

# 2009/2010 Biennial Report

One Hundred Eight Congress of the United States  
of America

## AT THE SECOND SESSION

Began and held at the City of Washington on Tuesday, the twentieth day of January, two thousand and four An Act  
to reauthorize the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,  
and for other purposes.

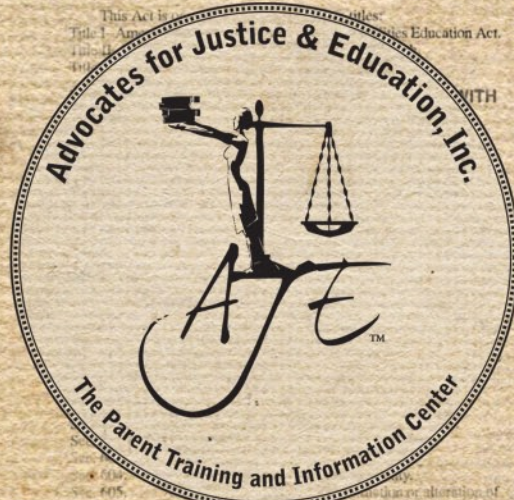
Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the  
United States of America in Congress assembled,

## SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Individuals with Disabilities Education  
Act of 2004."

## SEC. 2. ORGANIZATION OF THE ACT.

This Act is organized as follows:  
Title I. Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.  
Title II. Technical assistance.  
Title III. Research and demonstration projects.



Sec. 605. State or local agency alternative of  
facilities.  
Sec. 606. Employment of individuals with disabilities.  
Sec. 607. Requirements for prescribing regulations.  
Sec. 608. State administration.  
Sec. 609. Paperwork reduction.  
Sec. 610. Freely associated states.

## Part B - Assistance for Education of All Children With Disabilities

Sec. 611. Authorization; allotment; use of funds; authorization of  
appropriations.  
Sec. 612. State eligibility.  
Sec. 613. Local educational agency eligibility.  
Sec. 614. Evaluations, eligibility determinations, individualized  
education programs, and educational placements.  
Sec. 615. Procedural safeguards.  
Sec. 616. Monitoring; technical assistance, and enforcement.  
Sec. 617. Administration.  
Sec. 618. Program information.

# ADVOCATES FOR JUSTICE & EDUCATION

Empowering Parents, Strengthening Schools

## PERSONNEL PREPARATION, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, MODEL DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS, AND DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

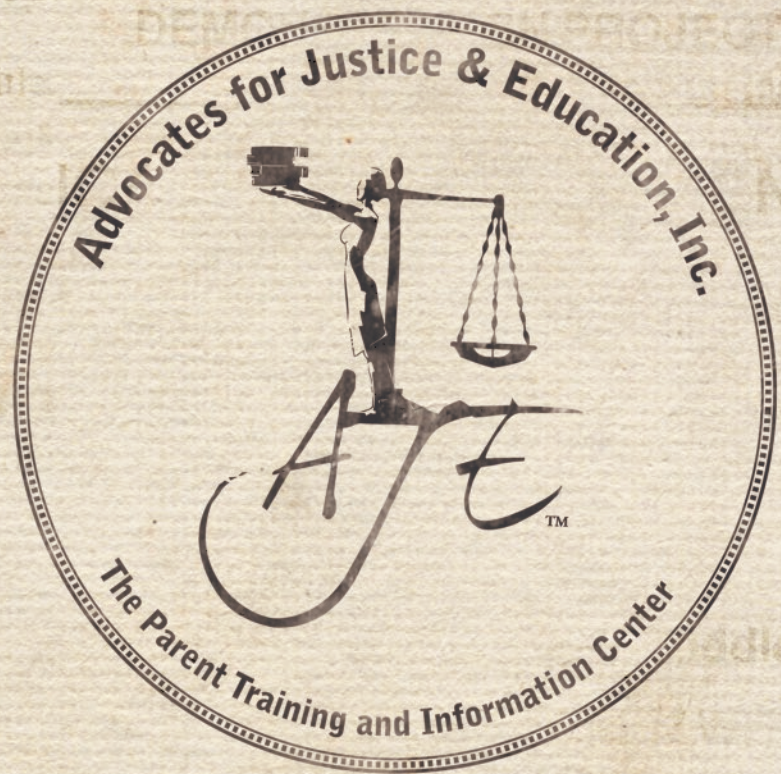
Sec. 661. Purpose; definition of eligible entity.  
Sec. 662. Personnel development to improve services and results  
for children with disabilities.  
Sec. 663. Technical assistance, demonstration projects,  
dissemination of information, and implementation  
scientifically based research.  
Sec. 664. Studies and evaluations.  
Sec. 665. Testing alternatives educational settings, behavior  
supports, and systemic school interventions.  
Sec. 667. Authorization of appropriations.

