measure the student's performance
 - * Examples of important data/metrics:
 - * IEP Annual Goals: “When given grade level text, Sam will use learned strategies to determine the meaning of unknown words on 2 out of 3 opportunities.”
 - * Daily Points Sheets: “Sam earned 6/10 points today. He completed all of his work with some prompting, but did not remain in assigned area and became upset when teacher attempted to redirect.”
 - * Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) Scores: more on these in a bit!
 - * Understanding this information is critical to effective advocacy for the student
 - * If you are unsure how to interpret the information, ask questions

Tip #5

Understand Student Progress

- * Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) Testing
 - * Administered in CMS Elementary/Middle Schools 3 times per year (beginning, middle, and end of school year)
 - * Assesses current academic ability in reading and math
 - * Computer Adaptive Test – selection of questions is unique to each student, getting harder or easier based on their responses
 - * Example: If the student answers Question 4 incorrectly, Question 5 will be easier than if they had answered Question 4 correctly

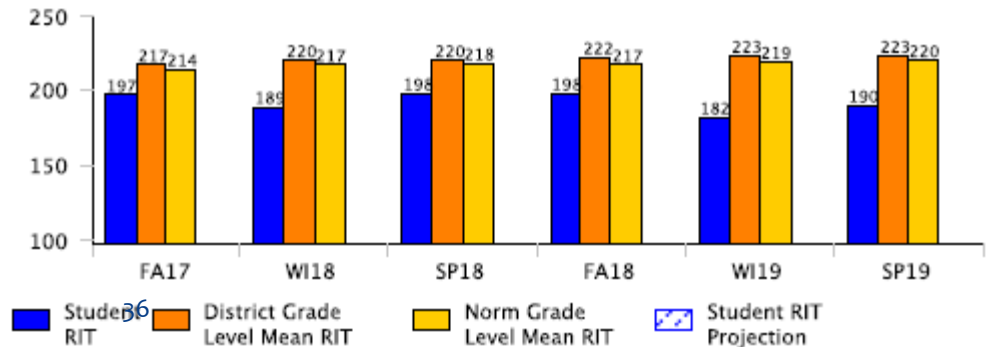
Tip #5

Understand Student Progress

- * MAP Testing:

- * The score (RIT, **Rasch Unit**) signifies the student's current level of academic ability
- * The teacher uses that score to personalize the student's curriculum
- * Scores are compared over time to measure progress
- * Keep track of the student's scores, versus:
 - * Expected Progress
 - * Norm Grade Level Mean

Reading



Tip #5

Understand Student Progress

- * Amplify Education Incorporated; mCLASS (DIBELS 8th Edition and Text Reading Comprehension)
 - * Required by the State to assess reading fluency and comprehension (K-3)
 - * Administered 3 times per school year in elementary school
 - * BOY = Beginning of Year (September)
 - * MOY = Middle of Year (January)
 - * EOY = End of Year (May)
 - * Exact assessment components depend on grade level

Tip #5

Understand Student Progress

- * Amplify Education Incorporated; mCLASS (DIBELS 8th Edition and Text Reading Comprehension)
 - * Text Reading Comprehension (TRC)
 - * Student reads a passage aloud and answers questions in writing or orally
 - * Scores are labeled as “Frustration,” “Independent,” or “Instructional” based on responses to questions and miscues in read aloud
 - * Student scored along Fountas and Pinnell Guided Reading Level of A-Z (Note: Students at Levels A-E also tested on sight word recognition)

Tip #5

Understand Student Progress

F&P TEXT LEVEL GRADIENT™

FOUNTAS & PINNELL LEVELS

GRADE-LEVEL GOALS

A	Kindergarten
B	
C	
D	
E	
F	Grade One
G	
H	
I	
J	
K	Grade Two
L	
M	
N	
O	
P	Grade Three
Q	
R	
S	
T	
U	Grade Four
V	
W	
X	
Y	
Z	Grade Five
Z+	
	Grade Six
	Grade Seven—Eight
	High School/Adult

