A Note from the Executive Director

Here we go again! We are at the beginning of another school year and while hopefully most of it will be in-person there are still a lot of challenges. Regression, masks, anxiety, understaffing, vaccinations, and more are all topics we are hearing a lot about. We are providing assistance to navigate all of these topics as we send our kids back to school.

We will be unveiling our new website soon as we close out the summer and enter into the fall. Some features will include easy navigation, links to all our recorded workshops, a complete calendar of events with registration links, a roadmap to resources, our complete online resource library, and a blog.

Unfortunately, due to the resurgence of the DELTA variant we have not been able to return to full in-person services. Our peer-to-peer assistance continues to operate on a virtual basis, we are still offering virtual trainings, and as always, our information specialists are available via phone, email, and our social media sites. We hope later in the fall and early winter we will be able to offer our Family Support Navigator and Supported Decision-Making trainings in-person again – stay tuned! We remain hopeful that we can resume our in-person Annual Conference in the spring of 2022 and our Transition Resource Fairs for youth.

We are working closely with Maine’s Department of Education to gather stakeholder input on the Maine’s State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report. This is a review report sent to the federal Office of Special Education Programs on how Maine is performing in specific areas of Special Education. We will be rolling out videos and surveys explaining the process and providing all of you with the opportunity to participate.

Updates:

- MDOE has delayed the repeal and replacement of Maine’s Unified Special Education Regulations until the spring legislative session.
- LD#1373 Restraint and Seclusion passed with amendments and will enter a rulemaking process. We will keep you updated.

Please continue to watch our website and social media pages on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for current and updated information and as always, please reach out to MPF with any questions or concerns.

Kind Regards,

*Carrie Woodcock, Executive Director*
Family Support Navigator Program

Maine Parent Federation has trained Family Support Navigators (FSN) that can help support your family at no cost to you! A FSN is an experienced parent who lives in your area and is available for 1:1 peer support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic all peer support is being offered via email, phone, texts, and through online platforms such as Zoom to support social distancing and keep all families safe.

A FSN can help you:

• Organize your paperwork.
• Interview a prospective service provider.
• Prepare for a meeting with your child’s doctor, school, or service provider.
• Provide support at an IEP meeting.
• Locate resources in your area.

To learn more about the FSN program, visit our website at www.mpf.org or call us at (800) 870-7746.

We are currently accepting referrals to the program. If you are a parent that needs peer support, know of a family that needs help, or would like to learn how you can become a Navigator, please contact the Regional Family Support Coordinator in your county for more information:

Androscoggin, Cumberland, Franklin, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Piscataquis, Sagadahoc, Somerset, Waldo and York
Deborah Newcombe, (800) 870-7746, dnewcombe@mpf.org

Aroostook, Hancock, Penobscot, and Washington
Robin Levesque, (207) 538-0866, rlevesque@mpf.org
SRC Announcement of Meetings/Recruitment of Members

The Maine State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) wants your input!

The SRC is a statewide citizens group created to advise the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) in Maine about how well its programs and services match the needs of people with disabilities.

The council meets monthly and invites you, as members of the public, to attend. The meetings are all being held virtually through zoom at this time. A meeting link can be obtained by contacting the SRC through the webpage listed below. (Otherwise, meetings are held at the Department of Labor in Augusta.) All meetings take place on the third Monday of the month from 1-3 PM.

The SRC is actively looking to recruit more members to represent the voices of those impacted by disability. Please visit www.mainesrc.org for more information.

MPF Workshops & Virtual Trainings

If you are interested in scheduling a workshop or need more information, please contact MPF at 800-870-7746 (statewide) or email parentconnect@mpf.org. Due to the many requests we receive for our workshops, we respectfully request that you give us at least 30 days’ notice to schedule. We will make every attempt to reasonably accommodate all requests. Please note: Registrations of less than 5 may require cancellation or rescheduling of the workshop.

MPF Dental Health: Guidance for Parents of Children with Disabilities or Special Healthcare Needs

This workshop was created in collaboration with Partnership for Children’s Oral Health (PCOH), and University of New England College of Dental Medicine.

Dental Hygiene is important for a healthy smile, and healthy mouth. This workshop was designed for parents of children with disabilities or special healthcare needs to discuss brushing challenges and accommodations, options to prepare for the dental visit home, as well as providing useful resources for parents.

