QUARTERLY INFORMER

JANUARY, FEBRUARY, AND MARCH 2025 EDITION

2024 in Pictures





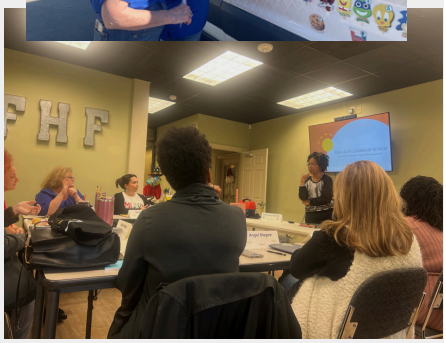
















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FHF SWLA Mission:
Our mission is to enable and empower individuals with disabilities and their families by providing information, referral, education, training, peer support and advocacy skills.

Who we Are ... What we Do!

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Families Helping Families
OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA
Supporting All disABILITIES



Mardi Gras

Allen Parish - March 3-4, 2025
Beauregard Parish - March 3-4, 2025
Calcasieu Parish - March 3-5, 2025
Cameron Parish - March 3-6, 2025
Jeff Davis Parish - March 3-5, 2025

Flu shots have changed this year — here's why

Live Science By: Emily Cooke 10/2/2024

Unlike past flu shots, flu vaccines for the 2024-2025 season don't contain the "Yamagata lineage" of influenza viruses because evidence suggests that type of flu no longer exists. For more than a decade, the annual flu shot has protected against four types of the influenza virus — but this year, that has changed.

In the United States, vaccines for the 2024-2025 flu season provide protection against only three subtypes of influenza: two influenza A viruses, called H1N1 and H3N2; and one influenza B virus, known as the "Victoria lineage." A fourth kind of flu virus — the "Yamagata lineage" — has been dropped from the formulation. This will be the first time since 2012 that U.S. flu vaccines have been trivalent, meaning three-component, as opposed to quadrivalent, or four-component.
But why the change?

Based on all available evidence, the Yamagata lineage is now extinct. So, in March 2024, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced that this year's flu vaccines would not include that subtype of virus, because it hasn't sickened anyone in years. We know this because there is a global consortium of scientists that regularly isolates flu viruses from sick patients and then analyzes the viruses' genetic material.

READ MORE

"We can never achieve greatness alone"



Community **Mardi Gras** Dance

January 24, 2025

6:00p-8:30p

Lake Charles Event Center

(Exhibition Hall)

For more information please call
337-475-3100

IMPERIAL CALCASIEU HUMAN SERVICES AUTHORITY

Families Helping Families OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA
Supporting All disABILITIES

CITY of LAKE CHARLES LA. 1867

Mardi Gras Southwest Louisiana

Save the Date

FHF Bunny Stop & Hop

EASTER EVENT FOR INDIVIDUAL WITH DISABILITIES & THEIR FAMILIES

FHF will be hosting our first Bunny Stop & Hop Trunk or Treat! Instead of having a typical Easter egg hunt; we'll be inviting friends, family and the community. The idea is that parents could simply park ("stop") and kids could "hop" from trunk to trunk gathering information from local community partners agencies and collecting goodies along the way. Each participant should bring a basket. The Easter Bunny is at the event and available for pictures. Standing Pics only. Bring your camera

DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED

10:00AM – 1:00PM

324 W. HALE ST.
LAKE CHARLES, LA. 70601
337-436-2570 INFO@FHFSWLA.ORG

Home Fire Prevention

A home fire is a devastating event, and one that you never count on happening. A fire can become life-threatening in just two minutes. A residence can be engulfed in flames in five minutes. Cooking and heating are the leading causes of home fires and fire injuries, and winter months are the peak time for fire-related deaths.



Fire (ready.gov/home-fires)

- Install and test smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors with battery backups.





Riddle:

There are two in a corner, one in a room, zero in a house, but one in a shelter.

