

# Advice for Parents in the Eligibility Process



*Dr. Judy Schrag is the co-principal for the Education and Human Services Group and past director, Office of Special Education, of the U.S. Department of Education.*

*During a recent visit to Georgia, Dr. Schrag provided some perspective on the state of special education and the SPDG program.*

*Dr. Schrag has done much work in the area of improving family engagement for SWD in schools as director of the US DOE Department of Special Education program. Under her leadership the funding for national parent training and information centers (PTI) began.*

## **She offered some advice to parents who are going through the eligibility process:**

I advise parents to be informed and involved in the eligibility process for their child. Georgia has a very good system of parent support that provides brochures, handouts, training, telephone support, parent to parent support, and other kinds of assistance to parents, so that parents can be informed about what will happen during the eligibility process, and their involvement therein. Parents know their child best; parents know their child's needs, interests, and how he or she learns best. Parents can provide wonderful information and input to the whole eligibility and subsequent IEP planning process.

In addition, to understanding the process of evaluation/eligibility process and providing necessary information and input regarding their child, I would advise parents to ask questions such as:

1. Why do you want to evaluate my child?
2. Will evaluation of my child include areas that we, as parents, are concerned about?
3. What kinds of tests or assessments will be used to evaluate my child?
4. Will someone observe my child in the classroom and include information from my child's teacher as well as from us, as parents, in the assessment process?
5. If my child is found to be eligible for special education, to what extent will he/she have access to the general curriculum—and what does that mean in his/her school?
6. How will assistive technology help my child to have access to the general education curriculum?
7. If my child is found to be eligible for special education, how will my child be held to high academic expectations and will there be flexibility in these expectations that relate to my child's special needs? For example for parents of children with more significant special needs that may not reach grade-level proficiency, how will their academic growth be recognized and validated. How will my child's special and general education teachers work together?
8. Will my child receive supports and services in both general and special education?
9. How will my child be included in the Georgia accountability/statewide assessment?
10. Will accommodations be there for my child, if needed?
11. What will be the path taken so that my child can meet state requirements for a standard diploma—will he or she have access to curriculum that will teach the common core or content—and what accommodations and supports will there be?