



Department of Education

3211 FOURTH STREET NE • WASHINGTON DC 20017-1194 • 202-541-3130 • FAX 202-541-3390
EMAIL: USCCBEDUCATION@USCCB.ORG • WWW.USCCB.ORG/EDUCATION

Dear IDEA Liaisons:

We write to ask for your assistance in serving as a liaison in your Congressional district during the reauthorization process of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). We received your name from a sign-up form that was sent directly from you, your school principal, your Catholic schools diocesan office, or another Catholic school contact. If you are unable to respond to this request, please contact us at your earliest convenience so that we can obtain the name of a replacement contact.

We requested this contact information to assist us in forming a national network of parents of special needs children and others interested in improving our school community's access to special education services through IDEA. This network is coordinated through the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Office of Parental Advocacy, which operates out of the USCCB Department of Education.

Enclosed are materials to provide you with some background about the reauthorization of IDEA, and how we hope to influence this process to secure more equitable benefits for special needs children enrolled in Catholic and other private schools. Please distribute these materials as needed to parents of special needs children and others in your school community.

As noted on the description of the liaison responsibilities, we hope you can provide us with critical assistance in disseminating information we will provide to you about the IDEA reauthorization. Additionally, we need your help in generating responses from your local Catholic school community to periodic requests from the USCCB for letters, phone calls, and other communication with members of Congress.

As a first step in this process, we ask for your assistance in collecting letters from Catholic school parents of special needs children describing the difficulties they may have encountered in accessing evaluations to determine a disabling condition and special education services from their local school district. To ensure the greatest impact, we ask that you forward the letters directly to our office so that we can personally deliver them to the appropriate members of Congress. Instructions for collecting and forwarding the letters are also enclosed.

IDEA Liaisons
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While we recognize that not all Catholic schools are fully equipped to serve children with special needs, we believe that these services could be greatly expanded if our school families had greater access to the services that would be available to their children if they were enrolled in a public school. We want to stress therefore that these letters from parents should focus on their experiences dealing with their public school district, rather than on difficulties they may have encountered with their Catholic school.

Finally, so that we can communicate with you as quickly as possible in the future, please send an email message to parent@usccb.org indicating your preferred email address, as well as your name and street address, and the Congressional district in which you will serve as an IDEA liaison.

Again, thank you for your willingness to become involved in this very important process on behalf of children with special needs. Should you have any questions, feel free to contact us by phone at 202/541-3132, or by email at parent@usccb.org.

Sincerely,

USCCB Office for Parental Advocacy

Enclosures



OFFICE FOR PARENTAL ADVOCACY

2002-2003 IDEA Reauthorization Parent Liaison Responsibilities

With the assistance of State Catholic Conferences, diocesan superintendents, and statewide parent advocacy group coordinators, the Department of Education and the Office of Government Liaison of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have initiated an effort to identify a national network of parents of special needs students to participate in advocacy efforts during the 2002-2003 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These parents will serve as liaisons in each Congressional district, especially in the districts of Congressional members who serve on key committees.

Responsibilities of liaisons include:

- Identifying other special needs parents in their Congressional districts;
- Disseminating information from the USCCB to other parents and schools in their districts;
- Collecting documentation regarding difficulties accessing IDEA services for Catholic school students;
- Establishing and maintaining contact with their members of Congress during the IDEA reauthorization as requested by the USCCB;
- Possibly visiting Capitol Hill or providing testimony as requested.

USCCB OFFICE FOR PARENTAL ADVOCACY

2002/2003 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) LOCAL CONTACTS

Your name and title

Diocese and State

Phone and E-mail address

Please provide below the requested information for the individual you have identified who will be responsible for coordinating advocacy efforts in his or her Congressional district during the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. You will also receive a copy of any information that USCCB forwards to this contact.

IDEA Advocacy Liaison Contact Information

State/Congressional District

Name of Coordinator

Address (Street, City, State and Zip)

Phone/E-mail

Position (E.g.: Special Needs Parent, Teacher, Principal, etc.)