Answer is on the last page



3 Ingredient Meatloaf
(2 Minute Prep, 1 Hour Bake)

All you to make your meatloaf need is:

- 1.5 – 2 lbs of Hamburger
- 1 box of Kraft Stove-Top Stuffing Mix
- 1/2 cup of Milk

Step One: Add all three ingredients into a large mixing bowl. Mix until everything evenly distributed.

Step Two: Place the mixture into a baking dish and cover with foil.

Step Three: Pre-heat your oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit, and then place your meatloaf into the oven, and bake for one hour.

Step Four: Serve & Enjoy!



Social Security Announces 2.5 Percent Benefit Increase for 2025

October 10, 2024 • By Nate Osburn, Deputy Commissioner, Office of Communications
Last Updated: October 10, 2024

Social Security benefits and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) payments for more than 72.5 million Americans will increase 2.5% in 2025, the Social Security Administration announced today. On average, Social Security retirement benefits will increase by about $50 per month starting in January.

Over the last decade the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase has averaged about 2.6%. The COLA was 3.2% in 2024.

Nearly 68 million Social Security beneficiaries will see a 2.5% COLA beginning in January 2025. Increased payments to nearly 7.5 million people receiving SSI will begin on December 31, 2024. (Note: Some people receive both Social Security benefits and SSI).

Some other adjustments that take effect in January of each year are based on the increase in average wages. Based on that increase, the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security tax (taxable maximum) is slated to increase to $176,100 from $168,600. Social Security begins notifying people about their new benefit amount by mail starting in early December.



This year, for the first time, Social Security beneficiaries will receive a newly designed and improved COLA notice that makes it easier for customers to find the information they need most. The simplified COLA notice is now only one page, uses plain and personalized language, and provides exact dates and dollar amounts of a person's new benefit amount and any deductions. Learn more on our video.

Individuals who have a personal my Social Security account can view their COLA notice online, which is secure, easy, and faster than receiving a letter in the mail. People can set up text or email alerts when there is a new message–such as their COLA notice–waiting for them in my Social Security.

People will need to have a personal my Social Security account by Nov. 20 to see their COLA notice online. To get started, visit www.ssa.gov/myaccount.

Information about Medicare changes for 2025 will be available at www.medicare.gov. For Social Security beneficiaries enrolled in Medicare, the 2025 benefit amount will be available via my Social Security's Message Center starting in late November. Those who have not opted to receive messages online will receive their COLA notice by mail in December.

The Social Security Act provides for how the COLA is calculated. The Social Security Act ties the annual COLA to the increase in the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W) as determined by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics.

To read more, please visit www.ssa.gov/cola.

Out Of My Mind' Official Trailer And Key Art Released Ahead Of World Cerebral Palsy Day

Based on the Bestselling Novel by Sharon M. Draper, the Disney Original Movie Streams Nov. 22 on Disney+

Disney+ revealed the trailer and key art for "Out of My Mind" in partnership with World Cerebral Palsy Day, a global movement celebrated on Oct. 6. "Out of My Mind," a Disney Original movie based on the bestselling novel by Sharon M. Draper, premiered earlier this year at Sundance Film Festival and arrives Nov. 22 on Disney+. Melody Brooks, a sixth grader with cerebral palsy, has a quick wit and a sharp mind, but because she is non-verbal and uses a wheelchair, she is not given the same opportunities as her classmates. When a young educator notices her student's untapped potential and Melody starts to participate in mainstream education, Melody shows that what she has to say is more important than how she says it.

