

Advocacy Week Town Hall Takeaways

On February 25, 55 advocates participated in a town hall discussion to share their stories, experiences, and vision for a better way of supporting students with disabilities. Advocates included families of students with disabilities and individuals with disabilities. The goal was to provide a venue for people who have direct experience in the system of special education to share what they have encountered and a vision for how to we can better serve students and families.

Guiding questions:

- What has your experience with your school been like?
- What has worked well for you?
- What would you ask legislators to do to change the system?

Notes from town hall

The notes below are a summary of the stories and experiences shared by people in school districts across Washington.

- **Experience with remote learning**
 - Some families are getting good communication from staff.
 - Fewer distractions in the at home classroom creates an environment that is preferred by some learners; we need to look at learning environments more intentionally to help ensure in-person learning can meet the needs of a variety of learning styles.
 - Virtual learning made navigating the IEP process even more challenging and more difficult to navigate and secure supports for students.
 - Relying on parents to be their child's instructional aide during remote learning limits many students from being able to meaningfully engage in remote learning unless a parent is able to actively support learning during remote instruction.
 - Assistive technology is not always provided by the school, so students who need assistive technology to participate in remote learning are unable to participate in class.
- **Supports for students and families**
 - Extended School Year needs to be accessible, especially with recovery and compensatory education services.

- We need to extend the age limit for students receiving transition services who have been impacted by remote learning.
- Language access, assistive technology, and being culturally responsive are critical to help families and students access education.
- **Family and community engagement**
 - A framework is needed to support communication. Currently families are left on their own to navigate a complicated process.
 - We need a collaborative process that treats families as partners, not adversaries. Parents are partners. Parents want to help their kids be successful.
 - We need to find a better way to hold districts accountable, so it isn't up to families to enforce the law, which creates a dynamic of opposing forces rather than the foundation for a collaborative relationship.
 - For some families, it takes years of advocating and sometimes hiring a lawyer to get an inclusive IEP.
- **Training and professional development**
 - Lack of proper training for educators can lead to students not receiving the supports they need which, in turn, can cause student disengagement from learning.
 - Social-emotional learning (SEL), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Early Intervention are critical for kids.
 - Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can help to shift mindset and grow understanding of how we can better support the collective and individual needs of students.

OUR VISION: *Every individual thrives in a learning-friendly environment where they feel safe, supported, and challenged.*