## SUBPART 3 - SUPPORTS TO IMPROVE RESULTS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Sec. 671. Parent training and information centers.  
Sec. 672. Community-based resource centers.  
Sec. 673. Technical assistance for parent training and  
information centers.  
Sec. 674. Technology development, demonstration, and







# Mission

**Advocates for Justice and Education works to educate parents, youth, and the community about the laws governing public education, specifically for children with special needs. We seek to empower youth and parents to be effective advocates on behalf of their children to ensure that they receive an appropriate education.**





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**Tatisha West**, Educational Support Specialist





# Letter from Leadership

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**“Making the decision to have a child - it is momentous. It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking around outside your body.” - *Elizabeth Stone***

When your child has special needs, disabilities, or health challenges, watching your heart go walking around outside your body, when it is particularly vulnerable, is that much tougher.

That’s why Advocates for Justice and Education exists, and why we continue to expand and develop new programs for families - to help them understand their rights and the opportunities available to them to help support and protect their children.

While developmental, health, and learning challenges are increasingly common in our culture and more readily diagnosed, many parents still struggle to find accurate information, guidance, and the help they need to find and maintain the education their children need to thrive. Especially when parents have limited education themselves, or are immigrants and face language and cultural barriers that impede their ability to communicate with the school system, children with special needs suffer the most. The system isn’t set up to help parents fight for their children. That’s where we come in.

Advocates for Justice and Education sponsors a wide range of programs in locations all over the District of Columbia to reach parents who need us. We connect parents with each other for support and guidance. We go to bat for students when the school system has stopped listening to their parents. We work directly with students who are ready to take the next step beyond school and need to acquire life and job skills necessary to make it on their own. We help families understand what doctors and therapists are telling them, and help schools learn how to better work with families whose children could benefit from some extra assistance.

We invite you to learn more about our recent accomplishments in this annual report, and encourage you to become involved in our work. We are grateful for the support of our many institutional funders, individual donors, and volunteers of all kinds who enable us to reach more families and provide the help they need to ensure that those beautiful hearts walking around outside their bodies can be nurtured, educated, and supported, and have what all parents want for their children - the opportunity to thrive.

Kim Jones, Executive Director  
Tracey Davis, Board Chair

# Why AJE Matters

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## Developmental, Health and Learning Challenges are Common.

Developmental and learning disabilities are more common than one might think. The U.S. Department of Education reports that more than one in five households include a child with special needs. Those needs can range from mild to severe and can affect all aspects of daily life for children, like walking, talking, socializing, and learning alongside peers.

## Parents of Children with Disabilities Need Information and Assistance.

Parents never expect to have a child with special needs, and most have no experience with the process of diagnosing and treating them. Pediatricians and specialists may be able to help, but some issues may go undetected at regular checkups. In many low-income families who lack insurance, children aren't able to receive regular check-ups. Day care workers may not be familiar with special needs, either. As a result, many children's needs may be misunderstood, misdiagnosed, or missed altogether. Parents may suspect a problem with their child's development but have no idea where to go to find information and help.

## Special Education Systems are Tough to Navigate.

Most public schools operate to serve the average student. Although special education services are available and, in fact, are mandated by law, the special education offerings are not the same at every school and are often challenging for parents to understand and navigate. Particularly when parents' own educational background is limited, it may be difficult or impossible for them to research what services their children are legally entitled to and advocate for appropriate placement.

## Raising a Child with Special Needs is Hard for Any Parent.

Families of children with special needs face significant financial, psychological, and emotional challenges. Raising a child with special needs that demand a lot of time and attention is tough and can be exhausting for the most diligent of parents. Advocates for Justice and Education helps parents understand their children's challenges, access the right opportunities to enable their children to grow and develop, and find the support they need for the important job of parenting special kids.

# What We Do

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*AJE works with families from throughout the District of Columbia who have children with special needs or whose children have been removed from school as a result of disciplinary actions. We accomplish our ambitious work primarily through trainings for parents and direct advocacy.*

## Trainings

One of AJE's most valuable services to the community is the free trainings we offer on a regular basis to parents and educators. Many questions about opportunities for children with special needs can be answered by the experts on our staff and our partner organizations who conduct these trainings at locations throughout the District of Columbia. Some trainings are offered in English and Spanish.