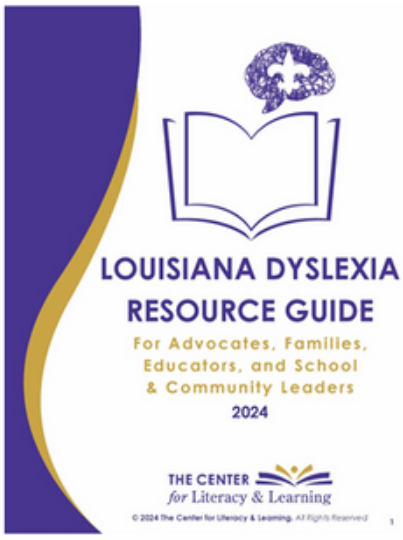
The film stars newcomer Phoebe-Rae Taylor as Melody, alongside acclaimed actors Rosemarie DeWitt, Luke Kirby, Michael Chernus, Courtney Taylor and Judith Light. Jennifer Aniston portrays Melody's inner voice.

"Out of My Mind," from Disney Branded Television, is produced by Big Beach LLC, Participant Films, LLC and EveryWhere Studios LLC. The film is produced by Academy Award® nominee Peter Saraf, Robert Kessel, Dan Angel and Michael B. Clark; Amber Sealey ("No Man of God") directs from an adapted screenplay written by Daniel Stiepleman (Humanitas Prize winner for "On the Basis of Sex"); executive producers are Jeff Skoll, Eddie Rubin, Leah Holzer, Tom Mazza, David Calvert Jones, Brian Gott and Alex Turtletaub. Film consultants include Richard Ellenson, Thomas Ellenson, Lawrence Carter-Long and the disability-led nonprofit organization RespectAbility.

TRAILER

Louisiana Dyslexia Resource Guide

The inaugural Louisiana Dyslexia Resource Guide is here!! Be sure to share this guide with your networks to help reach even more families and professionals who may benefit from the resources included. In addition to the guide, The Center for Literacy & Learning is proud to introduce the Louisiana Dyslexia Resource Chat—an innovative, user-friendly companion designed to provide personalized dyslexia resources quickly and easily.



Special Education resources for Latino and Somali families

This project is funded by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

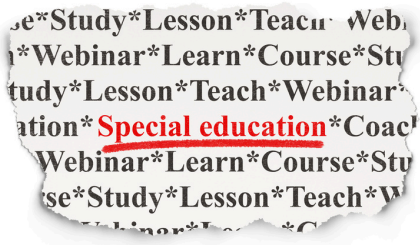
PACER Center has created new videos and tip sheets for Latino and Somali parents and families of children with autism and other disabilities. They give a basic understanding of special education and address common questions and concerns including how to ask for a special education evaluation, how to prepare for an IEP meeting, and more. The tip sheets are available in English and Spanish. The videos are available in English, Spanish, and Somali.



Tip sheets:

- What is special education?
- What is special education? (Spanish)
- How do I ask for a special education evaluation?
- How do I ask for a special education evaluation? (Spanish)
- How do I disagree with my child's IEP?
- How do I disagree with my child's IEP? (Spanish)
- It's my first IEP meeting, how do I prepare?
- It's my first IEP meeting, how do I prepare? (Spanish)
- What does a special education evaluation mean?
- What does a special education evaluation mean? (Spanish)
- Tips for advocating at school

Tips for advocating at school (Spanish)



Videos:

- Disability advocacy tips for families

)isability advocacy tips for families (Spanish)

Disability advocacy tips for families (Somali)

Early Steps would like to invite you to participate in the State Interagency Coordinating Council (SICC) and the Regional Interagency Coordinating Council (RICC) to discuss early intervention strategies for the Louisiana and the Southwest Louisiana Region. All family members are invited to attend, including providers, and other early intervention personnel. Our mission is to: Provide a way to participate in the SICC and RICC to represent regional issues.

