A Note from the Executive Director

With Spring just a few weeks away I am excited to be able to get back outside and to once again enjoy time with family and friends. It has been a long winter with a lot of isolation so I welcome the opportunities Spring will bring as well as hopes of much wider vaccination availability for all of our families. This time of year can be very busy with IEP planning and now, more than ever, we recognize the importance of re-establishing in-person learning goals and settings for your students.

Maine Parent Federation is busy with the final preparations for our Annual Free Conference in collaboration with GEAR Parent Network. This year’s conference will be a virtual event and held over a 2-week period. Our theme is A Parent Pandemic Toolkit. Sessions will be held at 9:00 AM and 1:00 PM on March 16th, 17th, 23rd, and 24th. Please check out all the sessions and register for the sessions that are important to you. We still have space available. Click here to register:


Our office remains open to take your phone calls. However, we still are not providing in-person trainings and peer-to-peer assistance. We will continue to offer these virtually until further notice. Check out the trainings we have recorded on various topics and are available for you to watch at your convenience: http://mpf.org/trainings.html.

With the legislative session in full swing MPF is closely monitoring bills that may directly impact children with special healthcare needs and disabilities. Two bills of current interest are LD#552 An Act to Strengthen the Individualized Education Program Process and the other which does not yet have an LD# but will limit the use of restraint and eliminates seclusion in our schools. It is also anticipated that Maine’s Unified Special Education Regulations will be opened for changes sometime this Spring.

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
What's New in the Information Center at MPF?

Maine Parent Federation has informational packets available on more than 200 topics. These packets contain researched information, tips, local and national resources, and a list of related lending library material available here at MPF. The following information packets have recently been updated:

**Disability/Disorder Related Topics:**

- CHADD Fact Sheets
- Disruptive Behavior
- Dropout Prevention
- Gifted and Talented
- Individual Education Program: IEP
- Learning Disability
- Occupational Therapy
- Physical Therapy
- Visual Impairment

If you would like to receive any of our information packets, or would like information on another topic, please contact MPF by:

- **Phone:** (800) 870-7746
  (Ask to speak with a Parent Information Specialist)
- **E-mail:** parentconnect@mpf.org
  (Please provide mailing information)

These materials are offered **free of charge!**

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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](http://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’s March Workshops & Events

Parent Support Group
4/1/21 @ 12pm

Join Maine Parent Federation for a virtual Parent Support Group. These meetings are intended to provide a confidential opportunity to connect parents who have children with special healthcare needs or disabilities. MPF staff will be available to answer your questions, hear your concerns, and provide helpful resources for you and your family.

The meetings are held the first Thursday of every month at noon.

Please register here:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwo cOmopjouHNTk1aabqLtAiyAKelHW7FNMe

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Please contact Jodie Hall, jhall@mpf.org if you have any questions.

Maine Youth Chat
3/23/21 at 4pm

Maine Parent Federation understands the importance of socializing. Maine Youth Chat is a virtual safe-space for youth and young adults with disabilities to network and “virtually” hangout. (Ages vary -16-24) Discussion topics will be lightly structured around self-advocacy and youth leadership.

Meetings will be held on the following dates from 4-4:30pm.

March: 3/9/21, 3/23/21
April: 4/6/21, 4/20/21
May: 5/4/21, 5/18/21
June: 6/1/21, 6/15/21

Please register here:

https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZMt cOqoql4sGtQ9F76XucweuweJuD_Q9CXm

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

If you have any questions, please contact Dylan Campbell, dcampbell@mpf.org.
Registration is Open for NERGN’s 2021 Annual Meeting

The theme this year is “Apart, together”

NERGN is holding their annual meeting virtually, on the afternoon of April 8 (1-4pm) and the morning of April 9 (9am - noon). Please consider joining for any amount of time, hopefully for the entire time!

Register here: https://unh.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_J9TYM9sQdatppYApQBcmQ?mc_cid=0491cd77ef&mc_cid=ee3db72577

As in past years, Day 1 (Thursday) will be geared toward families and family-led organizations. Day 2 will be geared toward all of our stakeholders.

Regional Updates

NERGN launched two separate collaborations in Aroostook County, ME, in hopes of reaching American Indian and other communities who might benefit from connection to genetic services or resources.

The first collaboration is with Angel Murchison at Cary Medical Center. As the cultural liaison, she knows the community. Meetings are held weekly with Angel to discern where the needs are.

Cary Medical Center is a 65-bed acute care hospital in Caribou, Maine. NERGN is thrilled to have them as a partner.

The second collaboration is with Aroostook County Action Program, or ACAP. ACAP is a trusted entity in northern Maine, strengthening their community with more than 40 programs bringing resources and services to area families.

For Parents – Prepare for the IEP Meeting

CADRE provides these suggestions to help parents plan and prepare for the meeting.

