

Special Education Rights & Advocacy

Presentations by Ellen M. Chambers, MBA



Ellen M. Chambers, MBA

Veteran special education activist, Ellen Chambers, is now available to present to your group on special education rights and advocacy.

Ms. Chambers has been a consistent presence on the Massachusetts special education scene since 1995 and is a highly respected presenter on these

topics. Those who attend her presentations leave with a clear understanding of what Massachusetts schoolchildren with special needs are entitled to under the law, and how to increase the chances that these youngsters will receive the services they need to succeed in school and in life.

Ms. Chambers is a recipient of the *Diane Lipton Award for Outstanding Educational Advocacy on Behalf of Children with Disabilities* given by the national Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, and the *Women of Justice Award* given by Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly.

She is the founder and Executive Director of the non-profit group SPEDWatch which is working to secure the educational rights of all Massachusetts students with disabilities.

In addition to the presentations described in this brochure, Ms. Chambers will work with you to customize a training to meet your organization's specific requirements.

Biography

Ellen Chambers ran a very successful special education advocacy practice for over ten years. She also was an Executive Director of a local chapter of the Massachusetts Arc, and worked at Boston's Disability Law Center where she partnered with some of the best special education attorneys in New England.

In 2006 Ms. Chambers founded the nonprofit organization SPEDWatch where she currently serves as Executive Director. SPEDWatch provides infrastructure and leadership for a statewide civil rights, social change movement devoted to securing the educational rights of schoolchildren with disabilities. SPEDWatch authors the report: *Broken Promises: Special Education in Massachusetts*, maintains a website to stimulate broad discussion of children's special education rights; publishes the only newsletter in Massachusetts devoted solely to information impacting special education rights; and has a vibrant listserv where members give and receive advocacy advice and emotional support. She has appeared twice on Boston's ABC television news. See www.spedwatch.org

Ms. Chambers holds a B.A. degree in English from the University of Lowell, and an M.B.A. from Bentley College. She resides in Pepperell, Massachusetts with her husband and her teenage daughter who has high functioning autism.

03-2009

Presentation Topics

Your Special Education Rights

2 hours

A basic understanding of the special education process and the laws that govern that process is critical to a parent's ability to work in partnership with schools on behalf of their student with special needs. All Massachusetts school districts are required to provide, in cooperation with their Special Education Parent Advisory Council, an annual workshop on the rights of students and their parents and guardians under state and federal special education laws. This presentation allows schools to meet that regulatory obligation, and gives participants the information they need to participate meaningfully in educational programming decisions.

At the end of this presentation attendees will be able to:

- Identify federal and state special education regulations.
- Identify resources where they can learn more about special education rights.
- Define the basic legal requirements that govern special education referrals, evaluations, and eligibility determinations.
- Define the basic legal requirements that govern the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).
- Define the basic procedural safeguards provided by special education law.
- Understand the extent of their right to participate in educational decision making.
- Identify the resources available to help settle disputes about a student's educational programming.
- Identify the steps to take if a violation of special education law, policy or procedure is suspected.

“I would highly recommend the Your Special Education Rights training presented by Ellen Chambers. The presentation was not only comprehensive but Ms. Chambers was more than willing to answer any questions our parents had. The parents who attended felt that they left with a clear understanding of the process. We will definitely invite her back next year.”

Katherine M. Martin, Esq.
Vice President, Chicopee SpedPac

03-2009

Presentation Topics

Basic Rights: Denied

3 hours

You've been to all the special education workshops. You know how the process is *supposed* to work, and you know what your rights are. But what do you do when your rights are violated? It is an unfortunate fact that schools are frequently in noncompliance with special education law, and enforcement of the law is alarmingly lax. This presentation teaches participants how to address the most common problems and regulatory violations that occur at each stage of the special education process: referral, evaluation, eligibility determination, IEP development, and placement. The material is easy to understand, yet substantive enough to make a real and immediate difference for children. Prior attendance at a special education rights training is suggested but not required.

