

Parent Groups in New Jersey

A Guide to Developing & Conducting an Effective Group

QUICK FACTS

Advocacy and Leadership: Roles Parents Play

"You don't need to see the whole staircase, just take the first step" Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
Parent leadership is fundamental. It happens naturally every day in your family, your early childhood program or school, and in your community. Parent leaders can advocate for change that matters to their families, join with others to form a leadership group or coalition, and influence local, state, and national policy decisions. Every parent or family member can be a leader and an advocate they want to be, no matter how little time or experience they think they have. Here are some ideas for consideration



Get Started

- Read an article or watch a video on a topic of interest. Seek out short bursts of learning opportunities every day.
 - **Subscribe to The Engagement Exchange (NJFEHUB Newsletter) and The Bridge (SPAN Newsletter)** for information, resources, training, and networking opportunities to advance your advocacy and leadership development.
- Reflect on what is important to you and your family and what changes you want to make. Involve your family and friends in creating an action plan.
- Share information and resources on issues that are important to you with your network.
- Contact your child's teacher or principal and find out how you can contribute to the school community.
- Identify a local group or online community and connect with others who share your passion for advocacy.

Get Involved

- Summarize your thoughts and suggestions on an issue to tell your story. **See Sharing Your Family Story**
- Talk to other parents and community members about their concerns and find out what questions and ideas they have for improvement. Write down their stories and proposed solutions.
- Create a contact list of people who are interested in the cause you support. Connect regularly to strengthen your leadership commitment and deepen your sense of purpose.
- Ask your early childhood program or school leaders, community council or local Board of Education for the opportunity to meet with parents, discuss your thoughts and concerns, and brainstorm ideas to develop mutual solutions.
- Find out who your legislators are and learn about their priorities for children and families. Share your story with them and what you think needs to be done.

Get Active

- Join a local parent group, including early childhood advisory committee, **Special Education Parent Advisory Group (SEPAG)**, PTA/PTO, **NJFEHUB Advisory Committee**, **Regional Family Support Planning Council (RFSPC)**, to network with other parents and professionals, stay current on important issues, provide input, and continue to develop your leadership skills, knowledge, and confidence.

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- Attend a public forum (e.g., local council meeting, Board of Education meeting, SEPAG meeting, community town hall, etc.) and provide input to the community and school leaders on issues concerning children and families. Advocate for action to be taken and for families to be actively involved in the decision-making process.
- Volunteer in your child's early childhood program or school and share information about your child and family with your child's teacher. Maintain regular contact throughout the year.

Keep Going

- Organize a school or community event to meet new parents and other interested organizations of the school community, including libraries, Family Success Centers, health centers, faith-based organizations, and businesses.
- Build positive, trusting relationships, grow awareness about important issues diverse families face, expand your community circle of influence, and empower others to join your group.
- Get together with other parents and interested members of the school community to create a vision for your community's future, identify priorities, goals, necessary resources, potential partners, and tasks to create an action plan to make your vision a reality.
- Become more active in your local SEPAG or parent advocacy group: volunteer to facilitate a discussion, present a workshop, mentor other parents, or try on other leadership roles that match your strengths and help to develop new skills.
- Participate in the **SPAN Parent Advocacy Network** trainings and conferences, including SPAN Resource Parent training, Special Education Volunteer Advocate (SEVA) training, and mini- conferences.
- Advocate for equity and inclusion of diverse family voices at all levels of decision-making and across all systems that serve children and families.

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together"

African Proverb



For a complete guide to starting and supporting a SEPAG in your school, district, or community, visit the **START at the New Jersey Family Engagement Hub** (<https://njfehub.org/start/>)

Access the SPAN SEPAG Guide

