

D.C. Parent Center @ AJE

I. Background.

A. **Organizational History.** In 1996, Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc. (A.J.E.) was created as a community-based initiative designed to empower, motivate, and educate low-income parents about the laws that govern special education, its related services, and the consequences of institutional negligence and/or inappropriate classification of students with special needs. It is AJE’s mission to eliminate those barriers that impede the ability of children to learn and successfully matriculate through the District of Columbia public school system. A.J.E. fulfills this mission by providing quality advocacy training and direct services to parents of children with special needs, and by advocating for appropriate diagnosis, treatment, classification, and educational placement. A.J.E. has a specific focus on children living in low-income underserved communities, who are being denied educational and/or related services. A.J.E. remains dedicated to providing services that are culturally competent and respectful of community principles.

As the federally designated Parent Training and Information Center and Community Parent Resource Center for the District of Columbia, AJE has the advantage of being a part of a national network of 100 Parent Centers.

B. **Mission.** The mission of AJE is to educate parents, youth, and the community about the laws governing public education, specifically for children with all disabilities and special needs. We seek to empower youth to self advocate and parents to be effective advocates on behalf of their children to ensure that they receive an appropriate education. It is also our mission to make the public aware of the consequences of institutional negligence of children with or without disabilities and to promote school accountability.

C. **Current Parent Center Programs.** A.J.E. currently operates two Parent Centers: one located in Historic Anacostia and the other in Columbia Heights. As the federally designated parent center, A.J.E. works with three populations of parents and their children: Students Eligible for Early Intervention Services (Birth-3), School Aged Students (4-12), and Transition Aged Students (13-21). Services are rendered through direct services, training, community education, and empowerment projects. AJE’s current programs include:

i. Parent to Parent Program: Our Parent-to-Parent Program provides parents with leadership training and a supportive network of peers. Parent mentors are parents of children with special needs and will serve as a key component to AJE’s supportive assistance to parents. This program offers parents an opportunity to develop leadership skills.

ii. Resource and Information Libraries. The Resource and Information Library offer parents information on the laws of special education, specific disabilities, the latest research on treatment and interventions, and adaptive technology.

iii. Transition Advocacy Project. The Transition Advocacy Project provides youth ages 13-21 and their parents with support, advocacy, information, and training in order to improve their involvement in their educational planning.

iv. Community Education: Community education is provided through our workshops and seminars which are free to the families we serve. We also engage our community partners in our community through our in-service training.

In addition to the Parent Center Programs, families utilizing AJE's services also have access to additional supports, **which are not funded by this project**, and include AJE's Legal Services Division and the Family Support Services described below:

a. Legal Services/Individual Advocacy. In critical and complicated areas of need, from time to time, A.J.E. will make referrals to our legal services division. Our staff attorneys provide free individual representation when necessary to ensure that appropriate services are being made available to a family in need. Cases are generally referred to the legal services division if the student has a pending disciplinary action; the student does not have educational placement or has been out of school for a substantial period of time; or the student is returning from a residential/correctional placement. This representation includes but is not limited to: support in the development of the Individual Education Plans (IEP); representation in school discipline proceedings; intervention in placement decisions; and direct representation at resolution meetings, mediation, or due process hearings.

b. Family Support: Family Support services provide case management services and crisis intervention services for parents who need intensive family support services. The Center provides home visitation, community linkages, emergency assistance (rent & utilities); and through our partnership with the Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia, comprehensive legal services in the area of housing, public benefits, and family law issues;

II. Project Proposal

This proposal is being submitted as an expansion of AJE's existing model for a Parent Center. AJE proposes a graduated approach over the period of three years to provide training, information, and support on behalf of students and their families.

A. Program Scope. "The D.C. Parent Center @ AJE"

AJE will expand our existing model of Parent Centers by:

- Establishing a separate program budget;

- Hiring a Project Director for the “*D.C. Parent Center @ AJE*”;
- Hiring separate program staff to support this expansion;
- Developing an integrated system of internal tracking to monitor trends and parent center calls; and
- Evaluating the Project on a Quarterly Basis

1. Parent Support and Training.

a. Early Intervention & Student Support.

We propose to intervene on behalf families when they first recognize that their child is having difficulty or in need of additional supports. Families will be able to utilize our staff in supporting their efforts to determine what is necessary to support their child in school before they need the formal intervention through special education. We will encourage the utilization of the Student Support Teams and the emerging Response to Intervention (RTI) as a pre-referral intervention and educate parents about the importance of utilizing the resources in the community.

