

# Preface



In the first edition of this book (published in 2000) I wrote, “I was motivated to write this book because the topic—the role and responsibility of special education professionals to serve as advocates for students with disabilities and their families—is critically important as the field of special education enters the twenty-first century.” Now, several years later, I am even more convinced about the need for this book and its focus on advocacy by special education professionals for the students and families they serve. Special education advocacy by both parents and professionals was responsible for securing basic rights and services for children with disabilities during the 1970s. We have now entered an era that will require sustained and committed advocacy to maintain the rights and services won during the first wave of special education advocacy. This second wave of special education advocacy must respond to the increasing demands of children with disabilities and their families and to the significant challenges facing schools and educators working with limited resources.

Effective advocacy seeks to inform and challenge institutions and individuals to respond to the individual needs of children with disabilities, not to alienate or antagonize institutions and individuals who may come under an advocate’s scrutiny. In *Making a Difference*, I do not try to offer simplistic panaceas for the challenges facing families, special education professionals, and schools in responding to the increasingly complex needs of children with disabilities. Instead, I raise difficult issues and suggest possible responses in an effort to fulfill a professional’s responsibility to act in the best interests of children with disabilities.

This book grew out of a course I have taught for over 20 years. This course addresses issues special education professionals must be aware of in effectively collaborating, supporting, and empowering families of students with disabilities. When I started to formulate the outline for this book, I quickly discovered many excellent books and articles on the subjects of special education law, educational ethics, collaboration, and conflict resolution strategies. However, no professional publications comprehensively addressed the topic of advocacy by special education professionals. Specifically, I wanted to integrate information from a number of related fields of study by identifying and discussing *essential advocacy competencies for special education professionals*. This book is the result of that integration process.

## *Multiple Perspectives*

In writing *Making a Difference*, I approached the topic from three diverse perspectives. First, I am a parent of a child with a disability who has been receiving educational services since 9 months of age. My daughter is now 30 years old. My parental perspective is interwoven throughout the book. In most cases, my family and I have been effectively supported and empowered by wonderfully dedicated special education professionals. In some cases, however, we have experienced negative professional attitudes and actions. My point in sharing this parental perspective is to illuminate experiences, both positive and negative, that I believe are typical for many families of children with disabilities.

Second, I write from the perspective of a professional who worked as a lawyer for a few years and served as a special education due process hearing officer for 9 years. The topic of advocacy must inevitably address legal rights and procedures, and my background and experiences related to special education law surface in several chapters.

Finally, I have addressed the topic of special education advocacy from the point of view of an educator. The demands and diverse responsibilities facing educators today are immense. Although this book argues for another job responsibility—advocacy—I believe an advocate’s role is complementary to the basic duties of any effective, caring educator. That is, an educator cannot be a caring, dedicated, and effective professional without serving as a child advocate. The vast majority of special education professionals, I believe, are caring, dedicated individuals. In this book, I highlight professionals’ advocacy responsibilities and provide some useful tools in functioning as an advocate for children with disabilities and their families.

## *Book Features*

In the second edition of *Making a Difference*, I have maintained many of the unique features from the first edition and have added some new ones. One feature retained from the first edition is the set of four advocacy scenarios. An overview of each scenario appears at the beginning of the introduction to this book. Each scenario involves a special education professional who has encountered an advocacy dilemma. I intersperse these four advocacy scenarios throughout the book to illustrate issues, concepts, and strategies that are discussed in subsequent chapters. The advocacy scenarios provide a more realistic and practical application of the advocacy skills addressed in this book. Another feature included in most of the chapters is *Advocacy Anecdotes*. These brief stories are set apart from the main text and offer the reader some real-life examples of advocacy issues and concerns. Many of these Advocacy Anecdotes discuss my personal experiences as a parent of a child with a disability, as a lawyer or due pro-

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cess hearing officer, or as an educator. The third feature incorporated into most of the chapters is *Advocacy Actions*. Like the Advocacy Anecdotes, this material is set apart from the main text and provides the reader with quick reference advocacy pointers, checklists, or other advocacy-related information (e.g., a sample IDEA complaint letter, law- and advocacy-related Internet Web sites).

