Why do you think it's important for families to advocate for their child with IDD?

I think it is important to advocate for my son with IDD because without my advocating he would be faced with many frustrations because the school or his activities does not know the best way to approach his needs. His organizational skills and ability to self-advocate are not his strong points and without anyone staying on top of it to motivate him to push through it even when the going gets tough he would have continued to hit a brick wall.

What made you want to be more involved in your child's education?

It was vital for me to stay on top of my son's education when I noticed that he could not keep up with his work due to his inability to self-advocate and remain focused. I continued communicating with the school to devise a plan that would work best for my son. It was not easy when I initially was met with barriers, due to me not having my concerns drafted in the correct area or unclear statements on the services the school would provide on his IEP. I continued to do my research and talk with other parents. Fast forward, I finally connected with ARC who was able to help me understand my IEP better and guide me to ask the questions I needed to devise the best plan for his education.

What does being your child's advocate mean to you?

Being able to speak up for what my son needs and not being afraid to ask for assistance from other advocates. It is important to be able to speak with advocates who can help educate you on the best ways to come up with smart goals to bring up to the special education team. While I believed I was not strong enough to advocate for my son, I proved that I was and was able to get to an agreement that would work best for my son's needs.

How do you support your child's goals as they prepare for adulthood?

While it is still early on, I would like my son to be best prepared for adulthood by having conversations about what his ideal career looks like. We look forward to something in the video production and graphic design area. While we prepare for High School we are looking at every avenue this field can take him closer to his dream career as a videographer.

What advice would you give to other families about advocating for their child who receives special education?

The advice I would give to other families about advocating for their child who receives special education is to ask as many questions as necessary to gain an understanding of your child's needs

and the services the school is meant to provide. I believed in the beginning because the team was so nice to me they may have persuaded me into believing I had the best already for my son not realizing it was never being added to his services and only indicated as a “parental concern.” I have become more aware that my request should always come in writing first and then be verbalized at the meeting and not be afraid to ask for clarification of where his services will be outlined in his plan.

How can parents educate themselves about special education and related services?

Parents can educate themselves about special education and related services by doing their homework, especially by reading the PRISE. I also utilized the internet where I found ARC which showed me how to get on the right pathway to requesting the accommodations needed for my son to learn the best within his classrooms.