On October 1st, the DD Council’s two grassroots advocacy networks, Louisiana Citizens for Action Now! (LaCAN) and Louisiana Together Educating All Children (LaTEACH), will unite to form one powerful advocacy network! The new LaCAN – Louisiana Council’s Advocacy Network – will bring together advocates to speak out for systems change in home and community-based services, employment, and education.

What is RICC?
The Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC) is an essential part of the Part C early intervention system at the local level. Each region in the state has a RICC. The group’s membership includes family members of children with disabilities, as well as EarlySteps Service Providers, Family Service Coordinators (FSC) and, Intake Coordinators. There is also participation from Local Education Agencies (LEA) and Other interested community leaders.

If you are a parent of a child that receives services through EarlySteps we would like to invite you to attend an RICC meeting. This gives parents an opportunity locally to stay current with the latest information and provide valuable feedback to EarlySteps. The RICC meetings for Region 3 will be held on Thursday, October 27, 2016 from 10:00AM to 12:00PM at the St. Charles Parish School Board Office located at 1385 River Road Luling, La. 70070. For more information about upcoming meetings or participating please contact Chrissy Kraemer Community Outreach Specialist at 985-447-4461.
Affordable Care Act (ACA):
How The ACA is Helping Children with Special Needs and Their Families

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) has helped both children with disabilities and their parents. Two reports from the Urban Institute (see Resources) highlight how two generations are benefiting from healthcare coverage under the ACA.

How Health Care Coverage is Maximized

Research shows that when parents have coverage, their children will too.¹ One of the Urban Institute reports stated that “... just 1.7 percent of insured parents reported that their child is uninsured... In contrast, 25.2 percent of uninsured parents reported that their child is uninsured.” Medicaid expansion data showed that uninsured parents were three times as likely as insured parents to have children who were eligible for Medicaid yet were uninsured. Making sure parents have health insurance also helps retention for children’s coverage, resulting in continuity of care.

Data presented at the NJ Hospital Association showed that uninsured children and adults were diagnosed on average two to four years after their peers who had insurance coverage. This results in increased morbidity and mortality, since conditions are more severe and costly when there is a delay in diagnosis. Uninsured children and adults are less likely to access preventive services as well, which are now provided at no cost for families under the ACA. These services include but are not limited to:

- developmental screening
- depression screening
- newborn hearing screening
- vision screening
- immunizations
- lead screening for at risk children
- obesity screening
- special services for women regarding pregnancy, mammograms, cancer screenings, etc.
What Gains Have Been Made under The ACA for Families?

The Urban Institute reports indicate that there has been a decrease of 36% in uninsured parents since enactment of the ACA, and noted that “the share of parents with health insurance increased 6.4 percentage points and the share of children with coverage increased 1.7 percentage points – a historic high for families.” Notably there were “large declines [in uninsurance rates] among low-income and Hispanic parents and a narrowing of the difference in uninsurance rates between parents and children through early 2015.”

Families with insurance reported better access to care than those without insurance, which means families didn’t go without care or struggle as much with medical expenses. Parents were more satisfied with the newer health plans and thought they could get care when their child needed it, which is especially important for children with special health care needs. One of the Urban Institute reports noted that these gains have been made even though “Children were not the primary target of the ACA’s coverage provisions given that they have had substantially lower uninsurance rates than parents and other adults.”

Remaining Barriers

Although there have been improvements in coverage for both children and their parents -- 96.4% of children and 89.6% of parents have health insurance -- there are still many children and families who are eligible for health care coverage but remain uninsured. The Urban Institute found that most common reason for this is concern about affordability. Some families may not be aware of the subsidies available to help pay premiums. Others have incomes too high for Medicaid but not high enough (100 percent of the federal poverty level) to get those subsidies (known as the “assistance gap”). Other individuals are ineligible for premium subsidies or Medicaid due to immigration status. And parents who are ineligible due to immigration status may not realize that their children may be eligible for Medicaid or premium subsidies. Lastly, one third of uninsured families are in states that chose not to expand Medicaid. Affordability could be addressed either by Medicaid expansion and/or increased financial assistance in the Marketplace.

In sum, there have been improvements in coverage for both children with special needs and their parents. However, there are still obstacles to coverage for some families, such as affordability, ineligibility due to immigration status, and failure of states to expand Medicaid. Additionally, there are some children and families that may not be aware that they are eligible so remain unenrolled. Overall however, the latest data indicates that there has been increased enrollment and access to care including preventive care, which will most importantly result in better health outcomes for children with disabilities and their families.

