

Including an Exceptional Children's Component in your PTA.

Families of children with exceptional learning needs want information and support. Many times the school is their first and only opportunity to their questions answered and needs addressed. This can happen in many ways. PTA is a great organization to reach families, encourage them to become involved, and make a positive difference in their own children's lives as well as others.

Starting Up:

- Identify two or more knowledgeable parents and/or staff who are involved with students who have exceptional learning needs (academically gifted & special needs) in your school who would be willing to organize an Exceptional Children's Committee within your PTA. Advertise at PTA meetings, in school newsletters, website and of course by word of mouth that your PTA is seeking such individuals.
- Establish an Exceptional Children's committee within your PTA. This usually requires a membership vote or vote/approval from the executive board. Check your PTA bylaws for establishing a committee.
- Once you have people in place that are willing to act as committee chairs or members on the committee you are ready to roll with a program. The committee determines and prioritizes needs for EC related advocacy and programs in the school. They can formulate a purpose statement, goals, objectives and a budget just like other committees within your PTA. In Guilford County many PTAs include the EC Committee Chair as a member of their PTA Executive Board.
- In Wake County parents of children with special needs established a Special Education PTA (SEPTA) .
- Wake County also has an active PAGE group (Parents for the Advancement of Gifted Education). For more information about these groups contact NCPTA at (800) 255-0417 or email at office@ncpta.org.

Ideas:

- Establish a list of agencies/organizations/service providers in your area that provide services and resources to students with exceptional learning needs. This list can be included in a school PTA newsletter, website, booklet, or handout given to parents at your school. Include a brief description of the agency and contact information.

- Knowledgeable PTA EC Committee members can act as a resource/referral for other parents to contact. Be mindful of confidentiality issues and make sure that these volunteers are OK with having their name published as a committee member or given to other parents. Please call or email NCPTA for more detailed information on how to handle confidentiality issues.
- Sponsor regular coffees, workshops, or informal meetings for EC families to get together network, share ideas, and resources. You will want someone to organize and facilitate the meetings.
- Invite guest speakers or knowledgeable school staff to discuss topics common to all families of students with exceptional learning needs students such as writing/understanding individualize education plans (IEPs), special education laws, curriculum /programs for academically and intellectually gifted or how to advocate effectively on your child's behalf.
- Invite an agency or knowledgeable professional to address specific topics such as understanding Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Dyslexia, Gifted Learners etc.
Invite teachers and all parents/guardians to attend. You will be surprised at how many parents who do not have identified EC students will attend and benefit from this information.
- Include articles in your school PTA newsletter on topics that related to students with exceptional learning needs or advertise relevant local workshops or conferences.
- Celebrate Disability History and Awareness month at your school by reading stories written by children or people with disabilities, create a bulletin board featuring famous people living with disabilities or have a person with a disability come to speak at your schools. There are countless other ideas. You do not have to wait until October to do this.
- Promote education and awareness for the academically gifted via bullitin boards, activities, events etc.
- Send legislative news to EC families informing them of pending legislation that effect students with exceptional learning needs.
- A well informed parent of a child with exceptional learning needs and or staff member is a great resource to your PTA, they can help advise the PTA on how to make projects, events, and activities more accessible, enjoyable and inclusive for all students.