- Prepare notes about what you want to learn/find out at the meeting.
- Prepare notes about what you want your child to learn in school.
- Bring a picture of your child if they won’t be attending.
- “If this were your child...?” use this questioning strategy.
- Ask for additional time to consider important decisions if you’re uncomfortable making them on the spot at the meeting or want to get additional input.
- Look for opportunities to express gratitude to teachers and related staff.
- Bring someone along as a source of support.
- If compromising, define how and when to evaluate if compromise is working.
- Try to remain calm.
- Saying “I don’t know what you mean” is a demonstration of confidence and competence.

CADRE – The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education – is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs at the US Department of Education to serve as the National Center on Dispute Resolution in Special Education. http://www.cadreworks.org

CADRE works to increase the nation’s capacity to effectively resolve special education disputes, reducing the use of expensive adversarial processes. The Center encourages the use of mediation and other collaborative strategies to resolve disagreements about special education and early intervention programs.
504 Education Plans

Kids with physical or mental disabilities can face academic hurdles for a variety of reasons. But parents can take advantage of federal laws to help ensure their children's special needs are met.

Section 504 of the U.S. Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is designed to help parents of students with physical or mental impairments in public schools, or publicly funded private schools, work with educators to design customized educational plans. These 504 plans legally ensure that students will be treated fairly at school.

504 Plan Basics

Students can qualify for 504 plans if they have physical or mental impairments that affect or limit any of their abilities to:

- walk, breathe, eat, or sleep
- communicate, see, hear, or speak
- read, concentrate, think, or learn
- stand, bend, lift, or work

Examples of accommodations in 504 plans include:

- preferential seating
- extended time on tests and assignments
- reduced homework or classwork
- verbal, visual, or technology aids
- modified textbooks or audio-video materials
- behavior management support
- adjusted class schedules or grading
- verbal testing
- excused lateness, absence, or missed classwork
- pre-approved nurse's office visits and accompaniment to visits
- occupational or physical therapy

The goal of 504 plans is for students to be educated in regular classrooms along with the services, accommodations, or educational aids they might need. If students with these plans can't achieve satisfactory academic success, as is determined by the school, then alternative settings in the school or private or residential programs can be considered.

504 Plans vs. IEPs

A 504 plan is different from an individualized education program (IEP). The main difference is that a 504 plan modifies a student's regular education program in a regular classroom setting. A 504 plan is monitored by classroom teachers. A student with an IEP, as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), may receive different educational services in a special or regular educational setting, depending on the student's need. IEP programs are delivered and monitored by additional school support staff.

Also, parental approval and involvement is required for an IEP, but not for a 504 plan. Full parental participation in the 504 plan process, however, is important for the student's academic success.
It's important to note that students with IEPs are also entitled to the additional protections and services offered by 504 plans. Students with IEPs might benefit from a 504 plan, for example, if they're moving from a special education setting to a regular classroom.

**Evaluation and Referral**

A 504 plan should be considered when a student isn't benefiting from instruction due to a physical or mental impairment. The issue can be raised by a parent or legal guardian, teacher, physician, or therapist.

A 504 plan can help when a student returns to school after a serious injury or illness, or when a student isn't eligible for special education services or an IEP, but still needs extra services to succeed academically. Once an educational concern is raised, the school principal or other academic advisor sets up a meeting of a 504 planning team. The team usually consists of parents, the principal, classroom teachers, and other school personnel (such as the school nurse, guidance counselor, psychologist, or social worker).

After reviewing academic and medical records and interviewing the student and parents, the 504 team determines if the child is eligible to have a 504 plan put in place. Sometimes school officials and parents disagree about eligibility. Disagreements also can arise about details within the 504 plan itself. In these cases, parents can make written appeals to the school district or the U.S. Office for Civil Rights.

**Reviewing the 504 Plan**

Once the plan is developed by the team, all the student's teachers are responsible for implementing the accommodations in the plan, as well as participating in plan reviews.

The 504 plan should be reviewed at least annually to determine if the accommodations are up to date and appropriate, based on the student's needs. Any 504 plan team member, including the parent, may call for a 504 plan review at any time if there is an educational concern or change in the student's needs. The plan can be terminated if the 504 team determines that the student:

- is no longer disabled
- no longer requires any special accommodations or services to meet the identified needs
- can be appropriately instructed in general education

**A Final Word**

Parents have the right to choose where their kids will be educated. This choice includes public or private elementary schools and secondary schools, including religious schools. It also includes charter schools and home schools.

However, it is important to understand that the rights of children with disabilities who are placed by their parents in private elementary schools and secondary schools are not the same as those of kids with disabilities who are enrolled in public schools (or placed by public agencies in private schools when the public school is unable to provide a free appropriate public education).

Children with disabilities who are placed in private schools may not get any services or the same services they would have received in a public school.