

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION:

A strong understanding of the various school supports is an invaluable tool for parents advocating for their children, medical professionals advocating for patients and educators serving students. The school setting is a unique and important learning environment for students. It is a testing ground and space to prepare for living and working as adult. A safe place where students can make mistakes without the more severe consequences experienced in society. At school, students build important skills for adulthood including academic, independent living and social emotional skills.

This session will provide information on informal support, 504 plans, and Individualized Educational Programs (IEP) including eligibility requirements and difference between medical and educational assessments. Attendees will learn about the IEP eligibility process and elements of a strong IEP including communication and behavior support. We will also discuss students of color and their unique challenges. We hope that each attendee leaves the session equipped as an empowered education advocate for children living with Dyslexia.

Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

1. Identify the different types of school support available to students with disabilities.
2. Determine when a student is likely to qualify for an Individualized Educational Program (IEP).
3. Understand the IEP process and important components of a well drafted IEP.
4. Identify strategies to support our students with Dyslexia in school.
5. Identify strategies to support behavioral needs in school.
6. Discuss the unique challenges experienced by students of color.

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS:

Mary Jo O'Neill is a special education advocate at Hickman Lowder. She guides families through the education process to ensure that the educational needs of their children with disabilities are met. Mary Jo is a licensed Intervention Specialist who reviews IEPs, 504 Plans, ETRs and sits alongside the family in team meetings to advocate together for the child's needs. Families rely upon Mary Jo's expertise to help them navigate the special education process, obtain Independent Educational Evaluations, qualify for extended school year, secure Jon Peterson or Autism Scholarship funds, and manage specialized instruction within the Catholic/private school setting.

Mary Jo's goal is to give voice to students with learning disabilities and their parents, so they are heard and given access to the best educational resources and services in their school system. Mary Jo's collaborative, relationship-building approach serves families well. In rare cases where the district is not cooperative, Mary Jo is able to call upon the attorneys to pursue legal recourse.

Janet Griffith is an Attorney with Hickman Lowder whose practice is focused on helping families with education needs, including IEPs, 504 Plans, and disciplinary concerns. Janet helps families at all stages of their education journey from evaluation and eligibility to reviewing and right-fitting existing IEPs and



The graphic features a blue background with a white icon of a family (two adults and a child) and a 'BONUS' badge with three stars. A laptop screen displays two women: Mary Jo O'Neill on the left and Janet Griffith on the right. Above the laptop, a dark blue banner contains the text 'EMPOWERED EDUCATION ADVOCATE' in white, all-caps font.

Mary Jo O'Neill, M. Ed.
Janet Griffith, Attorney

504s. Janet is skilled at understanding the whole child including their academic and social emotional well-being. She believes early and effective intervention is critical for development and transition to adulthood.

Janet's passion for education work is rooted in personal experience. She grew up watching her parents navigate her brother's special education needs. Now, as a mother herself, she has a child with an IEP. She knows first-hand that advocating for your child is uniquely stressful and so she strives to provide families with confidence and emotional support.