## Advocacy

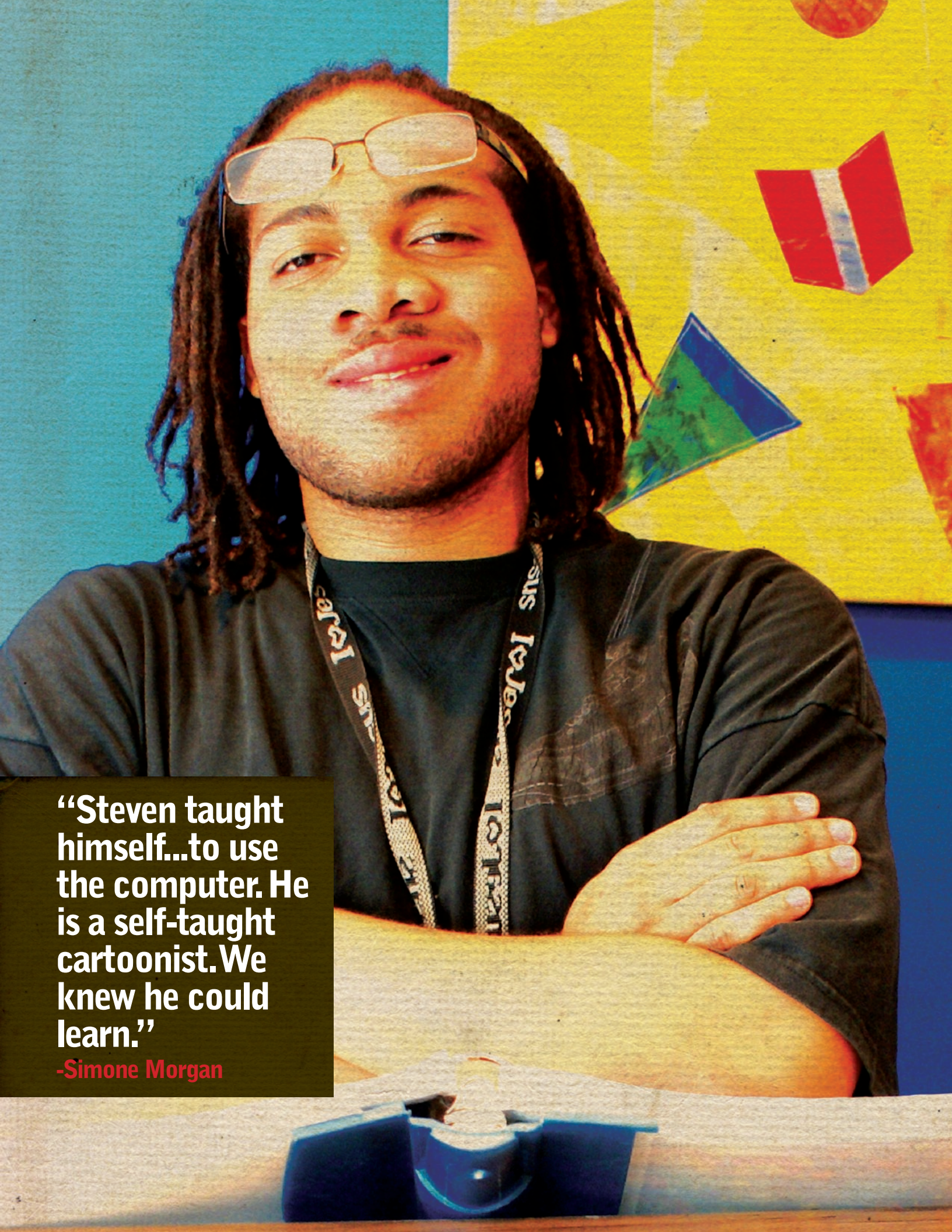
Parents can connect with advocates through several AJE programs. We have trained attorneys, social workers, and parents on staff and as volunteers to work with parents on a

range of issues. Parents can access our advocates through a variety of channels, and our staff will work closely together to ensure that we address all of our families' needs.

## Parent Training and Information Center

The Parent Training and Information Center is a comprehensive resource library and training center with locations in Capitol Hill, Southeast DC, and Petworth. The centers offer parents and professionals information on specific disabilities, special education laws, research on treatment and interventions, and adaptive technology. We conduct many of our training sessions at the centers.

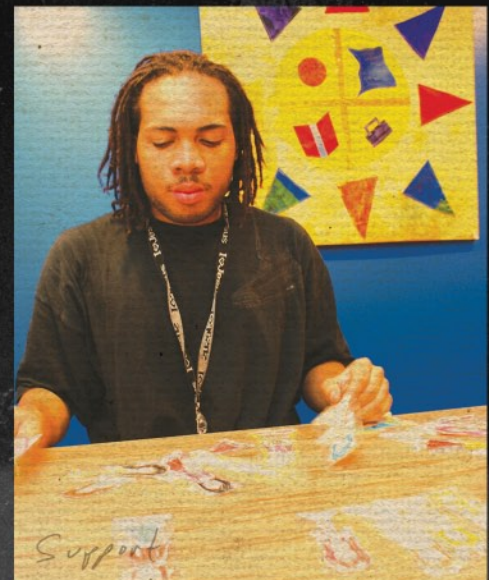
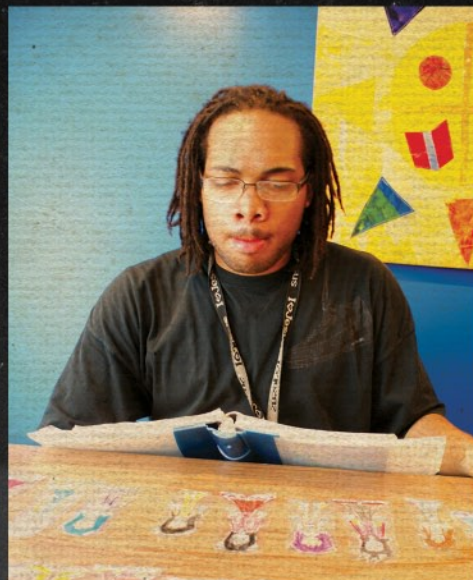