2. Educational advocacy & direct services.

In the event that parents believe that their child’s needs are not being met by the public schools, AJE will provide those families with additional support in the form of educational advocacy. AJE will utilize our existing intake and case management system to assess the level of help necessary to support the family appropriately. Services provided to families accessing this resource include but are not limited to: 1) special education training; 2) support and coaching in the development in the Individual Education Plans (IEP); 3) attending MDT/IEP meetings to ensure that procedural safeguards are protected; 4) disciplinary conferences 5) and representation at mandatory resolution conferences.

Level of Service. During the intake process, we make an initial determination regarding the level of service that will be needed to support a family. Although families may initially enter our system requiring a specific level of service, it does not preclude the educational advocate from later making a determination that the nature of the case will require more intensive supports. There are three levels of service provided to a family being supported by educational advocacy and direct service -- Advice & Counseling; Brief Service; and Extended Service:

a. Advice and Counseling:

In some cases, families who seek our assistance do not require the support of an educational advocate to resolve a dispute with the school, but information and direction to solve the problems themselves. For instance, families who need to start the special education evaluation process may only need advice on how to get started, their rights during the process and

the legal timelines the school system must follow. In cases such as those, our educational advocates will advise parents through in-person and/or telephone consultations about their legal rights and steps to take based on the facts of their issues. Generally, families falling within this level of service make requests for basic information. Though the request may be simple, in every case where advice and counseling is provided, staff will follow-up with written correspondence to the parent documenting the advice and recommendations provided.

b. Brief Service: There are some cases where families need a little more assistance than advice and counseling. Examples of when brief service may be required are as follows: (1) parents who need to request records or other information from a school who need assistance in drafting a request letter; (2) parents who wish to file a complaint with the state complaint office who need assistance in drafting a complaint; (3) parents who may not understand information given to them by the school and need assistance with understanding. In those cases, staff will make contact with school officials, draft letters and complaints on behalf of the parent, and help explain information provided by the schools. Staff follow-up with written correspondence to the parent documenting the advice given and any action we have taken on their behalf.

c. Extended Service: Extended services cases are cases that will require intensive support. These are generally cases that involve complicated matters, such as disputed placements, students failing to receive mandated services, and inadequate accommodations. In these matters parents and AJE sign a “Service Agreement”. This agreement outlines the parameters of our representation, sets out the parent’s goals, and outlines the roles and responsibilities of both parties in supporting the student’s goals. Our educational advocates will support the family by attending multidisciplinary team meetings (MDT), IEP meetings, and in developing their skills to self advocate. Educational advocates will also work with the family in the developing, revising, and the implementation of their child’s IEP. In general cases are closed once the parent’s goals have been met. Prior to closing cases are staffed and reviewed by supervisors to insure that all the parents’ goals have been met. Parents are provided with a detailed letter reiterating their goals, the degree to which they have been met, and our role in helping them to achieve those goals.

Ancillary Service and Supports. Parents accessing the D.C. Parent Center @ AJE will also have available to them the following ancillary services:

a. Community Training: AJE will conduct workshops and advocacy training for families and community-based organizations serving children, youth, and families. Our training and advocacy sessions are specifically designed to: clarify legal obligations and rights; to empower parents and support social service providers to meaningfully participate in educational meetings

and school conferences; and to orient the parents on the effective utilization of the District’s social service delivery system and how it can support children with special needs.

b. Advocacy to Prevent Dropouts. This project will have a specific focus on educating parents and the community serving parents of at-risk youth about available interventions and creative utilization of the transition process to support their special needs students. We will conduct a public information campaign designed to educate parents and the community about the growing trend of involuntary suspension and disenrollment practices at the local schools.

c. Comprehensive Approach to System Reform. We are proposing to not only increase our capacity for the delivery of services but to expand the level of policy advocacy in an effort to promote a systemic response to the needs of children at risk of school failure. Our policy staff will provide legislative analysis and develop key partnerships/alliances to support increased parent education and advocacy. AJE will work closely with the District of Columbia on compliance monitoring and make recommendations for improving the system accountability for the District of Columbia public and charter school system.

d. Policy Advocacy. There is no single source for information regarding school reform that accurately reflects the needs of the students most at risk of not being successful. The District of Columbia has historically looked to agencies that specifically work on issues that include education, but there is no single source of agencies in the District that is capable of providing data and interactions with the parents who are most effected by the policy and changes.

