

PTA Special Needs Representatives Info

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Karen Conder, Utah PTA Special Needs Specialist

specialneeds@utahpta.org

Special Needs Representative is an important position on local PTA boards

Does your local PTA Board have a Special Needs Rep?

A Special Needs Rep can help students with disabilities and their families to be connected and more fully included and to enjoy the benefits of associating and participating with others in the school community. More than 86,000 Utah public school children have disabilities. A Special Needs Rep can make a big difference in the lives of these students.

What the job of PTA Special Needs Rep IS:

- **Local PTA Boards** can designate a Special Needs Rep or someone could volunteer to serve in that position. The Rep would work with the board and be a go-between working with the PTA and the teachers and staff as activities are being planned.
- **Work with the local PTA board** – be a resource and support for the board as well as for students with disabilities and their families.
- **Consult** with teachers and the school nurse to determine what accommodations are needed for an activity. Then work with the board to provide adaptations and assistance so that all students can participate in and enjoy the activity.
- **Communication - facilitate communication** so that students with special needs and their families receive needed information about activities and events as well as other important information about the school community and that they know who to contact with questions about PTA and school activities.
- **Encourage inclusion** - Work with the PTA and the school to make sure that activities are adapted to be inclusive and accessible for everyone, including those with special needs.
- **Make connections** - help families and students make connections with others.
- **Build a good relationship** with the special education team at your school so you can help each other. Get to know teachers, speech pathologists, guidance counselors, school nurses, psychologists, administrators, etc. They can all help inform parents about Special Needs Reps and can help deliver information to students with disabilities and their families.
- **Publicize** the role of Special Needs Rep so people will know who to contact and let them know you are there to help. (Schools will not be giving you a list of special needs students due to privacy laws).
- This position could look different at different schools. A Special Needs Rep can be a person with or without a child with special needs. (This is a PTA position, it is not the same as positions with Special Needs groups organized by school districts).

What the job of PTA Special Needs Rep is NOT:

- SN Rep does not attend IEP meetings for or with other parents.
- SN Rep does not need to be a specialist on any or all disabilities or an expert on IEPs or 504 plans.
- SN Rep should not share personal information about children or families.

An Important Note on Privacy and Respect

- Through work as a Special Needs Rep, you might become aware of private information about students and their disabilities. (like who is receiving Special Education services and details about a students' disability) It's very important that you keep that information private and not share it with others.
- **It is illegal** to share this type of information without written permission.
- ****When sending group emails, use BCC (blind carbon copy) so the list of recipients is kept private**
- Some people are more open about their child's disabilities and others are more reserved about giving out information. Even if families have shared information with you or others, it's not your information to share.

How to get started as the Special Needs Rep:

- Put your contact information in the front office and on the school website or Facebook page, put an article in the school newsletter, speak at Back to School Night, etc.
- Ask special ed team to pass out fliers at Parent-Teacher Conferences and IEP meetings with information about the Special Needs Rep
- Become familiar with resources for students with disabilities and their families

The main points of focus for the Special Needs Rep are:

1) Communication 2) Flexibility 3) Awareness 4) Inclusion 5) Resources

1. Communication

- Make sure students and families get the message or information they need in a way they can receive it.
- Figure out the best way to communicate – email, paper flyers, phone calls, regular newsletters, webpage, Facebook, posters in the halls, etc. - may need to communicate with them in multiple ways.
- Don't just assume everyone will hear about activities and know all the details.
- Don't count on students verbally relaying the information and details to their parents.
- Get information to these families as **early** as possible.
- Students with disabilities **often need more time** than others to prepare for a change in schedule or a special activity and they **often end up being told at the last minute.**
- Be careful with acronyms (Special Education is full of them)
Make sure to clarify acronyms. When using an acronym define it at least the first time you use it in any situation.
If you don't understand an acronym – **ask** for clarification

2. Flexibility

- All special needs are not the same. Some are purely physical and others are cognitive or behavioral or a mixture. Some are temporary and others are long-lasting or permanent.
- What is appropriate for one person with a special need may not be appropriate for another, even another person with the same disability. Different children may need different accommodations to fully participate.
- **Focus on accommodations needed rather than what the specific disabilities are.**
- Work with special ed teachers and parents. Communicate with them. Keep them informed on activities.
- Be flexible – be willing to adapt and adjust programs and activities to accommodate children with special needs.

Possible Adjustments

- A buddy or extra help during field day
- Non-food treats as prizes for a fun run

- Some less noisy activities at a school carnival like a quiet sensory room, so students who are getting overwhelmed can decompress
 - Allergen-free foods for a class party
 - An ASL (American Sign Language) interpreter for a student or family member
 - Informed ahead of times about loud noises or surprise elements of an assembly
 - Time at a carnival before the rest of the students come
 - Let teachers, students, and parents know what will happen and what they will be expected to do at an activity
- **Support Special Ed Teachers and Aides**
 - Recognize and support special education teachers and don't forget their aides.
 - They have extra work – IEPs, testing, reports, working closely with many classroom teachers, wide range of abilities and needs in the same class, etc.
 - Help them find needed volunteers and resources.
 - Make sure they have people to help with parties and field trips or in the classroom, if needed.
 - Give them the same help (or more) that is given to general ed classes.

