



**Back to School Roadmap
Top 10 Strategies
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Parents: How to Navigate Your Student's Complex Special Education Needs Now for the 2015-2016 School Year and Beyond

Take ownership of your child's education. This is the time to plan your own back to school transition, anticipate your child's needs and start to build a framework for collaboration and a path for a successful school year. This can be a time of great anxiety for you and your child, so take a proactive approach to your child's education and set the stage for open communications during the school year.

Checklist:

1) **Review your child's IEP (Individual Education Plan) and/or 504 Accommodation Plan** and be certain that you understand the goals, objectives, services, accommodations and staff who are key to implementing the plans. *If you are starting the school year without these plans in hand, call the school ASAP and request a copy of the IEP or 504 Plan.*

2) **Familiarize** yourself with the terms and acronyms in the IEP. Do you understand the language used in the IEP? For a useful guide to the ABC's of special education and related acronyms:

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/acronyms/>

3) **Request** an informal meeting to review your concerns if there are questions about the IEP.

4) **Confirm** that the school staff has acquired the training in certain areas of delivering the IEP services to your child since the last PPT meeting. If the school's staff was required to obtain training in certain areas of delivering the IEP services to your child, have you confirmed that the school staff has acquired that training since your last PPT?

5) **Request** the scheduling of a PPT meeting as soon as possible to review and address your concerns, if your concerns are not addressed through an informal meeting.

6) **Meet** with the staff assigned to your child for the new school year. Discuss how you want to monitor your child's progress and how you want to be informed: daily, weekly, monthly, and what form the communication will take.

7) **Re-orient** your child to the school environment to ease the level of anxiety. Plan for you and a school staff member to walk a child around the school building, especially if it is a new school environment for your child.

8) **Discuss** your concerns with your child's transition to the 2015-16 school year. Did you notice any changes over the summer? Did your child's pediatrician or other professional have any development or medical concerns? If so, consider sharing this information with the school.

9) **Communicate and advocate for your child** with school staff during the 2015-16 school year through regularly scheduled informal meetings, e-mails, or other forms of communication.

Special Note: Any issues and concerns that you may have should be addressed immediately, rather than allowing small problems and issues evolve into insurmountable obstacles.

10) **Ensure** that you are on the same wavelength with your child's teachers. Send your child's teachers a letter or e-mail that describes your perceptions of your child's: strengths, weaknesses, learning style(s), behaviors, social issues, and any other concerns that you may have for the 2015-2016 school year.

The Last Word: Your Child's Educational Future Matters

You should start the school year with great expectations. If those expectations are not met to your satisfaction within a reasonable amount of time and your child continues to struggle, or you feel your child is achieving below his or her potential, you have rights to pursue as outlined in your "Procedural Safeguards." Those rights include a plan of action: reviewing your concerns at a PPT meeting, outside evaluations and other administrative remedies.

Please feel free to share this checklist with family and friends who might benefit from this information.

Attorney Lawrence Berliner has practiced in the area of special education law, disability law and legal advocacy throughout Connecticut for the past 32 years. He can be reached via e-mail lwb.esq@gmail.com or phone **(203) 255-0582**. He is available for individual consultations and meetings with any parent organization to discuss their concerns. He has offices located in Westport and Guilford, Connecticut.

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This is for informational purposes only and should not be construed as providing specific legal advice for your child's circumstances. You should consult and attorney for specific legal advice.