The Art of Writing Letters to the School
by Pamela Wright, MA, MSW

When parents fire off a letter to the school, they are usually in the middle of a crisis that involves their child. At that moment, they want to DO SOMETHING. They may be trying to right a wrong or protect their child from harm. Some parents write angry "last straw" letters after a series of bad experiences or incidents that occurred over a period months or years.

Before you put pen to paper, you need to STOP and THiNK about what you want your letter to accomplish.

**12 Rules for Writing Effective Letters**

You write letters to request information, request action, provide information or describe an event, decline a request, and express appreciation.

Because you want your letters to create a good first impression, we urge you to read our companion article, 12 Rules for Writing Great Letters. If you follow these Rules, you will make it more likely that you will get the relief you want.

1. Before you write a letter, think, then answer WHY and WHAT.
2. First letters are always drafts.
3. Allow time for "cooling off" and revisions.
4. You are always negotiating for services.
6. Assume you won’t be able to resolve your dispute. Instead, the dispute will escalate, a special education due process hearing will be held, and you won’t be able to testify or tell your side of the story.
7. Make your problem unique.
8. You ARE writing letters to a decision-making Stranger. You are NOT writing letters to the school.
10. NEVER make judgments.
11. Tell a story. Write your letter chronologically. Don’t mention the primary issue in the first paragraph of your letter.
12. Write letters that are easy to understand. Make your letters clear, short, alive, and right.

For more information please go to - See more at: http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/letters.draft.htm#sthash.PupAFQnx.dpuf
Affordable Care Act (ACA):
How Can Families and Professionals Help Children with Special Needs Keep Insurance Coverage as they Age Out?

Families and professionals working with children with disabilities need to know about various insurance coverage options as children age out of programs. Choices may be different depending upon whether the insurance is employer-based, obtained through the Marketplace, or public insurance. NOTE: Children with special health care needs may be eligible for more than one type of plan.

What is Dependent Coverage?
There are several ways families can keep their child under their plan. These are:
- Under the ACA (Affordable Care Act), families can continue health insurance coverage for their children until age 26, even if their children are living on their own. (See also Marketplace plans, below.)
- Some states have their own laws, which if more generous, would override federal requirements. For example, dependent coverage is available until age 31 in New Jersey if the dependent young adult is living at home, unmarried, etc.
- Using the “disabled dependent provision”, sometimes still called the “certification of the handicapped provision”, a child could be covered regardless of age as long as the parent is employed. Parents can ask their employer’s human resources department for the form, which is important to complete prior to age 18, since coverage, once suspended, cannot be restored.

Marketplace Plans
As mentioned previously, families can continue dependent coverage until age 26 under the ACA. The Marketplace will only pick one type of plan (Qualified Health Plan (QHP) or Medicaid.) Families can apply for coverage during open enrollment periods, special enrollment situations (e.g. losing a job), or Medicaid anytime.

Adult children up to age 26 can stay on a parent’s plan even if they are:
- married
- not living with their parents
- attending school
- not financially dependent on their parents
- eligible to enroll in their employer’s plan

Public Insurance
Medicaid provides coverage for individuals who have disabilities or low income. After age 18, the individual is seen as a “family of one” and parental income is no longer “deemed” as part of their income. States that expanded Medicaid under ACA have coverage starting at age 19. This may make it possible to transition from Medicaid for children or the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to adult Medicaid, although this is not automatic, so it is necessary to apply. Some children may be eligible for a Medicaid waiver due to their medical status, regardless of family income.

Parents can contact their Maternal and Child Health Title V agency or their Family Voices/Family-to-Family Health Information Center (see Resources.) In most states, if a child is eligible Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which provides financial aid, they are also eligible for Medicaid.

Medicare offers coverage for individuals over age 65 or with certain disabilities. Medicare will cover children who have kidney disease and need dialysis or transplant. Disabled Adult Child (DAC) provisions allow eligibility for Medicare if the child was disabled before age 22 and a parent is disabled, retired, or deceased.
Other Options for Health Coverage

Catastrophic Plans: People under age 30 are eligible for catastrophic health plans. The plans are called “catastrophic” as they protect against high costs of care for a major illness. The benefits are limited for both primary and preventive care. Catastrophic plans have fewer benefits than QHPs so may not be the best choice for people with disabilities.

College Plans: Students are not exempt from the requirement to have insurance that meets certain standards or else pay a penalty, but many college health plans qualify as coverage for this purchase. However, some of these plans may not have as many benefits as QHPs or may not qualify as creditable coverage under the health law. Students should check to see if they are eligible for tax credits to purchase a Marketplace plan. Note that, in states that have expanded their Medicaid program, students age 19 and older may qualify for Medicaid.