**“Steven taught himself...to use the computer. He is a self-taught cartoonist. We knew he could learn.”**

**-Simone Morgan**





# Steven Morgan

## From Silent Preschooler To Straight A Student-The Power Of Tenacity

**W**hen Steven Morgan, diagnosed with autism at age three, started elementary school, he was nonverbal. But Steven made such terrific progress in a program designed to address his special needs that when he graduated at age 12, he gave a speech that left the auditorium in tears. By sixth grade, he had transitioned to a regular education classroom.

Unfortunately, middle school was not such a nurturing environment. Although Steven was fine academically, he was mercilessly teased for being different. Steven's family was afraid to limit his educational progress, but they moved him to a self-contained class for students with disabilities in an effort to end the teasing.

In high school, the nightmare of abuse from his classmates that he experienced in middle school returned. "We would

go to IEP meetings and tell them we wanted Steven to be in regular classes," his sister Simone says. "They didn't want to challenge him because they thought he would get frustrated. We wanted him to get a high school diploma, not just a certificate of completion. They said maybe a diploma wasn't for him. Steven taught himself to play the piano. He taught himself to use the computer. He is a self-taught cartoonist. We knew he could learn."

At that point, Simone decided to get an advocate. She knew Steven wasn't getting what he needed at school, but she had run out of ideas about how to ask for it. When the family found AJE, Sylvia Gravitt joined their team. "From that point on, we weren't by ourselves," Simone says. "There was a whole different tone to every meeting. . . . Even though she's this petite young lady, she was hard as nails. She demanded things from the school that we didn't even know about."

"We had the passion but not the knowledge," recalls Simone. "Sylvia told me who to write letters of complaint to. She read everything. She gave me pointers. She would call to follow up on everything. We got the chancellor's office involved, and they started coming to meetings. I felt like I wasn't doing it alone, and I had a team."

Steven will graduate in June 2012 with a high school diploma. He has a 4.0 GPA and recently earned an A in trigonometry. He attends a program at Roosevelt High School that enables students with autism to be mainstreamed but still receive academic and emotional support. He plans to attend Montgomery College to study art and become a cartoonist.





## On Helping Parents Understand Their Children's Diagnoses

"A lot of our families operate on a crisis level. They see ER doctors more than primary care physicians. We make sure families have access to a medical home and understand the services available to them. We have professionals working with them, but we also match them with their peers [Family Navigators], who can explain things in such a way that families won't feel judged and may feel more comfortable. Especially when your child has just been diagnosed with a disability, there's a lot of emotion, which can set up poor relationships with medical providers. Often a child is put into a category and is eligible for services, but no one explains to the parents exactly what the symptoms are or what they mean. Parents don't know what services outside of school their child may be eligible for or why it's important to make sure their child takes the medication the doctor prescribes."

**Tatisha West,**  
Educational Support Specialist,  
DC Parent Information Network

## DC Parent Information Network

Consistent, quality health care for children and their parents is often a key factor in making sure young people attend school every day. Through the DC Parent Information Network (DC PIN), we educate families with special health care needs and mental health issues and try to set them up with a medical home that can better coordinate a range of medical needs. We also advocate for individuals and families seeking accommodations to meet their health care needs. DC PIN serves all families and children from birth to age 21.

## Transition Advocacy Project

Our Transition Advocacy Project (TAP) helps young people become more knowledgeable about and involved in their own educational planning. TAP helps build self-advocacy and leadership skills so youth can chart their own course for independence.

Young people who have been following IEPs or 504 plans while in high school must initiate special services for themselves after they leave high school. AJE staff work with parents and students to determine whether the young people's current plans are appropriate and outline options for the future, such as obtaining a GED, preparing for college, entering trade school, or getting a job.

TAP includes a youth support group that meets monthly and covers such topics as getting health insurance, renting an apartment, using public transportation, and creating a resume.