Education is Special: A Guide to Special Education in Maine
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Y88gU4py3I
Special education in Maine (or anywhere) can be a complex and confusing system to navigate. Many parents feel overwhelmed by the various rules and regulations, as well as the vocabulary that is used. Maine Parent Federation has developed this virtual workshop as a resource to help explain the process of special education and empower families to be active participants in their children’s education.

Healthy Eating: Guidance for Parent of Children with Disabilities or Special Healthcare Needs
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOLw5znxK3Q
Nutritious food is essential for a child to grow and learn. This workshop was designed for parents to discuss barriers to healthy eating habits, how to respond to common mealtime challenges, and how to incorporate nutrition goals across all plans.

Katie Beckett Waiver Program: A Step-by-Step Guide to Apply for Benefits
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CMXPCITpmrs
The Katie Beckett waiver is an option for children with serious health conditions. It allows access to full MaineCare benefits to individuals who may not qualify otherwise. Maine Parent Federation has developed this training to guide parents through the application process, and what to expect along the way.
Supported Decision Making: Exploring Alternatives to Guardianship
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kS1DQHcsqvU
Supported Decision Making is one of the many alternatives to Guardianship. As of September 2019, the probate code (the law that oversees Guardianship) was changed for the first time in decades. This webinar explores what the changes implemented in September 2019 mean for your family. Obtaining guardianship is a legal process where an individual is stripped of their rights, and another individual can now legally make their decisions. This option is not right for all families, and other options should be explored first.

Self-Advocacy: Finding Your Voice (Youth Workshop)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b2wKd0WYuOY
Self-Advocacy is one of the most important skills a young person can have. Self-Advocacy is the act of speaking up for yourself in order to receive what you need or want. Self-Advocacy is also understanding yourself and communicating your dreams and goals in life. This workshop is designed to help young people with disabilities or special healthcare recognize the importance of self-advocacy, and provide youth with tips to become better self-advocates.

SMART Goals: For Individualized Education Programs
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qxQI5tyRUES
S.M.A.R.T. Goals is an acronym, which is helpful in constructing meaningful and achievable goals.
S - Specific
M - Measurable
A - Attainable
R - Results-Oriented
T - Time-Based
We can apply this framework to the process of developing IEP goals to ensure student’s education programs are appropriate to help them be successful in school.

Transition from High School: Looking Beyond the High School Years
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_x6Bbkxd6_o
The transition from high school into the world of adulthood is a milestone for ALL young people. There are so many possibilities as youth dream and plan for their future! For young people with disabilities, this can also mean challenges when continuing education, seeking employment, and living independently. This workshop explores the importance of planning early for life after high school with an emphasis on person-centered planning.

Transition to Kindergarten: Guidance for Parent of Children with Disabilities or Special Healthcare Needs
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vwn7QlxleCk
The transition to kindergarten is a big deal! Kindergarten is a sign that your child is growing and increasing their independence. While it is an exciting time, it can also be a time filled with many unknowns. This workshop maps out the process of the transition and provides tools and tips to help parents become active members of the IEP team.

Maine Parent Federation Overview:
Programs and Services offered by MPF
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aq9hr3O25wk
MPF is a private non-profit organization. MPF provides information, referral, one on one telephone support, and training to parents of children with disabilities or special health care needs and the professionals who work with these families through numerous grant-funded projects. Our services are offered at no cost to parents and are available statewide.
Reaching Underserved Communities

Our work in Northern Maine continues to grow! Our cultural liaisons at Cary Medical Center and Aroostook County Action Program are reaching out to the Mic Mac and Maliseet communities. Angel Murchison, our partner at Cary, has also established weekly visits to the Amish community of roughly 200 near Presque Isle. We are learning, learning, and learning. Each step is quite a gift.

In August, we met with folks from the Midwest Genetics Network, one of NERGN’s sister-projects. They work with several Plains communities in their region and were happy to share insights.

Register now for the Oct. 13, 2021, BIAA-Maine’s 12th Annual “Defining Moments in Brain Injury” conference, the premier conference centered on research, treatment, and services pertinent to brain injury recovery and rehabilitation in Maine.