SICC will be held on:
Thursday, January 9, 2025
1:00p-3:00p via Zoom

RICC will be held on:
Thursday, January 23, 2025
1:30p-3:30p via Zoom

For more info or to RSVP contact China Guillory at (337) 436-2570 or email cfguillory@fhfswla.org

earlysteps
louisiana's early intervention system

Barbie's Latest Additions: Blind Barbie and Black Barbie with Down Syndrome

Barbie has unveiled two new additions to its expanding range of diverse and inclusive dolls: a blind Barbie and the first Black Barbie with Down syndrome. These dolls are part of Barbie's 2024 Fashionistas Line, a collection known for its variety, featuring over 175 different skin tones, eye colors, hair textures, body types, disabilities, and fashion styles. This significant step forward showcases Mattel's commitment to reflecting the world's diversity and promoting inclusion.

Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion

In recent years, the Barbie Fashionistas Line has been at the forefront of representing various disabilities and appearances. Past additions to the line have included Barbie's and Kens with mobility aids such as wheelchairs and braces, dolls with hearing aids, hair loss, and vitiligo. The introduction of the first Barbie with Down syndrome last year was a milestone, and this year, the lineup expands further with the introduction of a blind Barbie and a Black Barbie with Down syndrome.

According to a statement from Mattel, these new dolls were created in partnership with nonprofit agencies that advocate for those with vision impairments and blindness, as well as people with Down syndrome. The collaboration involved extensive conversations with members of the communities these dolls represent, ensuring that the dolls feature accurate and respectful details. For instance, the number of lines on the Barbie's palms was meticulously designed to reflect the characteristics of people with Down syndrome.

Blind Barbie: Features and Design

The blind Barbie is a first for the Fashionistas Line, although Mattel had previously introduced a blind Barbie as part of its Inspiring Women series, which included a doll inspired by Helen Keller. This new blind Barbie comes equipped with a white and red cane featuring a marshmallow tip and a pair of functional sunglasses. The sunglasses are designed to provide additional eye protection, catering to individuals who may be sensitive to light.

Unlike some other models, this Barbie has bendable elbows, allowing her to comfortably use her cane. Her eyes are designed with an "eye gaze facing slightly up and out," reflecting the appearance of the eyes of some blind or low-vision individuals. These thoughtful design choices help in providing an accurate representation of blind and low-vision individuals.

Mattel worked closely with the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) on the clothing, design, and packaging for the doll. The sensory-rich outfit for Blind Barbie includes a satiny pink blouse and a ruffled skirt, offering a strong tactile experience. The blouse features a brightly colored, high-contrast hook and loop closure on the back, and the skirt has an elastic waistband, making it easier to change Barbie's clothes. These high-contrast elements are more easily viewable for people with low vision, enhancing the doll's accessibility.

Black Barbie with Down Syndrome: Features and Design

Mattel has also introduced another groundbreaking doll, a Black Barbie with Down syndrome. This is the second Barbie with Down syndrome to be introduced, following the release of the first in April 2023. The new doll was designed in collaboration with the National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS), and this time, Mattel also consulted a focus group of Black individuals from the Down syndrome community to ensure the doll's features and design accurately reflect their experiences.

The Black Barbie with Down syndrome was sculpted to depict the physical characteristics of people with the condition, including a shorter frame, a longer torso, and low muscle tone. Her palms feature single lines, a common characteristic of people with Down syndrome. Her head was crafted with great attention to detail, featuring a rounder shape, smaller ears, a flat nasal bridge, and eyes that are slightly slanted in an almond shape with white dots in the iris. These physical traits help in creating a realistic representation of individuals with Down syndrome.

The Barbie's hair and clothing were also designed based on community feedback. Her hair is textured and braided, reflecting a request from the Black Down syndrome community. She wears a blue and yellow dress featuring a pattern associated with the Down syndrome awareness movement. The dress includes three arrows in some of the hearts, symbolizing the third 21st chromosome that individuals with Down syndrome have.

Barbie Fashionistas Line: A Legacy of Diversity

The Barbie Fashionistas Line was first introduced in 2009 and has since been dedicated to reflecting the diverse world that children see around them. Each year, a new lineup of dolls is released, offering a wide variety of shapes, sizes, skin tones, hair colors and types, eye colors and shapes, fashion styles, disabilities, and more. The 2023 line included several different Barbie's and Kens in wheelchairs, Barbies and Kens with vitiligo, the first doll with Down syndrome, and a Ken with a prosthetic leg.