## Parent to Parent: The Family Navigator Program

Through support from the DC Department of Health, the Parent-to-Parent program has trained 80 parents in the community, many of whom are former clients of AJE, to support their peers. Family Navigators come to the table armed with resources to help parents find medical professionals, sign up for government programs, resolve simple issues, look for housing, or address other problems that don't require legal expertise. Family Navigators also provide a listening ear for parents who are experiencing a great deal of stress.



Spanish-speaking Family Navigators have been critical to AJE's ability to reach a greater number of parents in DC. We've found through our work with Latino families that many parents do not realize that their children are entitled to a free and appropriate education, regardless of their disabilities, because that is not always the case in the countries from which these families emigrated. Because of the history of dictatorial governments, where individuals who spoke up against authority were punished, many Latino parents do not feel comfortable disagreeing with school officials or do not realize that they can object to school system decisions about their children. These barriers are in addition to the basic language barrier that many Spanish-speaking families face when meetings and documents related to their children are conducted and written in English. AJE staff and volunteers are able to educate these families about their rights and the opportunities for their children in the United States, and we facilitate needed interpretation and translation services.

## Legal Services

When attending meetings, writing letters, making phone calls, and providing other intermediate mediation don't work to help a child who needs appropriate services at school or who has been unjustly suspended or expelled from school, the AJE legal services team steps in. AJE's attorneys review cases to determine when legal action must be taken to advocate for and restore a young person's rights.

In 2010 we launched a pro bono attorney program to match AJE clients with volunteer attorneys who handle cases where students are suspended or expelled from school without due process or where the parent feels the disciplinary action was inappropriate. Working with a network of pro bono attorneys has allowed AJE to greatly expand the number of families we can help.




## On Behavior Intervention

"Justice motivates me. I want to make sure kids are in school and getting the services they need. This is a vulnerable population—high-risk youth who need certain supports in place. There's a real lack of training for teachers to understand special needs and discipline. [A teacher] may have a kid in the classroom with an IEP, and the teacher isn't aware of it. Usually the administration is imposing discipline. They aren't in class with the kid.

"We have done trainings with teachers. A lot of teachers are interested in positive behavior supports. They want to know 'How can we implement that? I have this child in class but don't know what to do.' A good behavior intervention plan should be for across the school—at recess, lunch, or the classroom. All staff members should know what those intervention strategies are. If they see the behavior, they should know what to do."

**Rochanda Hiligh-Thomas,**  
Director of Legal Services and Advocacy

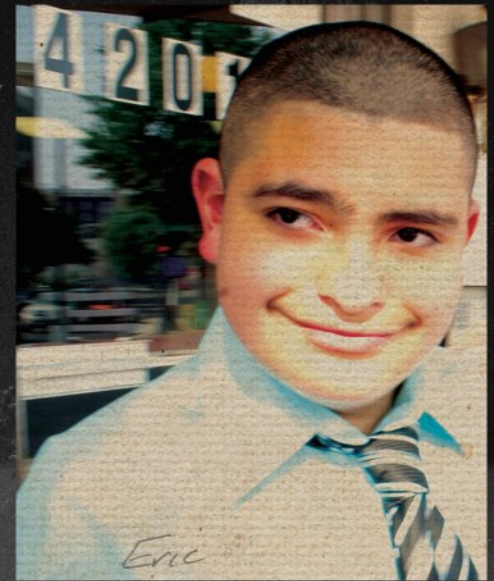
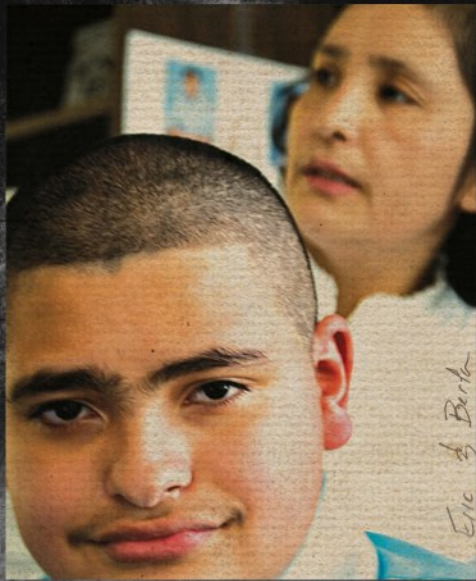


A photograph of a young man in a light blue shirt and striped tie, smiling, with a woman standing behind him in a hallway. The man is in the foreground, looking towards the camera. The woman is in the background, slightly out of focus, looking towards the camera. The hallway has a yellow wall and a painting on the left.

**“When I work  
with someone,  
I share my  
experience.”**

**-Berta Mata**





# Berta Mata

## From Parent In Need Of Help To Bilingual Educational Support Specialist

**B**erta Mata had been assured that her three-year-old son Eric would be able to stay at the National Children's Center, a school that was giving him the services he needed. Then one September day, the bus picked him up and took him to a different school. Mata had no idea where he was.