- * Fountas and Pinnell Reading Level (see left-hand icon)
- * A student's performance is either labeled:
 - * Green (at or above benchmark)
 - * Yellow (somewhat below benchmark and requiring some intervention)
 - * Red (well below benchmark and requiring intensive intervention)
- * Know the student's score and grade level expectation
 - * If the student is far below grade level, they should receive reading interventions, and "progress monitoring" (more frequent assessment of level)

The grade-level goals on the F&P Text Level Gradient™ are intended to provide general guidelines, which should be adjusted based on school/district requirements and professional teacher judgement.

Tip #5

Understand Student Progress

- * Homework
 - * Spend time supporting the student with their homework
 - * Be curious about what they are learning
 - * Understand the skills they are expected to display
 - * Learn about their areas of strength and weakness
 - * Inform teachers of any learning issues observed during homework time

Tip #6

Organize Important Paperwork

- * Keep all documents in one location , organize by academic year, and include:

Documents received from school, such as:	Documents provided to school, such as:	Miscellaneous:
* Current IEP, Section 504 Plan, Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) * Progress reports on academics and IEP goals * Functional Behavior Assessments * Report cards * Work samples * Evaluation/assessment results * Discipline referrals	* Letters/emails sent to school staff * Student profile * Tutor progress reports * Medical records * Therapy/treatment reports * Independent evaluation/assessment results	* Personal meeting notes * Notes of phone, face-to-face conversations or texts with school staff

Tip #7

Keep the School in the Loop

- * Inform the school about life events that may impact the student's performance, such as:
 - * Death of a loved one
 - * Divorce or separation
 - * Illness
 - * Move or change in living circumstances
 - * Change in outside services (therapies/counseling services)
 - * Change in medications
- * Provide the school with new outside evaluations (redact sensitive information)
 - * Consider requesting an IEP/Section 504 Plan meeting, if applicable