3. Awareness

Help others be more aware of those with disabilities and how to treat them and include them.

People First Language

People First Language focuses on the person rather than on the disability. A person with a disability is still a person. The words we use reflect our attitudes and perceptions and can have a powerful effect on those around us. When speaking to or about those with disabilities, it's important to use People First Language (PFL).

USE person with a disability,	NOT disabled person
USE person who uses a wheelchair,	NOT wheelchair bound or confined to a wheelchair
USE person with a physical disability,	NOT cripple, quadriplegic, etc.
USE person with a learning disability,	NOT learning disabled
USE person with a cognitive disability,	NOT mentally disabled

Disability Etiquette (MN State Council on Disabilities, used with permission)

Tips: Relax! People with disabilities are 'just people' – like you.

- Never assume you know what an individual with a disability wants or needs;
- When talking to a person with a disability, talk directly to that individual, not the friend, companion or sign language interpreter who may also be present.
- Treat adults in a manner befitting adults.
- If offering any assistance, ALWAYS wait for a response.
- Never automatically push someone who uses a wheelchair.
- Do not raise your voice or shout unless instructed to do so.
- Do not look away while talking with a person who is Deaf or hard of hearing, he or she may be reading your lips.
- Do not assume a Deaf or hard of hearing person can read lips, it's very difficult and a good lip reader can usually only decipher about one-third of what you are saying.
- Do not pretend to understand if you do not, you may agree to do something accidentally.

- If greeting someone who is blind or low vision, identify yourself and those who may be accompanying you.
- When guiding someone who is blind or low vision, allow him or her to take your arm, and give verbal directions, if appropriate.
- When ending a visit with someone who is blind or low vision always communicate your actions, don't just walk away.

4. Inclusion

- Many students who are in special ed are attending schools that are not their neighborhood schools.
- The families may feel isolated because they are not from the area and they may feel isolated because their children are in a different kind of class and maybe participate in different activities than the rest of the children in that grade do.
- Many students are bussed to the schools and parents don't get the opportunity to be in the school when dropping off and picking up students. They may not have friendships and connections with other parents in the school.
- Being part of PTA could help parents of students with disabilities connect with other parents and feel more a part of things.
- Sometimes other parents might even be afraid to approach these parents for fear of offending them.
- Everyone wants to feel welcome and included. It's nice to be invited and informed whether they participate or not.

5. Resources

Utah PTA <http://www.utahpta.org/>



Reflections – Special Artist Category Check the Utah PTA website www.utahpta.org for **Special Artist** information, rules, guidelines, judging process, and guidelines for judges.

Disability Awareness Activity Packet:

Activities and Resources for Teaching Students About Disabilities

By Bev Adcock and Michael L. Remus (Deer Valley Unified School District, used with permission)

<http://www.dvusd.org/cms/lib011/AZ01901092/Centricity/Domain/1318/Disability%20Awareness%20Packet%202.pdf>



Includes information and activities to help students be more aware of and empathetic with those with disabilities and how to help and understand them better.

USBE (Utah State Board of Education) Special Education Services

Information on Accessibility, Effective Instruction, Annual Performance reports, Multi-Tiered System of Supports, and many other topics.

<https://www.schools.utah.gov/specialeducation>



Resolutions - HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

PTA Resolutions are official documents outlining the opinion, will, or intent of the association to address problems, situations, or concerns that affect children and youth and require action to seek resolution on the issue. On the local state or national level or all of the above.

Utah PTA Resolution: High Expectations for Students with Disabilities

In June 2017, after 2 years of work by the Utah PTA Special Needs Committee, this resolution was approved by the Utah PTA membership. Utah PTA supports high expectations for all students. The majority of students with disabilities can successfully function much like anyone else in society. What they primarily lack is the self-confidence and support to plot their own course in life. Our goal is that with this resolution we can begin to change the mindset of all stakeholders – parents, teachers, the community and the students themselves – that we will have high expectations for students with disabilities and that we will give them the opportunities, tools, accommodations and instruction to enable them to go as far as possible toward achieving their full potential and living a fulfilling and meaningful life.

<http://www.utahpta.org/files/docs/UT%20High%20Expectations%20%20Updated%20Feb%202018.pdf>

National PTA Resolution: High Expectations for Students with Disabilities

This resolution was adopted by the delegates at the National PTA Convention in New Orleans, LA in June 2018.

<https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/advocacy/2018-approved-convention-resolutions/high-expectations-for-students-with-disabilities-r.pdf>

Utah Legislative Resolution

HCR14 – Concurrent Resolution Encouraging High Expectations for Students with Disabilities

This resolution was passed during the 2019 legislative session.