"When he came home, he cried and cried because he was alone and in an unfamiliar place," Mata recalls. "I didn't want him at that school. I'd never even seen that school. I wanted to keep him in NCC, where he had been since he was one year old."

Mata contacted AJE and was matched with an advocate, who helped her argue successfully to keep Eric at NCC at no cost. He will be able to stay there until age 22. Mata's son has microcephaly, developmental delays, heart problems,

and asthma. At one point, Mata had to stop working to take care of him.

After Mata and AJE succeeded in ensuring Mata's son's placement, the AJE advocate invited Mata to help out at AJE trainings and represent AJE at community festivals. As a native Spanish speaker, Mata provided the Latino community with an important connection with AJE. After volunteering for a while, Mata became an advocate with AJE and is now AJE's Bilingual Educational Support Specialist.

"When I work with someone, I share my experience," Mata explains. "When parents have a problem and they don't know what to do, I help. I work especially with moms who speak Spanish. . . . Sometimes schools are not appropriate. Sometimes a school doesn't want to provide transportation. I'm also doing trainings for parents."

Mata believes the solidarity and emotional support she provides are just as important as the information. "Parents think they're the only people who have these problems. We assure them they're not alone."

Mata's son is now 14 and doing well. She is grateful for AJE's support. "I love my job, and I love what I am doing. I tell parents, please learn so you can help your children and then help other parents."



# AJE Trains Parents & Educators

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**Below is a list of some of the topics covered by AJE trainings. Trainings can be modified to suit specific audiences.**

- Parent rights and responsibilities
- How to identify a child with special needs
- Understanding special education
- Preparing for and participating in IEP meetings
- Transition from Part C to Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004
- The role of parents in early literacy
- Understanding and drafting the Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP)
- Laws protecting people with disabilities
- School discipline and Positive Behavior Interventions
- Understanding and developing positive Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs)
- Determining whether behavior problems are caused by learning disabilities
- How and when to advocate effectively
- Understanding the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
- A parent's guide to preventing bullying
- The importance of finding a medical home
- ADHD, ED, OHI: What do all these letters mean? Cracking the disability code
- Understanding communication disorders
- Working effectively with doctors
- From school to adulthood: Life transition planning
- Skills for effective parent advocacy
- Talking with young people about sexuality
- Helping young people get and keep their first job
- Rights for the English-language learner

## AJE by the Numbers

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Thanks to generous foundation investments and government contracts, AJE has grown significantly in recent years and dramatically increased the number of families we've been able to help. At the same time, we're working hard to improve our ability to capture data about our work so we can better understand the continuing needs of the families we serve and evaluate how well we're serving them. Here's a sample of statistics that reflects our efforts in the community.

### After working with AJE:

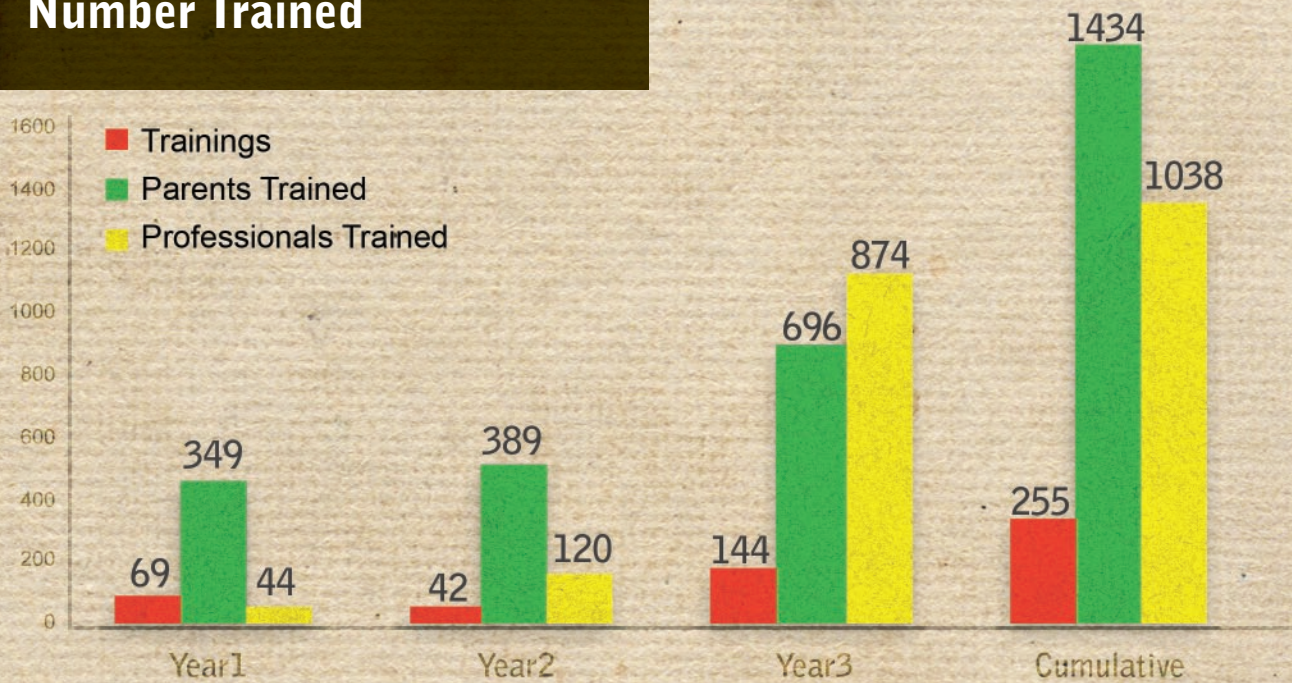
- 90% of parents say they are able to get information from their children's school that they understand. Only 60% say they're able to do this before working with AJE.
- 75% of parents believe their child's teachers understand their needs. Before working with AJE, only 35% think so.
- 60% of parents understand that there is a formal process for advocating on behalf of their children to meet their educational needs. Before working with AJE, fewer than 40% know this.

