

TSA'S BACK TO SCHOOL TOP 10

Educators, advocates, parents and students of all ages were consulted to determine the ten things that you should know or do before the first day of school.

1 LEARN THE LAY OF THE LAND

Getting around an unfamiliar environment is a huge source of stress on the first day of school. Parent and educator Ellen Meyers, TSA Board Member and Chair of the Education Committee, urges parents to arrange for a tour of the school prior to the first day. "Right before is best. Walk around the building and figure out how to get from the front door to homeroom and from homeroom to classes." This is particularly important when a child is moving to a new school. "Transitions are hard for kids, especially kids with TS," she added.

Since Junior High School, graduate student Tanya Mueller relied on a dry run "walk through" of her class schedule before the first day of school. Now that her course work is completed and she's teaching, "I have to check out my classroom before classes start, to ensure I know what A/V equipment it has."

The same principle applies from kindergarten to post doctoral students—learn the lay of the land and reduce the first day of school fear of being late or getting lost—or missing a needed slide projector.

2 AN OUNCE OF PREPARATION

Ms. Meyers says it's imperative that parents understand their child's IEP. "It's a contract between you and the school. It shouldn't be a foreign document. You won't be able to enforce it if you don't understand it. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Make sure you really understand it."

Marcela Diaz is a parent who strongly urges other parents to know what their children need and what the law provides in the area of special assistance. She reminds parents that since the "IEP process takes a long time, you might start in the summer" before the first day of school and hold the initial meeting. "When the need

for special consideration is accepted, there is a second meeting arranged with all the teachers who deal with the child with TS. The time between the first and second meetings could be months."

Be prepared for the first, second and all IEP related meetings. Bring copies of all the needed documents including supporting clinical and medical documentation (doctor's letter with diagnosis, etc.). For more information on preparing for the IEP, check out *The IEP for Students with TS — A Parent's Guide*, a brochure available from the TSA website.

3 MEET AND GREET

TSA President Judit Ungar says, "I always suggest to families that they make the teacher, or teachers, their best friend. Meet with them before school, give them all the brochures, books, videos, educator curriculum etc. they might need. Make sure to bring them cookies, brownies, etc. Volunteer at the school and offer them in-services and whatever help they need. Be a helpful support person. Do this each and every year. Be on the PTA if the school has one."

Ms. Diaz reminds parents who might feel shy that they have a right to meet their child's teacher before school starts. "You want to make sure your child will have a laid back, organized, and relaxed teacher vs. a loud, disorganized, and pushy teacher. I think that there is no better remedy to the fear of a new environment than knowing that your family is with you along the way!"

It also helps to have the teacher on your side. If the teacher truly understands the impact of TS on an individual student, there are fewer opportunities for disciplinary incidents and the confusion that arises from misinformation about TS.

4 GET CONNECTED

The IDEA and other laws regarding the education of children with and without disabilities keep changing. The impact on children with TS can be dramatic and direct. It's important for parents, and educators who teach children with TS, to learn all they can about these regulations. Get connected to TSA and keep on top of the changes. The TSA government relations page on the TSA website offers up-to-date information, but there is much more that concerned parents can do to help shape these laws.

Jeremy Scott of TSA's Government Relations Office in Washington, D.C. urges parents to sign up to receive information and then act on it by contacting legislators. Send TSA your e-mail address and you'll be added to the list.

As Mr. Scott puts it, "Our association encourages parents to become involved in the government relations program. TSA's government relations office in Washington, D.C. monitors federal legislation every day and when a bill or issue affects kids with TS an electronic alert is issued to TSA members. Many of the laws that are passed by Congress and signed into law by the President directly impact the way your child is being educated in school. Some of these 'new' laws may do more harm than good. It is important that parents take an active role early—so that they can be well informed before these laws are enacted."

For more information about the government relations program or to receive the e-mail alerts, contact Jeremy Scott, Government Relations Specialist at 202-408-6443 or e-mail him at tsdc@tsa-usa.org. Be sure to provide your e-mail address so you'll be kept up to date on pending legislation.

continued on page 8