Having More than One Plan: A child may be eligible for a private employer plan as well as Medicaid and/or Medicare as mentioned previously. It is important that there is “coordination of benefits” for all plans to reduce costs for families. If a provider doesn’t participate in Medicare, the doctor can send their “opt-out” Medicare letter to the private insurance company with the bill. Families can even file claims this way (see Resources). Also, if a provider doesn’t participate in Medicaid but the child also has private coverage, the doctor can contact the insurance plan to find out how to bill “out of network” as secondary.

Families have options available to them as their children “age out.” By checking resources (see below) and contacting the organizations listed there, they can determine the best option for their child with disabilities.

This tip sheet is based on an ACA blog authored by Lauren Agoratus, M.A. Lauren is the parent of a child with multiple disabilities who serves as the Coordinator for Family Voices-NJ and as the southern coordinator in her New Jersey Family-to-Family Health Information Center, both housed at the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN) at www.spanadvocacy.org.

More of Lauren’s tips about the ACA can be found on the website of the Family Voices National Center for Family/Professional Partnerships: http://www.fv-ncfpp.org/.
Study Finds Postsecondary Programs Boost Outcomes

By Shaun Heasley

Individuals with intellectual disabilities who attend postsecondary programs are finding greater success in the job market than those who do not pursue further education, a new study suggests. Graduates of postsecondary programs reported higher rates of employment since completing high school, according to findings published online this month in the Journal of Intellectual Disabilities. The research offers support for a growing number of programs at colleges and universities specifically geared toward young adults with developmental disabilities.

For the study, researchers interviewed administrators and surveyed 34 graduates from two postsecondary programs — one focused on providing supports so students can participate in typical college classes and the other offering a more specialized program just for those with disabilities. Researchers asked about the work experiences of the graduates who completed postsecondary programs between 2011 and 2013.

The graduates’ experiences were then compared to data from the federally-funded National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 on the post-high school outcomes of individuals with intellectual disabilities who did not attend postsecondary programs.

Researchers found “steep gains” for individuals in both the specialized and inclusive postsecondary offerings.

Slightly over half of those who did not seek additional education after high school said they had been employed in the last two years. By comparison, roughly 9 in 10 of those who graduated from a postsecondary program reported that they had worked outside their home or former school in the same time period.

“There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that (postsecondary education) programs for individuals with (intellectual disabilities) are highly effective as a means to increase employment rates for such individuals,” wrote Eric J. Moore of the University of Tennessee and Amy Schelling of Grand Valley State University in their findings. “Such data can and should be used to encourage further propagation of (postsecondary) programs for individuals with IDs and provides justification for pilot programs of similar kinds in countries wherein (postsecondary) programs have not yet been made available for individuals with IDs.”

http://www.disabilityscoop.com/2015/01/20/study-postsecondary-outcomes/19972/
What Is Earlysteps?

Earlysteps is Louisiana’s Early Intervention System for children with disabilities and developmental delays ages birth to three (3) and their families. By providing resources and support during those critical years, earlysteps helps children get off to a great start.

For Referrals Please Contact:
System Point of Entry
602 Parish Rd
Thibodaux La 70301
985-447-6550
Fax: 985-447-6513
http://dhhlouisiana.gov/index.cfm/page/139/n/139
Note Your Calendars!!

What you need to know about the Legislative Process*
Thursday, April 7, 2016
10:00 am - Noon
Terrebonne Library in Gray
To Register go to:
https://www.eventbrite.com/e/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-legislative-process-tickets-228079472

If not Now when?
Special Needs Trust Workshop
Plan for Your Child’s Future
Now
Wednesday, March 30th, 2016
At Bayou Land Families Helping Families
Contact Stephanie Washington
at 985-447-4461 to register

St. Mary Council on Aging
is hosting a free Community Expo
Wednesday, March 23, 2016
9:00am - 1:00pm
Baldwin Community Center

8th Annual Hunting for the Missing Piece 5k run/ walk
Saturday, March 19, 2016
7:30am - 2:00pm
Morgan City Jr. High School
Register at: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/8th-annual-hunting-for-the-missing-piece-autism-awareness-5k-runwalk-tickets-20658327614

Brittany’s Project Car Show
Saturday, March 19, 2016
10:30am - 9:30pm
Hwy 3211 Oaklawn Bridge Approach Rd. Franklin, La.