Resources:

Urban Institute:

Georgetown University Health Policy Institute

HealthCare.gov

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 the 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-nfpp.org/.

Every Student Succeeds Act: 5 things parents need to know

By Danielle Dreilinger, NOLA.com | The Times-Picayune

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaces No Child Left Behind, the well-known law that governed schools for more than a decade. The federal Education Department is still rolling out the specifics, but the new law shifts power from Washington to the states.

"It is probably the most important legislation we've seen since 2002," said John Warner Smith, chief executive of the nonprofit K-12 advocacy Education's Next Horizon.

Louisiana is setting "its plan for the next several years for how it will prioritize things that affect the education of your child, and the support that will be provided to teachers and the prioritization of how our tax dollars are spent," said Sarah Massey, director of Communities in Schools of Greater New Orleans.

The Mandeville meeting is taking place at Fontainebleau High and the New Orleans meeting starts at 2 p.m. at KIPP Central City Academy.

1. How will Louisiana decide which schools get an "A"?

Louisiana schools get an annual grade, like students, from A to F. Most of that currently depends on standardized tests. But now, "there is a call for evaluating schools on something other than just test scores," Massey said. States may include more holistic issues such as student engagement or school climate, according to a December fact sheet from the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Florentina Staigers, policy analyst with Equity in All Places, said the law gave people the chance to push states to measure what they think matters most. For her group, that's school suspensions. "We're hoping we can actually use ESSA" to hold schools accountable, she said. If discipline is part of the state report card, "there's definitely some incentive there."

Changing Louisiana's report card formula might also affect the reputation of a district or demand for particular schools.

2. Kids might take fewer tests.

"Testing is a huge, huge issue," Massey said. Louisiana tests public school students in math, English, history and science every year from grades three through eight, plus six high school exams and the ACT.

That's more than the federal government requires. States also have new flexibility to give shorter exams throughout the year instead of one big test like the LEAP, according to the Council of Chief State School Officers. The law encourages schools to spend less time on testing.
Every Student Succeeds Act: 5 things parents need to know

3. More focus on fixing inequities.
"There is a significant gap in the level of achievement between economically disadvantaged students and other students," Smith said. "Louisiana now has a mandate in their local district to address these issues."
Louisiana will also have to identify and intervene in schools where traditionally disadvantaged groups lag behind their peers, according to the Education Trust. In addition, "states are required to ensure that students of color and students from low-income families are not taught at disproportionate rates by ineffective, inexperienced or out-of-field teachers," said Takirra Winfield, director of strategic media initiatives at the U.S. Department of Education.
The law requires stronger oversight of students who are learning English -- a growing part of the school system in greater New Orleans. U.S. Education Secretary John King Jr. has emphasized the right of homeless students and students in foster care to get a great education.

4. Local decisions on spending federal money.
The new law "expands and creates new funding opportunities," according to Louisiana Education Department materials. Louisiana may choose how it intervenes in troubled schools, and put money toward teacher recruitment and training. School systems may get grants for student support and enrichment.
"I think a big part of the solution to these problems over time is going to be how we use the federal money attached to this legislation," Smith said. "I'd want to know ... how the Recovery School District and the Orleans Parish School Board are putting it to use."

5. The governor thinks it matters.
The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and the state's education superintendent set most education policy in Louisiana. But Gov. John Bel Edwards is getting involved in the new law, creating his own advisory panel to make recommendations.
The Louisiana Education Department plans to draft its plan for the new law this fall. But it's a long process, and the new rules don't fully go into effect until next year. People who miss the initial meetings may watch them online and send comments to ESSALouisiana@la.gov or john.white@la.gov.

Congress Eyes Changes To ABLE Act, Special Needs Trusts

A handful of bills designed to make it easier for people with disabilities to save money are advancing in Congress. Two pieces of legislation updating the Achieving a Better Life Experience, or ABLE, Act got a green light from the U.S. Senate Committee on Finance this month.

Under the ABLE Act, which became law in late 2014, people with disabilities can establish special accounts where they can save up to $100,000 without jeopardizing Social Security and other government benefits. Medicaid eligibility is not affected by any level of funds accrued in the accounts.

However, the accounts are currently limited to $14,000 in deposits per year. That would change under legislation known as the ABLE to Work Act that’s now headed before the full Senate. The bill calls for people with disabilities who are employed to be allowed to save their earnings up to the federal poverty level — currently $11,770 for a single person — in their ABLE accounts above and beyond the existing cap, nearly doubling their annual savings allowance.

