

MEMORANDUM

To: Leah Voorhies, Deputy Superintendent of Student Achievement
Utah State Board of Education (USB E)
From: Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (USEAP)
Subject: Tools for Parent Empowerment
Date: May 16, 2025

In our role as an advisory panel to the USB E, USEAP has spent considerable time considering how to bolster the empowerment of parents of students with disabilities. This topic was selected as a priority for the 2024-25 school year. In addition, some of the recommendations have been formulated based on themes that have emerged across discussions at USEAP meetings in the past several years. In total, USEAP identified three issues that we believe could be greatly affected by relatively easy solutions. The impact of these changes would be maximized if USB E focused on early childhood parent engagement to provide parents the resources that can help their children find long-term success in school early in their children's educational journey.

Issue #1: Improve Visibility of Existing Resources

USEAP members frequently praise the quality of many resources on the USB E website as well as resources from partner organizations such as Utah Parent Center and Utah Disability Law Center, both of which are non-profit organizations that are tasked with assisting students with accessing services under the IDEA. However, the experience of individual members and other parents in their networks suggests that these resources are under-utilized. Often parents do not have access to key information in a timely manner to help their children benefit from the information. Parents primarily must rely on inconsistent distribution from teachers and LEAs or seek out informal support networks.

Recommendation 1A: Create a One-Page Summary of Resources with Links

USEAP recommends that USB E direct its staff to create a one-page summary of USB E resources for students with disabilities that is visually appealing with links and QR codes to key websites (such as special education resources on the USB E

website and other key partner organizations). The one-page summary of the Procedural Safeguards is a good template for this recommended resource, which could also be routinely distributed at Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings and other key points of contact. USEAP believes that this recommendation is a relatively simple way to significantly increase direct access to the information for parents, students, and advocates.

Recommendation 1B: Create a Toolkit for LEAs on How to Share Existing Resources with Parents

USBE could also create a toolkit for LEAs showcasing the quality and range of available of programs, supports, and resources created by USBE and its partner organizations, emphasizing the benefits for students with disabilities of ensuring parent awareness of these resources, and providing recommendations and best practices on how to share these resources. The ultimate goal of both recommendations on increasing visibility of existing resources is to maximize the benefits of excellent work that has already been completed by USBE and others.

Issue #2: Remove Barriers for Parents to Access or Report Data

USEAP members identified two specific barriers for which it requests assistance from the USBE at this time.

Firstly, USEAP learned that the USBE no longer collects Section 504 data at the state level, as the requirement was eliminated a few years ago. While anecdotal reports provide useful insights, they are insufficient for predicting potential challenges or identifying important trends. Having data on the number of Section 504 Plans and when students move from having a Section 504 Plan to an IEP or vice versa would help identify current practices, evaluate the effectiveness of existing processes, and aid students in receiving the appropriate support to meet their academic goals. USEAP recommends that the USBE consider opportunities to collect and analyze data related to Section 504 Plans.

Secondly, USEAP members have observed that Utah has a low number of due process review requests compared to other states and have discussed a variety of potential concerns with the process.

Recommendation 2: Reduce Barriers for Requesting Due Process Reviews

USEAP concluded that a critical first step would be to remove the technological barriers of filing a request with the USBE. Consequently, USEAP recommends that USBE revise the special education rules to replace the requirement to file a due process request via fax with a user-friendly, secure electronic process for filing. Not only would this change remove barriers for participation for many parents, it would also better reflect the State of Utah's general policy preference favoring up-to-date and accessible technology.

Thank you for your time in considering our recommendations. We as a panel appreciate all of your efforts on behalf of children with disabilities throughout the State of Utah.