

BUILDING SELF-ADVOCACY skills in students

Submitted by PC Reads

Developing strong self-advocacy skills is important for all students, especially those with learning and attention difficulties.

Students are often too nervous or embarrassed to ask for the help they need in the classroom, whether it be more time on an assignment, copies of notes or an audiobook.

Also, they may fear being ridiculed by classmates for asking about accommodations that other students do not receive.

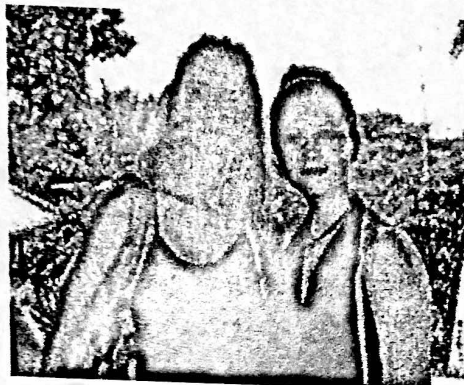
Speaking up may be daunting to students of all ages, but the earlier students begin working on self-advocacy skills, the more likely they are to develop the self-confidence needed to succeed in school and beyond.

Acquiring self-advocacy skills requires understanding personal strengths and weaknesses, knowing what is individually needed to succeed and exercising strong communication skills. Strong self-advocates learn to create positive relationships with teachers, often resulting in solutions to classroom challenges, the existence of which parents might not even be aware.

As students develop a sense of ownership over their learning, their educational independence and self-confidence grow. With guidance, a student's ability to self-advocate typically increases with practice. The following are some recommendations to help build student self-advocacy skills.

Recognizing strengths and weaknesses

Ensure that your child understands how he or she learns best, as accommodations are most effective when they match a student's learning style. Does he comprehend better when listening to books or reading print? Does she learn better by taking her own notes or just listening to a lecture and receiving copies of the



COURTESY OF PC READS
Laurie and Antionette Gentempo will co-chair PC READS' MIND Youth Program. The program is designed to assist students develop self-advocacy strategies and gain a sense of belonging. MIND is an acronym that stands for mentoring, inspiring and nurturing differences.

notes? Does she need a quiet area for tests to be able to focus well?

Understanding legal documents

If your child has an IEP or 504 Plan, review the contents together before school begins so that accommodations and modifications are understood. Understanding these documents helps students speak in positive, constructive ways with teachers. Both IEPs and 504 Plans will be reviewed annually, so be prepared to suggest revisions that are relevant to changes in classroom responsibilities. As students become self-advocates, encourage them to attend their IEP and 504 Plan meetings.

Working with teachers

Remind your child that asking for help is a good thing and model this at home. Provide praise when a student speaks up when he or she needs help and encourage him or her to speak with adults, whether ordering meals at restaurants or buying stamps at the post office. Let

teachers know that you are encouraging your child to be a self-advocate, as you value educational independence. Along the same lines, provide your children with opportunities to resolve issues with teachers before stepping in as a parent.

Speaking with classmates

Practice how your child could explain to classmates why the teacher is making accommodations for them and not others. "I need extra time on tests because I'm dyslexic, so reading is slower for me and takes me more time." Remind your child that everyone in the class has strengths and weaknesses and point out a few of their special strengths to boost self-confidence.

Finding mentors

Join the PC READS' MIND Youth Program. This program is designed to assist young students with developing self-advocacy strategies and gain a sense of belonging. MIND — which stands for Mentoring, Inspiring and Nurturing Differences — will hold four events annually, with a fall event focusing on self-advocacy. While initially designed for dyslexic students, programming is open to all students with learning differences. Please email parkcityreads@gmail.com for participation information.

PC READS is a local nonprofit advocating for recognition and education of dyslexic students. It promotes elevating literacy through early identification of struggling readers, effective reading interventions and appropriate classroom accommodations. It also offers support within our community through family advocacy, community education and school collaboration. To learn more about MIND and PC READS, please visit the website: parkcityreads.org.