According to Mattel, the Barbie Fashionistas series now offers more than 175 unique looks. The dolls aim to advance Barbie's continued goal of reflecting a multi-dimensional view of beauty and fashion, enabling more children to see themselves in their dolls and see their world reflected through play.

Commitment to Inclusivity

Barbie's latest additions, the blind Barbie and Black Barbie with Down syndrome, are significant steps in promoting inclusivity and representation in the toy industry. These dolls not only provide children with toys that look like them but also help in educating society about the diverse experiences and appearances of people around the world. Through thoughtful design, community collaboration, and accessible features, Mattel continues to lead the way in creating products that celebrate and embrace diversity.



To read more follow Barbie:



Contact Your Lawmakers

Do you have an idea for a policy or are you concerned about a pending bill?

Believe it or not, your representative expects to hear from you. It is part of their duty to listen and entertain their constituents' opinions and contacting them is easier than you think. Whether you write, call or request an in-person meeting, there are some basic dos and don'ts you should follow in order to get your point across.

Know your audience and remember they are people too

Get to know your legislators. What is their personal and professional history? With which party are they affiliated? What are their committee assignments? What is their voting record on the issue that concerns you? What issues do they generally support?

Review their biographical information and visit their websites. When you know what they stand for and what their background is, you can tailor your message more effectively and even relate to them on a personal level.

Share a brief personal experience that underscores the issue

It's important for legislators to see the person behind the words. Sharing a brief story about how you have been/could be impacted by action (or lack thereof) on the issue is important.

Try to pull in an experience that relates to their personal life, their values, or their politics. We are all multi-faceted human beings and can relate in many ways on many issues. Find the common ground or at a minimum try to impress upon them that their actions can impact you directly.



Focus on just one timely issue (and keep it brief)

It's easy to rattle off a list of demands, particularly when we are feeling frustrated or dismissed. However, doing this will only distract from your end goal of being heard and creating the change you want to see.

Pick one issue, preferably one that has active legislation moving through the voting process or if your Member of Congress is close to a vote.

Be Professional

Identify yourself as a constituent right away; legislators are much more willing to entertain opinions from voters that are from their own state or district. When writing, make sure you address your lawmaker respectfully by including their correct tittle and congressional committee if applicable. Be sure to thank them for their time and consideration at the end of your message. If you are lucky enough to get an in-person meeting, dress appropriately. You don't have to look like a banker or a lawyer but you definitely want to avoid club wear, jeans and sweatpants. Business casual is a good example of what to wear.

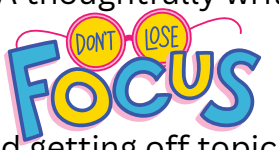
Facts, Not Feelings

Before presenting your position on an issue it's important that you take time to fully understand that issue and policies. After introducing yourself, include a short explanation about why you personally advocate or resist a certain bill. It's ok to express a feeling as in "I'm concerned about this bill's provision for "insert issue here," but going on and on about your feelings doesn't help your lawmaker. While your personal story is very important, it will resonate more deeply if you use reputable information to support your stance on how a specific piece of legislation will personally impact you.

Use a respectful tone

Don't be rude. Plain and simple. Calling names, belittling comments and a generally rage-filled tone will get your comments tossed. While it is sometimes hard to keep our emotions in check (especially when it comes to your wellbeing), it's important to use a professional and respectful tone throughout your conversation.

A thoughtfully written personal experience that is backed by factual information will go a lot farther than an angry rant.



Stay Focused

Avoid getting off topic with stories or similar issues that are only tangentially related. It is tempting to fill a brief silence on the phone or a blank email with more examples but trust that your representative is grateful that they know your concern in short order.

