



Protecting Rights. Creating Opportunities. Changing Lives

The Media Kit is intended to provide members of the print, electronic, television or social media press with information in a quick, easy-to-use format.

What is COPAA?

The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA) is the only national, independent, nonprofit, §501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization working to protect the legal and civil educational rights of the 6.4 million American children and young adults who have disabilities. COPAA members are everywhere the voices of students with disabilities and their families need to be heard.

What is COPAA's mission?

COPAA's mission is to protect and enforce the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families. Our primary goal is to secure high quality educational services for children and to promote excellence advocacy. Additionally, through our work with national policy leaders, COPAA promotes policies that protect and support the civil rights and strengthen accountability in order to assure high quality educational services for children and young adults with disabilities. COPAA is premised on the belief that every child has the right to high-quality education and an equal opportunity to achieve his or her full academic potential.

COPAA fulfills its mission through:

- Enabling members to network and share information and legal resources;
- Providing training for families and special education advocates on all aspects of special education advocacy and informal conflict resolution;
- Provide training for attorneys on legal practice: including due process, litigation, and informal conflict resolution;

- Enable families to locate advocates, attorneys, and related professionals through COPAA's website directory;
- Filing amicus curiae briefs in cases of national significance; and,
- Impacting policy decisions in Congress, the White House, U.S. Department of Education and Department of Justice on the national level; and, state and local advocacy on decisions that impact the funding, access, instruction, accommodations and support students and young adults with disabilities receive in Pre-K to higher education.

Who belongs to COPAA?

We are an unparalleled peer-to-peer network of special education family members, attorneys, advocates, and related professionals. COPAA membership grows every day. Currently, over 2,000 COPAA community members support tens of thousands students with disabilities and their families across the country. As an organization committed to civil rights, COPAA recognizes the relationship between discrimination and bias against people with disabilities and other forms or systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination based on race, national origin, ethnic and/or religious identity, sex/gender/gender identity/sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.

COPAA is committed to the full inclusion of persons of diverse backgrounds and identities in COPAA's leadership and membership and defines inclusivity as the valuing and promotion of the perspectives of those of different backgrounds and identities. COPAA defines cultural competency as a set of values, behaviors, attitudes, and practices within a system, organization, program, or among individuals, which enables them to work effectively, cross culturally. This includes, but is not limited to race, ethnicity, sex, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, ability, religion, and language. COPAA is committed to the development of policies and activities to promote the participation of diverse stakeholders and constituents, and to encourage all of its members to demonstrate cultural competency and genuine sensitivity in representing and advocating for students and their families. In addition, COPAA is committed to considering fully, in all activities and programs, the intersectionality of race, national origin, ethnic, cultural and/or religious identity, sexual/gender identity/sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, in our efforts to protect and enforce the legal and civil rights of students with disabilities and their families.

In addition, COPAA seeks to address issues affecting access to advocacy for students of color and linguistically diverse children and their families in recognition that these students are disproportionately represented in special

education. Our organization also seeks to address the need for advocates, attorneys, and empowered self-advocates from diverse communities as leaders and members of COPAA to fully address the inherent inequities experienced by students of color and linguistically diverse students.

Special Education Advocates and Attorneys work on behalf of parents of students with disabilities who are eligible for special education services and supports under federal and state law, i.e., the IDEA, Section 504, and other disability-related laws impacting a student's education.

Attorneys may be involved in the planning or review stages of developing an individualized education program (IEP) or 504 Plan, however generally become involved to represent the family in settling a dispute through mediation or a due process hearing. Some attorneys have a particular background or expertise in a specific disability, like autism or dyslexia, and others who provide more general representation. There are attorneys that work for public agencies or interest law centers, legal aid, or may be in private practice.

Special education advocates are not licensed to practice law. They are recognized under the IDEA as individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child. (20 U.S.C. § 1414 (d) (1) (b) (iv)) Advocates work in partnership with students and families to navigate the educational system so that appropriate services and supports are provided. Advocates empower families to make truly informed choices over time by assisting them to improve their understanding of educational rights, clarify expectations about public education, understand available options for educational services and supports, and improve the effectiveness of their child's educational "team." Some advocates have a particular background or expertise in a specific disability, like autism or dyslexia, and others who provide more general advocacy support. There are advocates that work for public agencies and advocates in private practice. In some states, not all, advocates are able to represent parents in due process hearings.

Related Service Professionals may be psychologists, speech pathologists, behavior analysts, education consultants, or any skilled professional who may be part of an individual student's team or who work to advocate for students and parents as part of their profession.

Parent - includes parents, guardians, or family members who participate as part of a child's individualized education program (IEP) or 504 team. Some families choose to represent themselves pro se in special education due process hearings.

What are COPAA's Policy Priorities?

COPAA is a leading, influential voice on Capitol Hill and with the media; directly influencing education, funding and civil rights policies for children with disabilities and their families. This is the time to use that position to outline and act upon a bold strategic 700,000 students with 504 plans are protected -- and that COPAA's membership feels empowered to help advocate on their behalf.

Our overarching policy priorities are:

- Ensuring excellence and equity in education for all children
- Safeguarding the protections of IDEA, Section 504 and ADA
- Ending discrimination in voucher and charter school programs
- Enforcing State compliance with the IDEA and ESSA
- Leading initiatives that stop the overuse of exclusionary disciplinary practices, especially seclusion and restraint
- Fully funding the IDEA
- Protecting IDEA and Title I funding from voucher programs
- Creating seamless transition for children with disabilities from infancy to post-secondary life

What are the primary disability rights laws COPAA protects and advances?

ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment, State and local government services, public accommodations (including education-related accommodations), commercial facilities, and transportation.

ESSA

The Every Student Succeeds Act, historically known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act provides funding to U.S. K-12 schools for educationally disadvantaged students living in poverty to ensure a quality public education for all students. ESSA also authorizes funds for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and for promotion of parental involvement.

HEA

The Higher Education Act of 2008 authorizes funding for colleges and universities, targeted grant programs, scholarships, and low-interest loans/financial aid for students.

IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to eligible infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities.

Section 504

Section 504 is a civil rights law under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Section 504 ensures that the child with a disability has equal access to an education and may be provided accommodations and modifications

WIOA

The Workforce Investment Opportunity Act is designed to help all job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with skilled labor.

COPAA members also are versed in state and local statutes and regulations that protect the rights of students with disabilities.

What is COPAA's history?

COPAA was conceived in 1998 by a handful of committed special education parent attorneys, advocates and parents wishing to create a national group focused on sharing information on the educational rights of students with disabilities and growing the field of special education advocates and attorneys.

How COPAA Leads and Governs Board of Directors:

COPAA is a largely grassroots organization, led by the 23 person all-volunteer Board of Directors. The Board designates committees to accomplish the work of the organization, all of which benefit from the enormous dedication of volunteer members. Current committees include: Amicus, Attorney, Awards, Conference, Development, Social and Racial Equity, Government Relations, Membership, Parent, Media Relations, Scholarship, and Training.

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