

**Ohio Parent Mentor Program
Fact Sheet
April 27, 2015**

What is the Parent Mentor Program?

The Parent Mentor Program is a state-funded initiative to provide a network of support across the state of Ohio to assist parents of students with disabilities (SWD) and the professionals that serve them with the resources necessary to ensure that these students are receiving an appropriate public education.

The premise of the Parent Mentor Program is the expectation that SWD will receive better access to quality educational services if parents and educators communicate more effectively with parent mentor assistance. This approach also has the benefit of helping to operationalize the partnership planning required by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)*.

The Parent Mentor Program promotes necessary and effective communication by providing information and support to families about special education issues and by providing a mechanism to convey the family perspective back to the school system. Funding is utilized to pay for parent mentors and related technical assistance, training and support.

What is a Parent Mentor?

A parent mentor is the parent of a child with a disability employed by local education agencies (LEAs), such as school districts and Educational Service Centers (ESCs), who is employed to help schools and families by providing training, support and information services. These services help families navigate the maze of local, state and federal special education rules and regulations to help ensure that SWD are receiving appropriate services and quality educational opportunities that result in the best outcomes possible consistent with the goals outlined in the students' Individualized Education Program (IEPs).

What services do Parent Mentors provide?

Parent Mentors provide the following services:

- Guide families through the special education process and help them understand their rights and responsibilities.
- Listen and provide support to families and educators on an individual basis.
- Provide information and resources to families and school personnel on education laws, district programs and services and community resources.

- Attend IEP meetings and other education-related meetings at parent or staff request.
- Organize and conduct information sessions or workshops based on the needs of families and professionals; and
- Build collaborative partnerships between families, schools and committees to benefit students with disabilities.

Why was the Parent Mentor Program started?

In 1991, the Parent Mentor Projects was established through the work of approximately 160 parents from across the state to decide how best to implement Goal #7 of the Ohio Department of Education's Special Education Action Plan. Goal #7 was the "Parent Involvement in Education" part of ODE's plan to restructure education for children with disabilities. This initiative was also started in response to a shared view on the part of parents and special education professionals that parent mentors were needed to help families navigate the complex world of special education.

What training do Parent Mentors receive?

The Ohio Department of Education's (ODE) Office for Exceptional Children (OEC) and the Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities (OCECD) provide support and technical assistance for the Parent Mentor Program, including: individual site visits; attending and giving input at Parent Mentor Council meetings; attending the Skills & Knowledge program committee meetings to plan the state conferences; grant, budget and report consultation; and having assigned OCECD staff attend PMO regional meetings at least three times a year across the state. This technical assistance and support is funded through the Meaningful Parent Engagement contract with ODE's OEC.

How is the Parent Mentor Program funded?

The Parent Mentor Program receives \$1,333,468 each year in state funding through the Special Education Enhancements line item (200-540) in the Ohio Department of Education's operating budget.

How many parent mentor projects does Ohio have?

Ohio currently has 71 parent mentor projects in place across the state of Ohio. These projects employ 28 full time and 65 part-time parent mentors. Parent mentors work from six to 45 hours per week and offer services at no cost.

Who employs Parent Mentors?

Parent mentors are employed by public educational entities. Of the 71 projects statewide, 46 are housed in school districts, 23 in Educational Service Centers (ESCs), and two are housed at state schools (Ohio School for the Deaf and the Ohio School for the Blind).

What is the impact of the Parent Mentor project?

In the 2012-2013 school year, the most recent for which data is available, parent mentors served 16, 660 separate families. The following data points reflect the work completed on behalf of these families:

- 62, 327 parent/student contacts
- 71,825 school contacts
- 67,306 agency contacts
- 1,753 ETRs attended by parent mentors
- 3,265 IEP meetings attended by parent mentors
- 9,071 “other” meetings attended by parent mentors
- 30,855 attendees at parent mentor sponsored trainings

Efforts to gauge the benefits of the parent mentor program have consistently resulted in positive feedback regarding the practical benefits of the program to families and students.