Follow Up

Be sure to thank your lawmaker for their time and consideration at the end of your letter or if you met in person, send a thank you along with any additional information you pledged to provide.



THANK YOU SO MUCH!

We depend on our community for donations and support to continue to help individuals with disabilities...Thank you!!!

R&R Construction
Sempra Infrastructure/LNG
Walmart Neighborhood Market - Lake Charles
Calcasieu Mechanical Contractors
Country Club Ladies Golf Association
Willie DeJean
Healthy Blue
Michael McHale
Fuse Entertainment
Lyondell Basel Employees



5 Things to Know Before Filing Taxes for People with Disabilities

With tax season upon us, here are 5 things you should know about the different tax credits for a child with a disability– plus the deductions and liabilities affecting families with children and adult dependents with disabilities.

1. Who can I claim as a dependent?

You can claim a person with disabilities as a dependent when:

- They have lived with you for more than half of the tax year.
- You have provided at least half of their support for the tax year.
- They are either your: child, stepchild, foster child, or a descendant of these.
- They are your brother, sister, stepsibling, father, mother, grandparent or other direct ancestor.
- They are not filing a tax return of their own.

2. What tax credits are there if I have a child or a dependent with disabilities?

Depending on your child's age and income, and your personal income, you may be able to claim the following:

- **Child tax credit** – Available for each qualifying child who will be under the age of 17 at the end of 2023. This credit is a total of $2,000 for each qualifying child for 2023.
- **Other dependent tax credit** — For dependents, other qualifying relatives, and even qualified dependents who are not related to the taxpayer, age 17 and older (including parents/grandparents), a credit of $500 may be available.
- **Child and dependent care tax credit** – For expenses incurred so that parents can work or look for work. Married people must both work, or one must work while the other is a full-time student, has a disability, or is looking for work (provided that the spouse looking for work has earnings during the year). This credit equals up to 50% of childcare expenses, limited to $8,000 for the care of one child and $16,000 for two or more qualifying persons.
- **Qualified retirement savings contributions credit** - For contributions to ABLE accounts by designated beneficiaries.

3. What about medical deductions and taxes?

Medical deductions can be considered for both the person with a disability and the people claiming that person as a dependent. These may include:

- Unreimbursed health care expenses
- Special schooling, training, or therapy
- Travel expenses to and from medical and therapy appointments
- Education aides
- Diagnostic evaluations
- Home improvements and/or modifications
- Cost of following special medically recommended diets
- Medically recommended conferences and seminars
- Genetic testing (related to a medical condition)
- Removal of lead paint

4. What if I'm filing for myself?

If you are an adult with disabilities filing taxes for yourself, here are 2 important considerations:

- **Impairment-Related Work Expenses deduction** – These are business expenses that are necessary for you to be able to work. These expenses are deductible only if you have a physical or intellectual disability that is a functional limitation to employment or that substantially limits one or more major life activities such as walking, speaking, and performing manual tasks.
- **Elderly and disabled tax credit** – Available to every U.S. citizen, who has reached age 65 during the tax year or those under 65 who are retired on permanent and total disability, and received taxable disability income in 2023. You may be eligible for this credit in the amount of $5000 to $7,500 depending on your circumstances.

5. What else should I think about?

- **IRC section 529 plans**– Although considered college savings plans; these have been expanded for use for certain K-12 tuition and expenses as well as qualified apprenticeships in the trades. Plus, the cost of certain services used by some children with disabilities is considered a qualified higher education expense for 529 college savings plans.
- ABLE Accounts– The Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2014 allows states to create tax-advantaged savings programs for eligible people with disabilities (also known as designated beneficiaries). Contributions to ABLE accounts can help designated beneficiaries save for qualified disability expenses. Distributions are tax-free if used for qualified disability expenses.
- Special needs trusts (SNTs) **and Health Savings Accounts (HSAs)** are important financial and tax planning tools that can significantly contribute to a person's quality of life. It is important to understand the opportunities that each of these provides.