### Over the past year, AJE:

- Provided direct advocacy services for 843 families
- Matched 27 families with Family Navigators
- Educated 811 parents, 112 young people, and 554 professionals at training sessions
- Conducted 161 training and support sessions for members of the community
- Joined parents at 417 IEP and MDT meetings
- Welcomed 3761 visitors to our Parent Training and Information Center
- Sent out 43,340 informational mailing

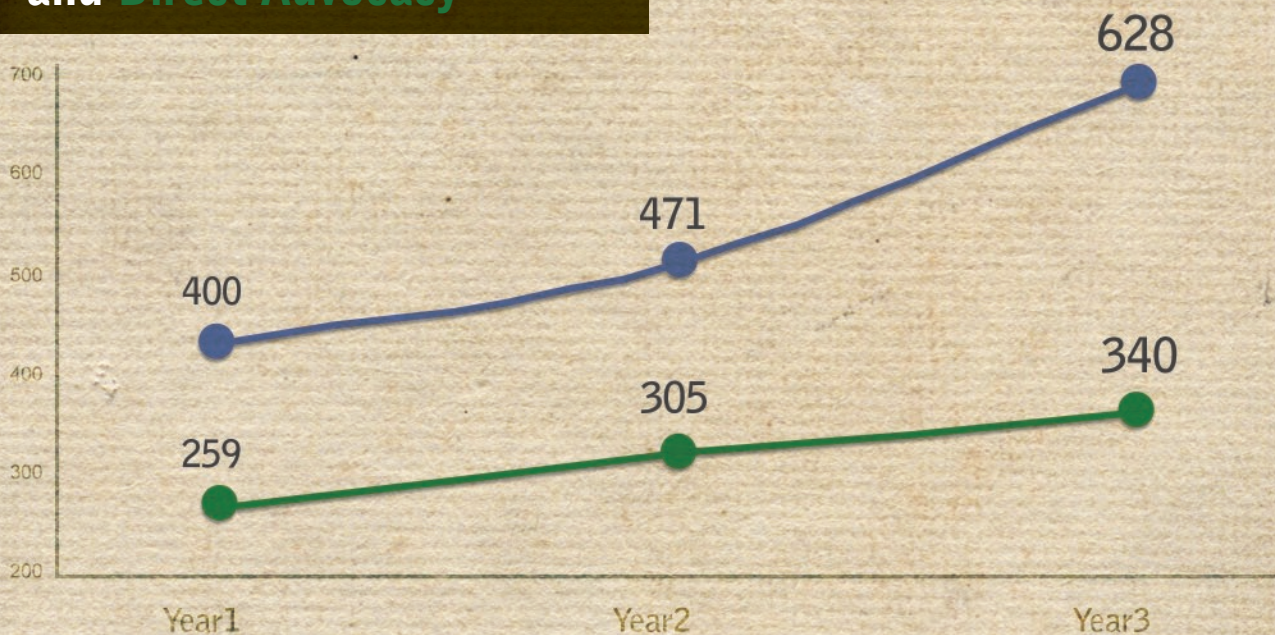


## Trainings and Number Trained



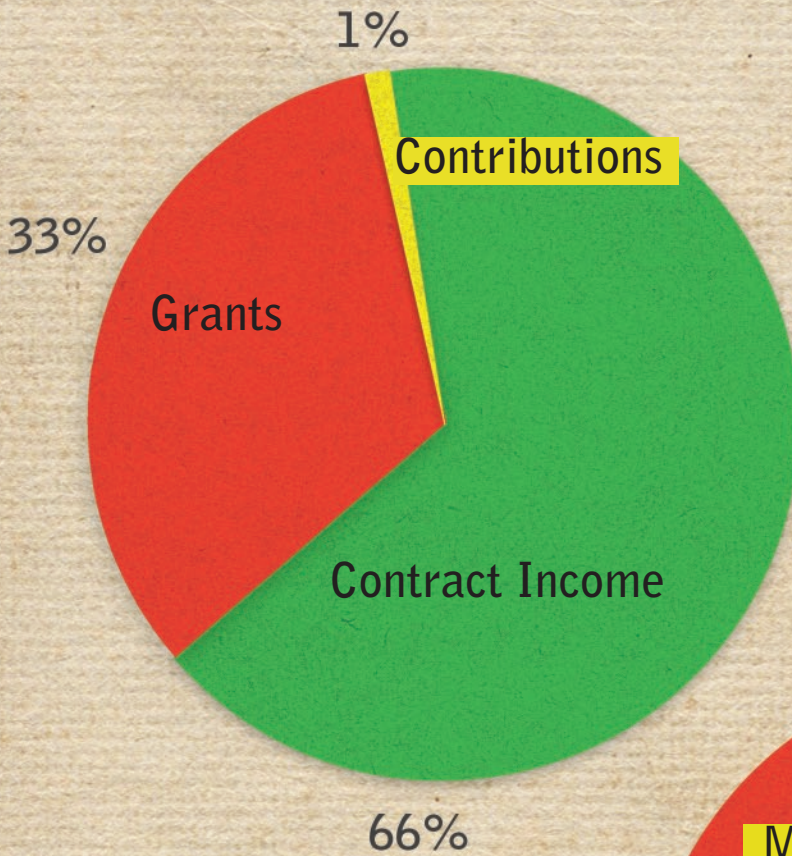
*\*Aided by a three-year contract with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, AJE was able to make great strides in expanding our reach within Washington , DC*

## Families Served Through Intake Process and Direct Advocacy





# Financials

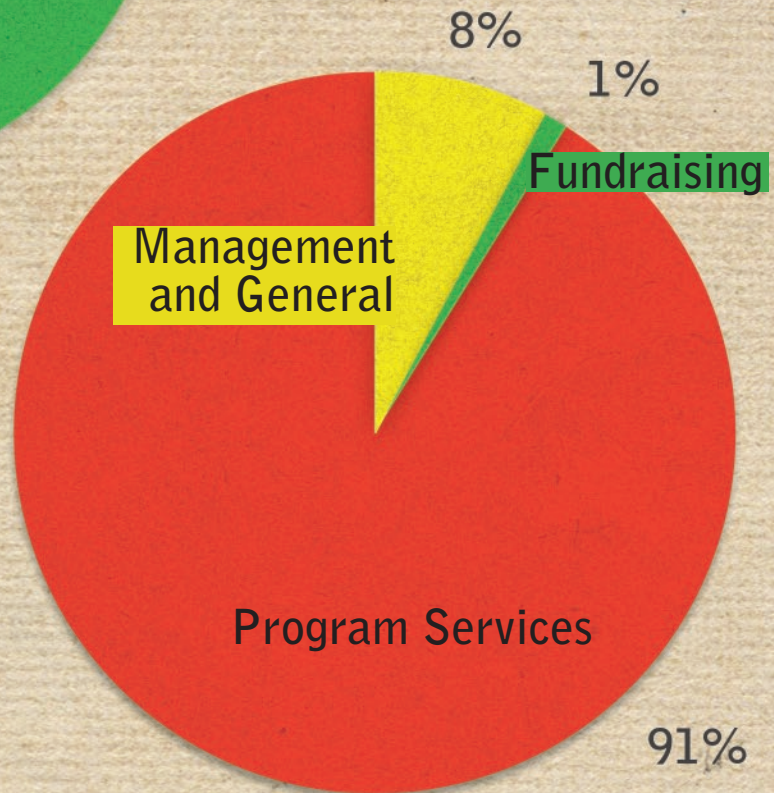


## Revenue

Contract Income	66%
Grants	33%
Contributions	1%

## Total Revenue

**\$1,473,574.00**



## Expenses

Program Services	91%
Management and General	8%
Fundraising	1%

## Total Expenses

**\$1,448,111.00**





# Funding Sources

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DC Bar Foundation

DC Children Youth Investment Trust Corporation

DC Department of Health

DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Georgetown University

HSC Foundation

Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation

The Moriah Fund

US Department of Education







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ITS TO THE INDIVIDUALS WITH  
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MENTS TO THE INDIVIDUALS  
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ending: Harding Elementary Neighborhood School: Washington Elementary

Yes ☐ No ☐ Last IEP Review Date: 8/4/10

a transition plan? n/a

receiving assistance in transition? n/a

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