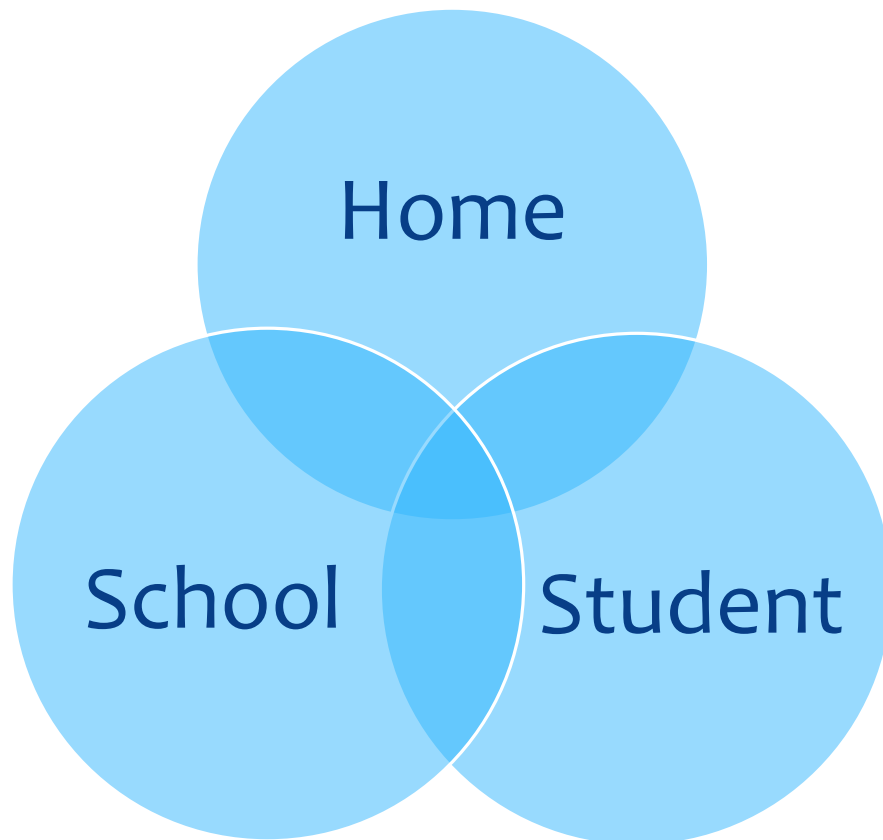
Tip #8

Trust Your Gut and Advocate

- * If you have a question or concern about the student, reach out
 - * Don't wait for the school to call you
 - * Don't wait for parent-teacher conference
- * Request an IEP/Section 504 Plan meeting if:
 - * There is a lack of expected progress toward IEP goals
 - * You obtain information from any new evaluation or reevaluation
 - * You observe new or increased concerning behaviors

Tip #9

Encourage Academic Growth at Home



All areas of a student's life will impact their experience in school. While it is important for caregivers to become part of the school environment, it is equally important for caregivers to make school part of the home environment as well.

Tip #9

Encourage Academic Growth at Home

* Elementary School:

- * Sign up for a library card and help the student find books they are excited about reading
- * Read early and often
 - * For younger elementary-age students, have them look at the pictures and guess what the words might say
 - * For older elementary-age students, ask them reading comprehension questions (“what just happened on that page?”) or alternate reading pages with them
- * Turn everyday tasks into learning opportunities
 - * For example, practice following directions by baking or cooking together. This also provides older students an opportunity to practice measurement and math skills.
- * Remember: Learning does not have to be a formal, planned activity – it can happen anywhere at any time!

Tip #9

Encourage Academic Growth at Home

- * Middle School:
 - * Help the student develop an organizational system to keep track of papers, assignments and notes
 - * Check in regularly on homework and projects
 - * Projects require more long-term planning, so developing time management skills is critical
 - * Go beyond “How was your day?”
 - * Ask questions that require thought; avoid one-word answers
 - * “What is one thing you learned today that you think you could use in the future? How would you use it?”
 - * Prompt a response, if necessary, by sharing an example from your own experience

Tip #9

Encourage Academic Growth at Home

- * High school:
 - * Find an appropriate balance between independence and accountability
 - * Allow them room to be and feel challenged, within reason
 - * Make time for regular check-ins and be proactive in engaging external resources (after-school study sessions, subject-specific tutoring, etc.)
 - * Make the connection between academic and practical skills
 - * English: help them draft a resume and cover letter
 - * Math: talk about finances and create a sample budget
 - * Be an active partner with the student to develop post-HS plans
 - * Do they have long-term goals?
 - * Are they interested in pursuing further education or starting a career?
 - * Traditional/Practical: “What do you want to do?”
 - * Modern/Abstract: “What is a problem you want to solve?”
 - * College Foundation of North Carolina College Planning Timeline Resource: www.CFNC.org

Contact the Education Law Program

- * Educational Advocacy for Individual Families
 - * GetHelp@cfcrights.org
 - * (704) 943-9609
- * Education Navigation
 - * ELP@cfcrights.org
 - * (704) 943-9611
- * Training Requests
 - * ELP@cfcrights.org
 - * (704) 372-7961

Helpful Resources

- * North Carolina Department of Public Instruction:
 - * <http://www.dpi.state.nc.us>
 - * Exceptional Children Division: <https://ec.ncpublicschools.gov/>
- * NC Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities
 - * <https://ec.ncpublicschools.gov/policies/nc-policies-governing-services-for-children-with-disabilities>
- * Exceptional Children's Advocacy Center:
 - * <http://www.ecac-parentcenter.org/>
- * LawHelpNC:
 - * <https://www.lawhelpnc.org/issues/education>
- * A Parent's Guide to Special Education in NC:
 - * <https://law.duke.edu.childedlaw/special-education-nc/>