AJE has become the primary source of information regarding impact, but we don’t have the capacity to perform this service as it needs to be done. It is critical that there be a resource available to the community and service providers that can offer feedback on school reform measures that can directly address the needs of the most vulnerable.

When addressing systemic issues that impact education of children, the ability to provide information to the community and respond is essential to any systemic school reform. Therefore, we want to be able to drive that change through this effort. We need to:

- highlight best practices;
- expand policy advocacy;
- produce and disseminate policy papers and briefs;
- expand community organizing and outreach;
- expand website management and content

B. Organizational Capacity.

This opportunity will offer us the ability to serve more families and have greater impact. We are proposing to hire more staff to not only support the direct services and advocacy, but to

increase our administrative capacity to support and sustain the programming of the D.C. Parent Center @ AJE. Acquiring highly qualified staffing to support these efforts will be critical to the sustainability of this work and the success of the proposed project.

1. Direct Services. We will hire the following direct service staff to support this effort:

- a. **Project Coordinator (1 FTE):** This person will be responsible for insuring that the deliverables under this contract are being met.
- b. **Education Advocates/Support Specialists¹ (3 FTE):** Educational advocates and specialists provide individual advocacy and support to families. They are the front line staff responsible for supporting the parents at intake, in meetings, and serve as an intermediary. Our goal will be to hire at least one or two bilingual Advocates.
- c. **Community Outreach/Training (2 FTE):** Our community outreach and training staff will be responsible for developing relationships with schools, community based providers, and parents. These staff persons will also be responsible for the community training and information dissemination.
- d. **Clerical Support (2 FTE):** AJE currently has one administrative support staff person. This project will require that we have additional staffing to receive parents and to support increased administrative demands.

2. Operations/Administration: This project will require us to extend our administrative capacity to support the increased level of accountability and oversight. Therefore will have to reallocate current staff resources and hire new staff to support this endeavor. We have provided in the budget a project cost allocation for salaries under this project. Most of the positions in this area are not billed at 100% to this project although some positions were created to support it.

In addition to our highly qualified direct service staff, we are proposing to hire through this effort:

- a. **Director of Operations:** This position will manage all administrative functions including fiscal operations, project compliance, space management, and logistics.
- b. **Data Manager:** This position will be responsible for compiling and reporting all statistical information gathered.
- c. **Communications Assistant:** This person will be responsible for external communications, information dissemination, arrange and coordinate programs to keep up contact between organization representatives and the public; represent the organization at community projects;

¹ The difference in the title is determined by education level, which determines pay scale. Advocates must have a bachelor's degree, Support Specialists do not.

make film, slide, or other visual presentations at meetings and school assemblies; and plan training. In addition, this person will be responsible for preparing annual reports and proposals for various projects.

III. Project Deliverables, Goals, Objectives, and Assessment:

A. Establishing Project Baseline to Determine Impact. This project will build from our existing model of parent support. The parties will be required to establish baseline numbers to measure impact of this project. To inform the process AJE has provided the numbers below:

**Fiscal Year 2007
October 1, 2006 - September 30, 2007**

Type of Service	Parents	Professionals	Other
Training	251	198	
Contacts	3901	1284	
Educ. Advocacy	603		
Newsletter			1210
Website Visits			5145
IEP Meetings	100		
Other Meetings	42		
Parent Center Visits			

Annually we expect to meet or exceed the following outcomes²:

Goal 1: Maintain a comprehensive resource library available for use by parents, advocates, and the local community.

Objective 1: Expand community awareness of the resource library through marketing, advertising, and community outreach.

Objective 2: Provide comprehensive resources to parents and advocates by subscribing to relevant periodicals, purchasing current publications and obtaining brochures and materials from partner organizations.

Objective 3: Extending the availability of the resource center beyond normal business hours to times that convenient to working parents.

Outcomes:

- 500 parents will use the Parent Resource Center;
- 250 Professionals/Paraprofessionals/Advocates will utilize the Parent Resource Center.

² Proposed outcomes are in addition to our existing contract/grant requirements.

Assessment of Performance: Quarterly Data Reporting

Goal 2: Offer a full complement of training seminars in the areas of special education, drop-out prevention, and parent leadership development.

Objective 1: Conduct training that concentrates on the issues most relevant to parents and advocates as express during our intake process.

Objective 2: Offer training that specifically targets the needs of Latino and Vietnamese communities.