A separate measure that also won committee approval — the ABLE Financial Planning Act — would allow families to rollover money saved for an individual with a disability in a 529 college savings plan to an ABLE account.

“We anticipate that these could be two technically-significant improvements to the ABLE program that we could get done this Congress,” said Sara Hart Weir, president of the National Down Syndrome Society. “Especially for ABLE to Work, this is the most proactive improvement because we’re looking at ABLE as a way to incentivize employment.”

The first ABLE accounts became available this summer. Currently, four states have programs available and at least another dozen are expected before the end of the year, Weir said. Individuals living in any state can already take advantage of ABLE accounts offered through programs in Nebraska, Ohio and Tennessee.
Congress Eyes Changes To ABLE Act, Special Needs Trusts

A third tweak to the ABLE Act, which would allow people with a disability that onsets by age 46 to qualify for an account, has not yet been considered. At present, the ABLE Act only applies to those with a disability that occurs by age 26.

Meanwhile, aside from changes to the ABLE Act, the U.S. House of Representatives approved separate legislation this month impacting savings options for those with disabilities.

The Special Needs Trust Fairness and Medicaid Improvement Act would allow people with disabilities to establish their own special needs trusts. Under existing law, individuals must rely on other family members or petition a court in order to save money through a trust regardless of their own abilities.

“This is a fundamental issue of equal protection under the law for those who are facing life-changing disease or disability,” said U.S. Rep. Glenn Thompson, R-Pa., who sponsored the bill.

Similar legislation passed the Senate last year, but due to some changes, the bill approved by the House will now return to the Senate.

Note Your Calendars!!

Region 3 Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC) Meeting
Thursday, October 27, 2016 from 10:00AM to 12:00PM at the St. Charles Parish School Board Office located at 13855 River Road Luling, La. 70070

Bayou Autism 2nd Annual Trivia Night
Morgan City Municipal Auditorium
Saturday, October 8th, 2016 6:00pm - 11:00pm
To register for this event please visit Bayouautism.org for more information

5th Annual Hope for Riley Scavenger
Saturday, October 8th, 2016
Foundry on the Bayou
715 W. 1st St. Thibodaux, La.
Email HopeforRiley@gmail.com for more information
This story can fit 175-225 words. If your newsletter is folded and mailed, this story will appear on the back. So, it's a good idea to make it easy to read at a glance.

A question and answer session is a good way to quickly capture the attention of readers. You can either compile questions that you’ve received since the last edition or you can summarize some generic questions that are frequently asked about your organization.

A listing of names and titles of managers in your organization is a good way to give your newsletter a personal touch. If your organization is small, you may want to list the names of all employees.

If you have any prices of standard products or services, you can include a listing of those here. You may want to refer your readers to any other forms of communication that you’ve created for your organization.

You can also use this space to remind readers to mark their calendars for a regular event, such as a breakfast meeting for vendors every third Tuesday of the month, or a biannual charity auction. If space is available, this is a good place to insert a clip art image or some other graphic.

Back Page Story Headline

Your Organization

This would be a good place to insert a short paragraph about your organization. It might include the purpose of the organization, its mission, founding date, and a brief history. You could also include a brief list of the types of products, services, or programs your organization offers, the geographic area covered (for example, western U.S. or European markets), and a profile of the types of customers or members served. It would also be useful to include a contact name for readers who want more information about the organization.

Bayou Land Families Helping Families

Bayou Land Families Helping Families is home to the Louisiana Family to Family Health Information Center (LA F2FHIC), a statewide program funded through the HRSA Maternal Child Health Program. The LA F2FHIC assists families of children and youth, ages 0-26 with any type of special health care need or disability. Join us on Facebook for information on the latest meetings, support groups, information and updates! AND, CHECK THE F2FHIC FACEBOOK PAGE DURING EMERGENCIES FOR IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENTS!!

Facebook: Laftofhic Kidscomplexneeds
Twitter: @laf2fhicBLFHF

Bayou Land Families Helping Families

Bayou Land Families Helping Families is a 501c-3, non-profit resource center serving families of individuals with disabilities and special health care needs, their families and the professionals who serve them. Donations are tax deductible.

Bayou Land Families Helping Families is also home to Louisiana Family Voices, Louisiana’s chapter of the national group Family Voices. Family Voices and the Louisiana Family Voices advocate for families of children and youth with special health care needs and disabilities.