The conference is open to all professionals and direct care workers serving individuals with brain injuries, survivors of brain injury, family members, and friends.

When: Wednesday, Oct. 13, 2021, from 7:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Where: Holiday Inn by the Bay, 88 Spring Street, Portland, Maine 04101

Free parking available for Conference attendees.


One-Day In-Person Family Support Navigator Training Coming to a S. ME Location in Late September!

Maine Parent Federation (MPF) is seeking parents, grandparents, and caregivers to children with disabilities and/or special health care needs who would like to become a trained Family Support Navigator (FSN) and provide peer support to other families in your area. The FSN program matches experienced parents with other parents who need support while learning to navigate systems such as Special Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, MaineCare/Katie Beckett, Adult Services, etc., and assists in locating local and statewide resources while helping parents learn to advocate for themselves.

A Family Support Navigator is a part-time independent consultant position. MPF contracts with you to provide up to 10 hours of support to each family you help. We pay $14.00 per hour of direct support to a family and .44 cents per mile travel reimbursement. This is a flexible opportunity as you set your own hours/schedule. MPF provides on-going supervision and technical assistance.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic all support to families is provided through phone, text, email, and social media platforms such as Zoom. One-on-one parent support will resume once the Pandemic is over.

This one day training will be held in late September. The date and location TBD, limited to 5 participants. The remainder of the training will be virtual, with 2, two-hour modules that have been pre-recorded. Masks will be required regardless of vaccination status.

Once the training is complete we will provide you with a $150 stipend.

Please contact Deborah Newcombe, dnewcombe@mpf.org to receive an application and job description.
How to Find Out if Kids Really Had an Academic Slide
By Trenia Kaufman, MS, Understood.org

School and learning looked different for most kids during the pandemic. Some kids experienced more stress and anxiety, making it harder to learn. And many kids who get special education services had disruptions in services or supports.

Academic slide, or “COVID slide,” is top of mind for lots of parents and teachers this year. Kids who learn and think differently may also be concerned about whether they’ve fallen behind.

But not all kids are behind. Many kids actually did well during distance or hybrid learning.

So how can you tell if kids need extra support? Below are ways to find out where kids’ skills really are.

Start by talking with kids.
Set aside time to talk with kids about their learning. How are they feeling about school? What areas were the hardest or the easiest last year?
Help kids fill out this back-to-school worksheet. Use it to reflect on last year and to make a plan for the new school year.

Look at last year’s assessments.
This might be standardized assessments (if available) or a recent IEP evaluation. You can also look at classroom tests, assignments, or projects. Remember that assessments are only a snapshot of how kids performed. They’re part of the picture, but not the whole thing.
If kids get special education services, look at their IEP to find the present level of performance section, IEP goals, and progress reports. These will tell you how a student is progressing on grade-level standards.

Prioritize the skills kids need this year.
Look at what skills and knowledge kids need for the upcoming grade level. Then think about where they might need more support to achieve grade-level learning goals. (Scroll to the bottom to find skill lists by grade.)
Don’t forget about areas like science, social studies, and social skills. Knowledge of the world and the ability to work with others is important at every age. Building world knowledge and vocabulary also helps with reading comprehension.

Watch for emotional or behavioral signs.
Kids who are struggling with school often experience emotional distress and low self-esteem. They might seem anxious, withdrawn, or depressed. Some kids avoid schoolwork or act out.
Remember there are other reasons that kids might show strong emotions or have behavioral challenges. For example, some kids might be reacting to transitions and changes. If you’re concerned about back-to-school anxiety, here’s what to watch out for.

Collaborate.
Strong family-teacher partnerships are key to figuring out how kids are doing — especially after a tough year. You don’t need to wait until parent-teacher conferences to start communicating.

Schedule time to talk about support kids need at school and home. Bring questions to ask and any observations you may have.
This back-to-school update can help families share important information about their kids with a new teacher.

If you’re seeing signs that kids are struggling or falling behind, there are more things you can do.

- Parents and caregivers: Take N.O.T.E. can help you track what you’re observing and decide on next steps.
- Teachers: Universal Design for Learning principles can help you meet the needs of the wide range of learners in your classroom.

(Visit the www.understood.org website for more information.)