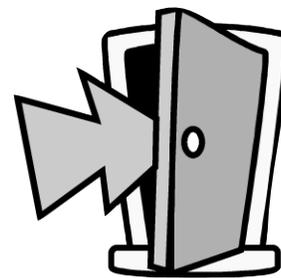


# Opening Doors to Solutions between Parents and Schools: When "No" means "Maybe"



by Cherie Takemoto, Executive Director, PEATC

**A**t the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) we get hundreds of calls from parents who don't know what to do when a school says "no." Parents can usually communicate to us in great detail exactly what they believe their children need and why their children need it. They are frustrated and angry when the school does not agree. But what can parents do to get their children the services, education and support they need to succeed in school?

There are formal steps that parents can take when they disagree with the schools. For students in special education, the school should give to the parents a "Notice of Procedural Safeguards." Some call this document "Due Process Rights." In some school systems, this might be an 13-page document in fine print outlining parental rights within special education and related laws. There are specific formal procedures included. For parents considering this route, read the fine print to find out how to go about submitting a complaint, requesting mediation, filing a request for due process hearing, or pursuing administrative review.

However, prior to initiating a formal resolutions to your disagreement, there are steps you might take to avoid the cost, time and energy of the appeal process. In an attempt to reach an agreement, parents should always work up the "chain of command" from teacher or specialist, to principal, to special education administrator,

to superintendent. Change comes more quickly for children when differences can be resolved at the school building level or at the administrative level with the school system.

Sometimes it takes a dozen "no's" to find someone who says "yes." But that "yes" will make a big difference for your child. By not giving up and continuing to ask for what you need, you will increase the likelihood that the schools will understand your perspective and the need to provide a service or support for your child. If you phrase your request in a way that is likely to elicit cooperation, you may be pleasantly surprised. ■

*PEATC is Virginia's parent training and information center committed to building better futures for children with disabilities by working collaboratively with families, schools and professionals who serve them to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life. The organization offers services and support for families and professionals; experienced-based program development and training curriculum; and, easy-to-understand, research-based disability education, information, training and support. For further information call: (703) 923-0010 or log on to [www.peatc.org](http://www.peatc.org)*

## The following are some non-threatening, but effective ways to communicate for success.

"I have a problem I'm hoping you can help me with."

"I need to discuss something that is going to be difficult for you to hear. I hope we can find a solution that we both can live with."

"I understand that you can't say "yes" to this request, but can you tell me who does have that authority?"

"I don't think I'm explaining this clearly enough. What I really want you to understand is, \_\_\_\_\_."

"This just isn't going to work for my child. What other options could we consider?"

"Is there another way to approach this that we could both live with?"

"I'm sorry I got so angry yesterday. I know you aren't the bad guy."

"I know this is hard for you to understand. To me, the most important factor is \_\_\_\_\_."

"I made a mistake in not taking your first suggestion. I hope we can do better this time."

"Thank you for \_\_\_\_\_."

"You made a big difference for my child when you \_\_\_\_\_."

"I appreciate your help in doing \_\_\_\_\_. You didn't have to do that, and it really helped."