<https://le.utah.gov/~2019/bills/static/HCR014.html>

Utah Parent Center <http://www.utahparentcenter.org/>

Also on Facebook – Utah Parent Center

Information, resources, support, advocacy and training for families of people with disabilities including IEP and 504 training and support. **Services are free of charge.** (Advocates can attend IEP meetings with parents, if requested)



The mission of the UPC is to help parents help their children, youth and young adults with all disabilities to live included, productive lives as members of the community. They accomplish this mission by providing accurate information, empathetic peer support, valuable training and effective advocacy based on the concept of parents helping parents.

UPC Disability Resource Directory

<http://www.utahparentcenter.org/disability-resource-book/>

This Directory is available to parents and professionals to help them connect with organizations, agencies, service providers and local disability support groups. Directory contains contact information and brief descriptions of services provided. Two versions – a 2 page condensed list or a longer, more detailed booklet.

National PTA

Special Needs Toolkit <https://www.pta.org/home/family-resources/Special-Education-Toolkit>

Includes information for getting needed services, dictionary of terms, list of resources, etc. Lots of information.

Ideas to Support Children with Special Needs

<http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=4275>

- Day of Encouragement
- Day of Pairing
- Special Needs Task Force

Resolution: Inclusive Communities Make Better Schools

<https://www.pta.org/home/advocacy/ptas-positions/Individual-PTA-Resolutions/resolution-on-inclusive-schools-build-stronger-communities>

UFAN - Utah Food Allergy Network

Email: support@utahfoodallergy.org

Facebook group: Utah Food Allergy Network

Support and information for Utah families affected by food allergies.



FARE - Food Allergy Resource & Education

<https://www.foodallergy.org/>

Resources, information and support for the entire food allergy community.



Utah Dyslexia Handbook

for Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Educators and Parents TO SUPPORT STRUGGLING READERS

The *Dyslexia Handbook* offers guidance, resources, and appropriate supports and interventions for readers with dyslexia. It is also a communication tool for educators and parents to work together. Our hope is that both educators and parents will use the ideas and techniques in the handbook as a team. It is vitally important that struggling readers not give up on themselves; it is just as important that we as educators and parents assist and empower students with dyslexia to enter the world of reading feeling empowered and prepared for their future.

The Dyslexia Handbook: <https://www.schools.utah.gov/file/d4596c5f-0174-47af-ba97-62652d1f6670>

Decoding Dyslexia Utah website: <http://www.decodingdyslexiautah.org/>

Law Enforcement: CIT – Crisis Intervention Teams

Crisis Intervention Teams include specially trained law enforcement officers. These officers are trained in tactics to effectively deal with a situation involving a person experiencing a mental health crisis. These officers are certified by the State of Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health.

A CIT Officer has received training in preventing psychiatric crises and de-escalating a crisis when it occurs, without the unnecessary use of physical force.

Officers are also trained in identifying characteristics of various mental disorders. Along with a newfound empathetic approach, officers of this program are trained to provide a safer intervention for the person experiencing a mental health crisis, their family members, the community, and the officers themselves.

Tips for dealing with Law Enforcement:

1. Students should meet their school officer and have a positive interaction with the officer and the officer should be especially familiar with special ed students in the school.
2. Students should be instructed on following officers' instructions when asked
3. All school staff should know what CIT officers are, especially anyone who might be calling police such as secretaries, administrators, psychologists, bus drivers, teachers, custodians, etc.
4. School staff should know to request CIT officers – just ask for a CIT officer when calling the police.
5. Some police departments have forms where you can list information that might be needed in a future crisis, such as contact information and description for a child who likes to wander, etc.

CIT Utah <http://www.cit-utah.com/> (801) 535-4653 CITUtah@CIT-Utah.com

People First Language

Information, examples, and the importance of People First Language

<https://www.disabilityisnatural.com/people-first-language.html>

Buddy Bench

A simple idea to end loneliness and foster friendship on the playground

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2016/04/04/kids-dont-have-to-be-lonely-at-recess-anymore-thanks-to-this-boy-and-his-buddy-bench/?utm_term=.b085c7ae73c7

Informational Websites and Articles

Understood for learning & attention issues website <https://www.understood.org/en>

This website has many articles for parents and teachers of students with disabilities on such topics as special services, social situations, managing feelings, etc.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): What You Need to Know

Article about the different types of LRE

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/special-education-basics/least-restrictive-environment-lre-what-you-need-to-know>

Friendship Circle: Special Needs Resources website <https://www.friendshipcircle.org/>

Friendship Circle is a non-profit organization in Michigan that works to create friendship in the lives of children and adults with special needs. This site has many posts about different aspects of having a child with a disability, including information on inclusion

13 Ways a Parent Teacher Association Can Help a Student with Special Needs

If you think the PTA can't or won't help your special education student, you are wrong!

<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2015/01/21/13-ways-a-parent-teacher-association-can-help-a-student-with-special-needs/>

Let's Talk About Inclusion

<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/04/12/lets-talk-about-inclusion/>

Inclusion: What It Is and What It Isn't

<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2014/01/02/inclusion-what-it-is-and-what-it-isnt/>

Inclusion Resolution: 10 Ways to Include a Child with Special Needs in 2013

<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/01/03/inclusion-resolution-10-ways-to-include-a-child-with-special-needs-in-2013/>