School or Diocesan Affiliation

Please return this form to:

Office for Parental Advocacy / Department of Education
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 Fourth Street, N.E., Washington, DC 20017
PH: 202/541-3132; FAX: 202-541-3390; Email: parent@usccb.org



OFFICE FOR PARENTAL ADVOCACY

Instructions for Collecting Letters to Congress

1. Provide the enclosed cover letter to parents and others that you think are interested in writing to Congress on behalf of special needs children enrolled in Catholic and other private schools. If you would like to receive this cover letter electronically, send an e-mail request to mrussell@usccb.org.
2. Indicate in the space provided at the end of the cover letter where the letters should be returned.
3. Forward your collected letters via U.S. mail, email, or fax to:

Office for Parental Advocacy
USCCB
Department of Education
3211 4th Street N.E.
Washington, DC 20017

PH: 202/541-3009
FAX: 202/541-3390
Email: parent@usccb.org

COVER LETTER TO PARENTS

Dear Parents of Special Needs Students:

I have been asked by the Office of Parental Advocacy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Department of Education for assistance in securing more equitable services for our students under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Congress is currently reviewing, or "reauthorizing" this law, and will likely be involved in this process well into 2003.

This reauthorization provides an important opportunity for us to communicate with our elected officials regarding the needs of Catholic and other private school students with special needs. Although the current IDEA requires that all private school children suspected of having a disability should be identified, located and evaluated by their local public school district at no cost to parents, private school parents often report that their children receive untimely and inadequate evaluations, if they are evaluated at all. Further, although the law also requires that at least a proportionate amount of federal IDEA dollars should be used to provide special education services to private school students, private school children are often offered very limited or no services from their local school districts.

I have been asked to collect letters from parents to demonstrate first, that students with disabilities do attend Catholic schools, and secondly, to verify the difficulties described above. Specifically, we encourage you to address a letter to your representatives in Congress urging them to consider changes to IDEA that would better address the needs of students enrolled in private schools. These letters will be forwarded to the USCCB, who will in turn distribute them to appropriate members of Congress through a personal visit on your behalf.

Your letter should be addressed to both senators from your state, as well as to the member of the House of Representatives who represents the Congressional district in which you reside. A draft letter, along with instructions for identifying the name and address of your Senators and Representative are enclosed.

Please return your letter to me by forwarding it to:

[Liaisons: Include here your address as well as email address or FAX number if appropriate]

Thank you for your critical help in securing equity for our children. Please pass this on to other parents who might be interested in participating in this important effort.

Sincerely,
IDEA liaison



OFFICE FOR PARENTAL ADVOCACY

WRITING TO CONGRESS

To identify your Senators and members of the House of Representatives:
Go to the Congressional web site at <http://thomas.loc.gov> and click on
"Congress & Legislative Activities."

For the Senate:

Click on "Senate," and then on
"Contacting the Senate" on the
bar at the top of the page.

For the House:

Click on "House of Representatives" and
scroll to the bottom of the page.
Click on "Write Your Representative" and
follow the instructions.

DRAFT LETTER

Letters addressed to Senators:

The Honorable (full name)
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Letters addresses House members:

The Honorable (full name)
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator (Last Name):

Dear Representative (Last Name):

I am writing to urge your support for changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that would better accommodate the needs of parentally-placed private school students. This issue is especially important to our family because of the special needs of our child [name]. [Child's name] is in [xx] grade at [xxxx] School, and has [specify disability].

We have chosen to send our child to a Catholic school because [specify reason – e.g. so that he/she can attend school with his/her siblings, because we value the importance of a religiously-oriented environment, etc.] However, in making this choice for [name of child], our family receives none [or little—depending on individual situation] of the support that we would receive for our child if he/she were to attend a public school.

[Provide examples here of:

- difficulties you may have encountered in accessing an evaluation of your child's disability from your local school district;
- the services you are receiving, if any, from your local school district to address your child's disability, or how those services have been denied or reduced;
- services your child is receiving from your Catholic school or outside providers, and the financial burden you have incurred in accessing those services.]

We urge you to support changes to IDEA that would at a minimum improve the Child Find process so that private school children are properly evaluated and identified, as currently required. Additionally, we urge you to support changes that would allow private school families like ours greater flexibility in using federal IDEA funds to assist them in affording special education services for their children.

On behalf of our child, and all children with disabilities who attend private schools, we hope you will give this issue your serious consideration.

Sincerely,

Your name and address

(Be sure to include this information so that your representatives know you are a constituent.)