Outcomes:

- 500 Parents/Caregivers will attend training hosted by the DC Parent Center @ AJE;
- 10 trainings will be conducted in collaboration with service providers and government agencies;
- Offer 12 trainings per year that will focus on the needs of Latino, Vietnamese, and other families

Assessment of Performance: Annual Survey Data, Training Evaluations, and sign-in sheets

Goal 3: To provide quality educational advocacy for families attempting to access special education services in situations where additional supports are required.

Objective 1: Provide educational advocacy to support the educational goals of parents.

Outcomes:

- 600 families and others will be assisted through our telephone intake process
- 200 families will be provided with direct educational support

Assessment of Performance: Annual Survey Data and Quarterly Data Reporting

Goal 4: To provide parents and the community with access to timely information on issues of importance and concern to them.

Objective 1: Provide updated information and linkages on the A.J.E. website

Objective 2: Provide parents with quarterly newsletter.

Objective 3: Provide links to disability organizations and relevant sites of interest to our families.

Objective 4: Provide updated information on the website weekly.

Outcomes:

- 1,500 will visit the A.J.E. website
- 1,200 individuals, parents, service providers, and advocates will receive quarterly newsletters;
- 100 online requests for information will be responded to by A.J.E. staff.

Assessment of Performance: Annual Survey Data and Quarterly Data Reporting

Goal 5: To expand our community outreach & public information efforts to low-income communities and policy makers, in the areas of special education, delinquency, truancy and legislative changes effecting access to public education services.

Objective 1: Expand community awareness through public testimony, participation policy advocacy, and community outreach about gaps and the availability of services.

Objective 2: Produce evidenced based position papers on the issues impacting education in the District of Columbia.

Assessment of Performance: Quarterly Data Reporting and Report dissemination

IV. Project Assessment³

In an effort to assess the progress of this new project, we are proposing to utilize several different methods of assessment – Program Evaluation, Quarterly Monitoring, and Quality Assurance

A. Program Evaluation. Bi-annually we utilize the evaluation services of “The Evaluation Project”. The Evaluation Project conducts an independent review of our organization’s operations, parent relations, case management, and efficacy of our training. The Evaluation Project uses four methods to collect evaluation data on AJE: *document review, observations, interviews, and surveys.* The surveys will be conducted using various ways. The methods that will be used for AJE may involve collecting information by mail, by phone, or in person. The evaluation team will attempt to maximize participation (response rate) by directly following up with non-respondents.

1. Methods and strategies

a. Records and Documents

The Evaluation Project will review the written documents and records already being recorded by AJE. These data can provide fairly reliable information about program participants and about the program over time.

b. Observations

The evaluation team will take a first hand look at AJE. The evaluation team will observe children and families engaged in activities, which will provide information for both *process* and *outcome evaluation.* The evaluation team will analyze what is and is not working, how the program is developing, and the appropriateness of activities for participants. Changes will be made based on the evaluation.

³ In January, 2008, we began our program evaluation to assess our progress since 2005. We expect to receive the results mid-April, 2008.

c. Interviews

The evaluation will involve interviewing participants, program staff, parents, and others to ascertain the impact of AJE's program. This approach will afford the evaluator access to a wide range of perspectives; getting students' and parents' views can give AJE a picture of what the program did or did not accomplish so that changes can be made in the program if needed.

d. Surveys

The program evaluation team will develop instruments that measure and tap central constructs and outcomes of the program. The team will design new instruments or will modify or adapt existing instruments as needed. This involves the use and possible adaptation of the national annual survey that is collected through the Alliance for 100 Parent Centers to do annual outcomes for parents (See page 15)

Some participants in selected trainings will receive an evaluation form at the beginning of the program and will receive the evaluation after completion of the program. The evaluation team will then use a pre-experimental, pre-post test design to ascertain efficacy of the AJE programs. Inferential statistics will be applied to these data to determine the any statistical difference made by the program.

A. Quality Assurance

AJE has monthly case management meetings where staff review their current case load with the Executive Director. This is an effort to assist the educational advocates with problem solving and reviewing case strategy, as well as identifying learning gaps that need to be supported. Additionally, we have instituted the following:

1. Random Case Audits.

As a quality control measure, we began in January 2008, a random case audit process for evaluating individual work performance. This provides us with insight into the challenges of our families and may reveals issues in our case management process. Cases are randomly selected, assessed for parent contact, quality of status notes, parent/case management, and quality of the representation.

2. Efforts to Outcomes.

We hope to move our case management system, by the Spring of 2008, to the Efforts to Outcomes data management for social service delivery agencies. This case management system provides us with the flexibility we need to develop and monitor parent goals and our ability to help to attain them. It has become increasingly important to us as an agency to determine if we are making an impact on the parents that we serve. We believe this system will do that.