At the end of this presentation attendees will be able to:

- Use the basic regulatory requirements and policies that govern special education to prevent and correct violations of students' special education rights.
- Integrate state and federal authoritative guidance on special education law into advocacy arguments.
- Understand key concepts in special education law such as: effective progress, the purpose of the law, "stay-put", and least restrictive environment.
- Explain the important differences between IEPs and Section 504 Plans.
- Use basic advocacy techniques to safeguard a child's special education rights.

“The Wachusett Parent to Parent Support Group was the very lucky recipient of Ellen Chambers’ Basic Rights: Denied workshop. It was just incredible. Fantastic information. Fantastic presentation. Everyone loved it. We are already talking about booking it again. I urge you to book this workshop for your own groups. You will be very thankful that you did.”

Julianne Kelley
Rutland, MA

03-2009

Presentation Topics

Special Education: Rights & Realities

2 hours

Part I: Rights (45 minutes)

An overview of the history of special education law, the rights of eligible students with special needs, the process by which students access special education services, and the resources available when there is disagreement about a child's special education programming, or a suspicion that a special education law, policy or procedure has been violated.

At the end of Part I participants will be able to:

- Identify federal and state special education regulations.
- Explain why special education laws were enacted.
- Describe what an eligible student with special needs is entitled to receive from his or her school district.
- Explain the basic steps in the special education process (evaluation, eligibility, etc.).
- Describe how special education disputes and regulatory violations are typically addressed.

Part II: Realities (75 minutes)

An in-depth exploration of special education regulatory noncompliance in our public schools and the consequences of that noncompliance for students. Governmental and societal factors that contribute to noncompliance will be discussed, along with suggestions for addressing these problems.

At the end of Part II participants will be able to:

- Describe how compliance with special education law is monitored.
- Discuss the prevalence of regulatory noncompliance at the local, state and national levels.
- Understand the environmental factors that have allowed noncompliance to continue unchecked for decades.
- Recognize the tragic consequences of regulatory noncompliance, and understand what can be done to address it.

“Very professional and informative. Really focused on helping parents understand federal, state and local government’s failure to live up to their responsibilities for special education. It was quite masterful actually! I was utterly impressed!”

Lauri Medeiros
Medford, MA

03-2009

Presentation Topics

Introduction to Special Education Advocacy

2 hours

If you are new (or not so new) to the world of special education this presentation will give you the basic information you'll need to start advocating for your student with disabilities. From building a strong independent clinical team, to working effectively with school systems, this training lays a solid foundation on which more sophisticated advocacy techniques can be built.

At the end of this presentation attendees will be able to:

- Research a child's diagnosis.
- Explain why a strong clinical team is so important and how to build that team.
- Understand the importance of self-pacing and organization.
- Understand the basic steps in the special education process (referral, evaluation, IEP development, etc.) and the key regulations and concepts that govern each step.
- Participate more effectively in team meetings.
- Identify federal and state special education regulations, policies and procedures.
- Interpret the meaning of evaluation test results (standard scores, subtest scores, percentiles, etc.)
- Determine whether or not a student is making effective progress.
- Take action to resolve disagreements with school districts, or to remedy suspected violations of special education laws, policies or procedures.

*“Definitely one of the best workshops I've ever attended.
And like most special ed parents I've attended quite a few.”*

Stacey Jackson
Holden, MA

03-2009

Presentation Fees ¹

Your Special Education Rights	\$35 per person, \$60 per couple
Basic Rights: Denied	\$45 per person, \$80 per couple
Special Education: Rights & Realities	\$35 per person, \$60 per couple
Intro. to Special Education Advocacy	\$35 per person, \$60 per couple

¹ Fees are subject to change without notice.

Custom Presentations

Ellen Chambers will work with you to design a presentation that suits your specific needs. Please call (978) 433-5983 or email echambers@spedwatch.org to arrange a time to discuss your requirements.

For more information:

(978) 433-5983 echambers@spedwatch.org

“It was definitely worth the trip to the mainland!”

Denese Allen
Nantucket, MA

“If you come to Reading again please call Reading Cable TV and request that they film it. Your presentation was so informative and helpful that I’m sure hundreds of people would love to see it.”

Mary Wynn
Reading, MA