The new features added to the second edition are found in all 13 chapters. They include chapter objectives, questions for discussion, a list of resources (i.e., Web sites pertaining to the chapter content), and reflection activities. These features enhance the instructional and learning components of the second edition.

## *Book Organization*

The introduction that opens this second edition of *Making a Difference* sets the stage for the book, which is organized into three parts. All of the original material has been updated with new references and content. Several chapters contain significant revisions that will be noted as I briefly review each chapter. Further, two new chapters have been added to this second edition. One of these, Chapter 4, addresses resilience as an essential disposition for special education advocates. The other, Chapter 8, discusses knowledge of community services and organizations as an essential knowledge base for advocates.

The introduction explains the need for professional advocacy in special education. Specifically, five arguments establish a need for special education professionals to function as child advocates: the historical discrimination experienced by individuals with disabilities, the frequent denial of educational rights and needs of children with disabilities, the political and bureaucratic structure of schools, the lack of parental advocacy, and the findings from special education outcomes research. This introduction includes new content on outcomes findings from the *Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study* (SEELS) and the *National Longitudinal Transition Study* as well as material from the most recent Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Parts I, II, and III categorize the essential professional advocacy competencies into *dispositions*, *knowledge bases*, and *skills*. Part I (Chapters 1 through 4) describes four essential advocacy dispositions: an advocacy disposition (Chapter 1), an ethical disposition (Chapter 2), a family support and empowerment disposition (Chapter 3), and a resilience disposition (Chapter 4). Chapter 1 contains updated information on legal issues related to educators serving as advocates. Chapter 2 includes new information on the Council on Exceptional Children's belief statements on advocacy and updated research on knowledge of ethics and ethical training

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of special education professionals. Chapter 3 has expanded coverage on family diversity issues.

Part II (Chapters 5 through 8) examines four essential knowledge bases for effective special education advocacy: special education law (Chapter 5), dispute resolution mechanisms (Chapter 6), systems change (Chapter 7), and community services and organizations that support individuals with disabilities and their families (Chapter 8). Chapter 5 has been extensively revised to include new legal information on the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 and the No Child Left Behind Act. Chapter 6 has expanded information on alternative dispute resolution approaches in special education and conflict resolution changes in IDEA 2004. Chapter 7 includes new information on institutional change issues and transactional, transitional, and transformational changes.

Part III (Chapters 9 through 13) reviews five essential advocacy skills: interpersonal communication skills (Chapter 9), collaboration skills (Chapter 10), conflict resolution skills (Chapter 11), advocacy skills and strategies (Chapter 12), and ethical analysis skills (Chapter 13). Chapter 9 includes new material on communication within a team context and communicating during IEP meetings. Chapter 10 includes a new section on the importance of establishing trust in developing collaborative partnerships between school professionals and families. Chapter 12 has a new section on advocacy stories contributed by five special education professionals.

The book's conclusion discusses the desired outcomes of special education advocacy, including an enhanced sense of professional development and growth, family empowerment, improved educational services for children with disabilities, and a more responsive and collaborative educational system.

## *Acknowledgments*

I was joined in writing of this second edition by my colleague, Denise Clark. Denise updated references and content in several of the original chapters. In addition, she was the primary author on one of the new chapters (Chapter 8). I appreciate all of her contributions to this second edition. In addition, I am indebted to five extraordinary special education professionals who generously shared their advocacy stories with me: Amy Quinn (not her real name at her request), Christine Cornell, Kelly-Heppner, Tiffany Frerks, and Joan Helbing. Each of these special education professionals fulfills the spirit and intent of advocacy as represented by this book.

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