

Beyond IEPs: Eight Ways Parents Can Help Advocate for Children with Autism

- 1. Schedule a meeting with school *district* administrators** to let them know how things are going and to share your ideas. You probably have already cultivated positive relationships with your child's school, so escalate it to the district level – they'll love to hear from you. Or volunteer for a district-wide committee or parent advisory council to share what you've learned.
- 2. Write a letter to your newspaper.** Write a short letter to the editor about what you think should be changed, or why you think your child's school district deserves a pat on the back.
- 3. Schedule a meeting with your local legislators to tell your story** and let them know how you feel about current policies related to people with autism. You may not get to speak directly with your Senator, Representative or Governor, but you will most certainly get to speak to someone on his or her staff. (Some lobbyists have already worn out their welcome, so speaking with a real constituent is like a breath of fresh air to a legislative staffer). If you are too shy or too busy to meet in person, send an email or make a phone call.
- 4. Stay abreast of federal and state laws that currently affect your child, or will affect him in the future.** Check out sites like change.org.
- 5. Take a refresher course on advocacy.** Local special school districts and advocacy organizations offer free advocacy training for parents.
- 6. Be a parent mentor to help other parents become more confident advocates.** You've learned a lot; now share it with other parents who are just beginning their journey up Mt. Autism. You can sign up to be a parent mentor through a number of different organizations.
- 7. Attend your children's' parent-teacher organization meetings.** Supporting your child's school is a great way to meet new people and to gently make them aware of the sensitivities related to autism spectrum disorders.
- 8. Sign up for research study.** Studies are underway for autism treatments, DNA, sibling and transition studies. Click here to view various autism [research study opportunities](#).

Adapted From [St. Louis Autism & Parenting Examiner](#) • L Mae Wilkinson