3. Financial Audits

AJE will have a financial audit each year. (See monitoring criteria on page 15)

4. Personnel Management.

a. Salary Allocations. All program staff have salaries allocated based upon a percentage of time billed to project cost centers. This project will have a separate budget and staff salaries will be allocated accordingly.

b. Performance Evaluations. All staff are provided annual performance reviews as a matter of course. All new staff begin with a ninety-day period of review. During that time they are evaluated based upon our job performance criteria, adaptation to the nature of the work, their position description and interpersonal skills.

c. Project Team Management. Project teams meet bi-weekly with their immediate supervisors. Once per month AJE conducts Management Team meetings with each Project Director. This project will fall under our Parent Services Division, which meets on the First Friday of every month.

5. Payments.

In an effort to assist the District in meeting its timelines and stated goals, AJE will require upon execution of the agreement an advance on the contract equal to 10% of the first year's contract budget. Subsequent invoices will be 1/12 of the balance of the contract. In addition, we will invoice the District monthly and receive payment within 30 days of the date of receipt.

B. Requirements for District of Columbia LEA and SEA.

1. District of Columbia (LEA). The District of Columbia, as the local education agency (LEA) will need to establish a single point of contact for the resolution of special education matters for AJE.

2. District of Columbia (SEA)/Charter School Board. The District of Columbia as the State Education Agency must mandate that the Charter School Board, establish a similar single point of contact for the resolution of special education matters and school disciplinary matters for AJE. The Charter schools currently do not have a single governance structure and as a result resolving disputes with them generally takes longer.

3. Single Point of Contact Procurement/Payments. The District of Columbia must provide AJE with a point of contact that will be responsible for insuring that our invoices are received and processed in a timely manner.

Quarterly Monitoring by a Team.

A team to be composed of members of the Blackmon/Jones parties and the expert consultant will be the Monitoring Team. This will consist of the following:

- District of Columbia Representative, Tami Lewis
- Blackmon/Jones, Ira Burnim
- National Expert on Parent Centers, Paula Goldberg

The monitoring team will meet quarterly to discuss compliance, contract monitoring, fiscal accountability and the program progress. They will meet with AJE and its management staff quarterly to review the progress.

A. Criteria for Monitoring the DC Parent Center @ AJE

The team of 3 people will meet quarterly in person or through conference calls to review the grants progress. The team will meet with Kim Jones and the management team. The team will review the following on a quarterly basis:

1. A short written narrative describing the progress for each objective which will include copies of the newsletters, policy materials, website and other products of the grant.
2. The number of parents and others receiving services for each objective in the scope of work as compared to the objective. (These numbers will be in addition to the numbers of people reached in AJE's other projects.)
3. The written evaluations for the workshops and trainings summarized as well as reviewing 2 workshops evaluation folders.
4. Outcome Data. The results of the Alliance follow-up survey to be done 3 to 9 months after workshops or individual support on the phone or in person.

The Alliance Survey is used by the 100 parent centers nationally to document outcomes. It was developed by PACER Center.

- a. 25 parents who call the DC Parent Center @ AJE who have received significant assistance will be called by an outside person.
- b. 25 parents who attend training for this project will be randomly selected and called by an outside person.
- c. AJE may add additional questions.
- d. Workshop outcome questions include:
 - (1) My child has received more appropriate services because I have put to use the information I have learned at the workshops? Yes___ No___
 - (2) Because of the information I received at the workshop, I am more knowledgeable about how to work with schools. Yes___ No___

Telephone and individual assistance and outcome questions:

- (1) The Parent Center provided me with the information I needed to make a decision about my child's education.
- (2) The information and support I received from the Parent Center helped me resolve a disagreement with schools.
- (3) My child has received more appropriate services, because I have put to use the information from the Parent Center.

The results of these 50 calls will be summarized and given to the monitoring team for the first year no later than March 30, 2009.

- e. A site visit will take place 2 to 3 times a year by Paula Goldberg and others as appropriate.

B. Financial Monitoring

1. AJE will provide copies of their proposed and actual budgets (expense and income for this project) on a quarterly basis.
2. AJE will solicit 3 bids for a financial audit by recognized audit firms that specializes in working with nonprofits. AJE will select a firm based on the 3 bids. An audit will be performed yearly by this firm and the audit and management letter will be shared with the Monitoring Team. The audit firm will not be involved with any monthly accounting for AJE.
3. The Monitoring Team will review financial information on a quarterly basis.