

Cynthia Jones is a special education teacher in Kentucky. Mrs. Jones has worked in the special education field for 6 years and was in regular education for 8 years prior to this. She is a full-time collaborator in a high school. Almost all of the students in Special Ed in the school are in regular classes. As a result, they need support in the regular classroom. That is where Mrs. Jones comes in. Her role is to work with the regular classroom teacher to make sure that IEP goals and adaptations and accommodations are implemented. This semester, she is working in three geometry classes with two different teachers. Cynthia Jones is also IMDSA's special education consultant and writes an educational column for MOSAIC WORLD, IMDSA's quarterly newsletter.

Kristy Colvin: Do you feel that the IEP's are implemented sufficiently in your school?

Cynthia Jones I believe our special education department does a really good job of implementing IEPs. We have 11 special ed teachers on staff, as well as 10 instructional assistants.

Parent: Our school district has always be a God send when it came to meeting my daughter's needs, until she got to High School, but now, her case manager is just not there for her

Cynthia Jones: In what ways is her case manager not there for her?

Parent: Her case manager isn't paying attention to what is going on. She got two Fs her first semester in 10th grade and she put that she was excelling on her IEP. I had to go above her head to get her out of the English class that she failed. And she was the teacher in that class that was the case manager. The case manager kept telling me that my daughter was doing fine in English and she could do it. But, she was coming home every day in tears, she didn't understand her English assignments

Cynthia Jones: If a student on my caseload were meeting her IEP goals but failing her classes, I would reconsider her IEP goals. It seems they are not meeting her needs. Were the assignments being modified?

Parent: Yes, the teacher was too difficult.

Cynthia Jones: Oh, I see. I sometimes encounter that problem.

Parent: We put her in a different class and she got an A the next semester she has always loved English

Cynthia Jones: Oh, then the teacher was DEFINITELY too difficult!

Parent: That is why I am saying this case manager is not paying attention to my daughter. I tried to communicate with her last year at the IEP in April, and I could tell while she smiled and shoot her head that it was going in one ear and out the other

Cynthia Jones: In a situation like that -- where her IEP goals were being "met" but she was still failing -- I would request a meeting and ask that the IEP be rewritten. Do you get much cooperation from the administration at your daughter's school?

Parent: I did and they insisted that they were still being met and there was no need for a meeting

Cynthia Jones That is one thing we have on our side at my school -- good "SpEd friendly" administrators. You *do* have the right to insist on a meeting.

Kristy Colvin So, Cynthia, what do you do in this instance....obviously, the staff is not listening

Parent Every time I call, I always get instructed that I must speak to my daughter's case manager. This same lady I am having trouble with

Cynthia Jones Honestly, if the parent is asking for a meeting, I hold a meeting.

Kristy Colvin can she ask for another case manager?

Cynthia Jones: You *can* ask for another case manager.

Parent: I can ?

Cynthia Jones I don't know how big the SpEd staff is at your school, though, so the logistics may be difficult.

Parent: That would go over real big, I bet?

Cynthia Jones Well, it depends on the climate of your school.

Cynthia Jones Another option is to get an advocate.

Kristy Colvin: have you dealt with advocates Cynthia?

Cynthia Jones Yes, I have dealt with advocates

Parent: Well, here is my concern, my daughter has big dreams, and she wants to take a lot of difficult classes next year.

Cynthia Jones Are these realistic goals for her?

Parent: no : But knowing her case manager, she will approve them

Cynthia Jones What are some of Allison's specific goals?

Parent: Allison wants to take human anatomy. She wants to be a massage therapist

Cynthia Jones Is there a way to "lead" your daughter to an understanding of just what is involved in her goals?

Parent: I don't want to discourage her, but if the teacher would work with us to get her into classes that would accommodate her to some extent, that would be great. I on the other hand, am doing my best to work with Allison to explain to her that these are not realistic.

Kristy Colvin: I am not the "expert" in this meeting, but I would like to share my experiences. Tim had really unrealistic goals too. I let him take the computer graphics class he wanted for one semester he wound up failing it and I told him he had to take something easier because it was an elective, it wasn't a big deal for him to fail it.

Kris3Mom: Are you in the meeting without Allison or is Allison there at all times

Parent: She is there the whole time

Cynthia Jones Once a child is in high school they DO need to be involved in their meetings, but you could always conduct a part of the meeting before bringing her in.

Kristy Colvin: During our IEP meetings, I always requested time alone without him first. This way, I was able to freely address any issues I was concerned about.:

Parent: The last meeting we had, 3 people didn't show, the principal ate her lunch while we were having the meeting and was constantly on her walkie talkie

Cynthia Jones Oh, dear!

Kristy Colvin: That is totally unacceptable!

Cynthia Jones I can understand busy schedules, but there is a certain level of professionalism that MUST be maintained! If you are unsatisfied with who is -- and is not -- in attendance, you can always ask for the meeting to be rescheduled.

Parent: I think what I will do is bring along some folks next time so they know I am serious

Kristy Colvin: an advocate would be a good idea!

Cynthia Jones You do have the right to bring people to the meeting who might be able to help with Allison's program.

Kristy Colvin: Cynthia, could you give this parent some kind of ideas on how she can handle this whole situation.? I understand that she is afraid to cause too much strife because then her daughter might get the brunt of it, but this is totally unacceptable!

Cynthia Jones : Well, the first thing I would do is make it very clear to the case manager that you are not happy with the direction your daughter's program is taking. If you get absolutely nowhere with the case manager, then I would talk to her immediate superior -- usually the head of the special education department. If that gets you nowhere, ask for a conference with the principal. If you are still unhappy, you have the right to go to the Board of Education. I would get the advocate involved somewhere between the case manager and the administration.

What I'm saying is, "Don't wait until you're on the doorstep of the Board of Education" to bring in an advocate.

Parent: Yes, when my daughter was first starting school and I didn't know what a IEP was. Then our county Group Homes came along with me for support.

Cynthia Jones Often, the advocate can be a good mediator.

Parent: Okay, so where do I find an advocate?

Cynthia Jones Usually, they can be found in the Yellow Pages under such titles as "Child Advocacy" or "Citizen Advocacy."

Kristy Colvin: do advocates cost?

Cynthia Jones No, it's your tax dollars at work.

Kristy Colvin: If you do a search online for "your state" special education advocates you will find a lot also, if you go to: <http://www.yellowpagesforkids.com/> not only will you find services in your state, but also you will learn about Writ law which is special education laws and rights

Cynthia Jones You can also find info on IDEA by simply googling it.

Cynthia Jones You are supposed to be offered a copy of your parent rights at each IEP meeting. The procedures for disagreeing, filing complaints, etc... are outlined in there, as well.

Parent: yes i get a copy of that.

Kristy Colvin: So, if this parent calls an advocate and explains the situation, the advocate can give her advice and come to the meetings with her..

Cynthia Jones Yes, definitely. The advocate will probably want to meet with you before the IEP meeting to discuss current goals, issues you are having, etc...

Kristy Colvin: I just wrote an article for K12 academics concerning the special education system and IEP's <http://www.k12academics.com/kristycolvin.htm>

Kristy Colvin: Thank you Cynthia very much for taking the time out to visit with us and answer our questions. I think we have learned a lot tonight on IEP's and advocates.