***This overview is not intended as tax advice. People with disabilities and their families should consult a tax professional about their specific circumstances.**

For Full Article click here:



I am CAPABLE

How Trump's Plan To Close The Ed Department Might Impact Students With Disabilities

November 18, 2024 by Disability Scoop

President-elect Donald Trump says he wants to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education, but experts are split on what that would mean for students with disabilities across the nation.

On the campaign trail, Trump pledged to close the federal agency responsible for overseeing implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and enforcing it.

Shuttering the Education Department would require an act of Congress, but with the former president headed back to the White House, the question of how such a move might impact students in special education emerged at a public briefing of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.



Amidst a discussion about teacher shortages, Commissioner Mondaire Jones asked a panel of experts to address how closing the Department of Education could affect students with disabilities.

Eric Hanushek, a fellow at the Hoover Institution at Stanford University who specializes in the economics of education, said that the push to close the Education Department is largely political and wouldn't fundamentally alter special education.

"I don't think eliminating the Department of Education would do much," he said. "Congress is the one who decides on appropriations and they would just redirect who in the executive branch is in charge of these appropriations. So that I don't think it has any obvious impacts on IDEA funding or other funding."

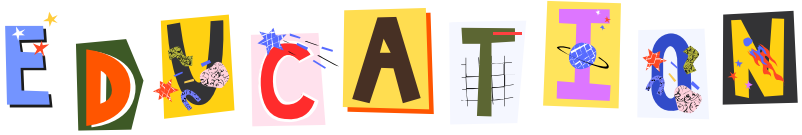
However, Hanushek did acknowledge that that doing away with the Education Department might lead to less emphasis on special education if it were tucked into a larger federal agency with other priorities and such changes could compromise the collection of data and the research role of the agency.

William Trachman, general counsel at Mountain States Legal Foundation, a conservative public interest law firm, said that the implications will largely come down to details.

"A lot of the question depends on what replaces a Department of Education," Trachman said. "If you are merely moving the civil rights office to the (Department of Justice) and the special education office to (the Department of Health and Human Services) and you are block granting things to the states, a lot of the impact of what happens is going to be revealed through those details which I don't believe any proposal have spelled out so far."

Others, however, said the consequences of dismantling the Education Department could be dire for students with disabilities, particularly in terms of access and equity and the protection of civil rights.





“Without a large governing body, there is going to be no regulation on who gets what,” said Amanda Levin Mazin, a senior lecturer at Columbia University’s Teachers College. “So the disparities that already exist in educational opportunities for students not only with disabilities but students who are marginalized for other reasons will be exacerbated. There is no more, there will be no more guarantee of basic educational rights which is really what IDEA, Title I and other aspects of the Department of Education really provide.”

Levin Mazin noted that the Education Department plays a large role in providing funding to colleges and universities to prepare special education teachers and she worries that without the agency, the pipeline of qualified educators would end.

Likewise, Jessica Levin, litigation director at the nonprofit Education Law Center, noted that the Education Department is more than just a means to pass funding to states.

“It’s in federal law that the core of special education rights are found and the Department of Education and the experts within it play a crucial role in enforcing those civil rights for students with disabilities across the country,” she said. “This is an incredibly dangerous proposal both on a practical and symbolic level.”

To read more click here:



Social Security

News Related to Social Security

Below are articles from the Social Security Administration's website related to Social Security that you may be interested in reading:

- New and Updated Overpayment Waiver Policies – Nov 25, 2024
- Helpful Social Security Resources for People Experiencing Homelessness – Nov 21, 2024
- An Important Update on Manner of Appearance – Updates the ways that claimants may attend their administrative law judge (ALJ) hearings – Nov 21, 2024
- Changes to Accessing Social Security Office In-Person Services – Nov 13, 2024

MORE INFO

KNOW YOUR SPECIAL EDUCATION RIGHTS

Webinar

Wednesday, January 22, 2025
12 PM

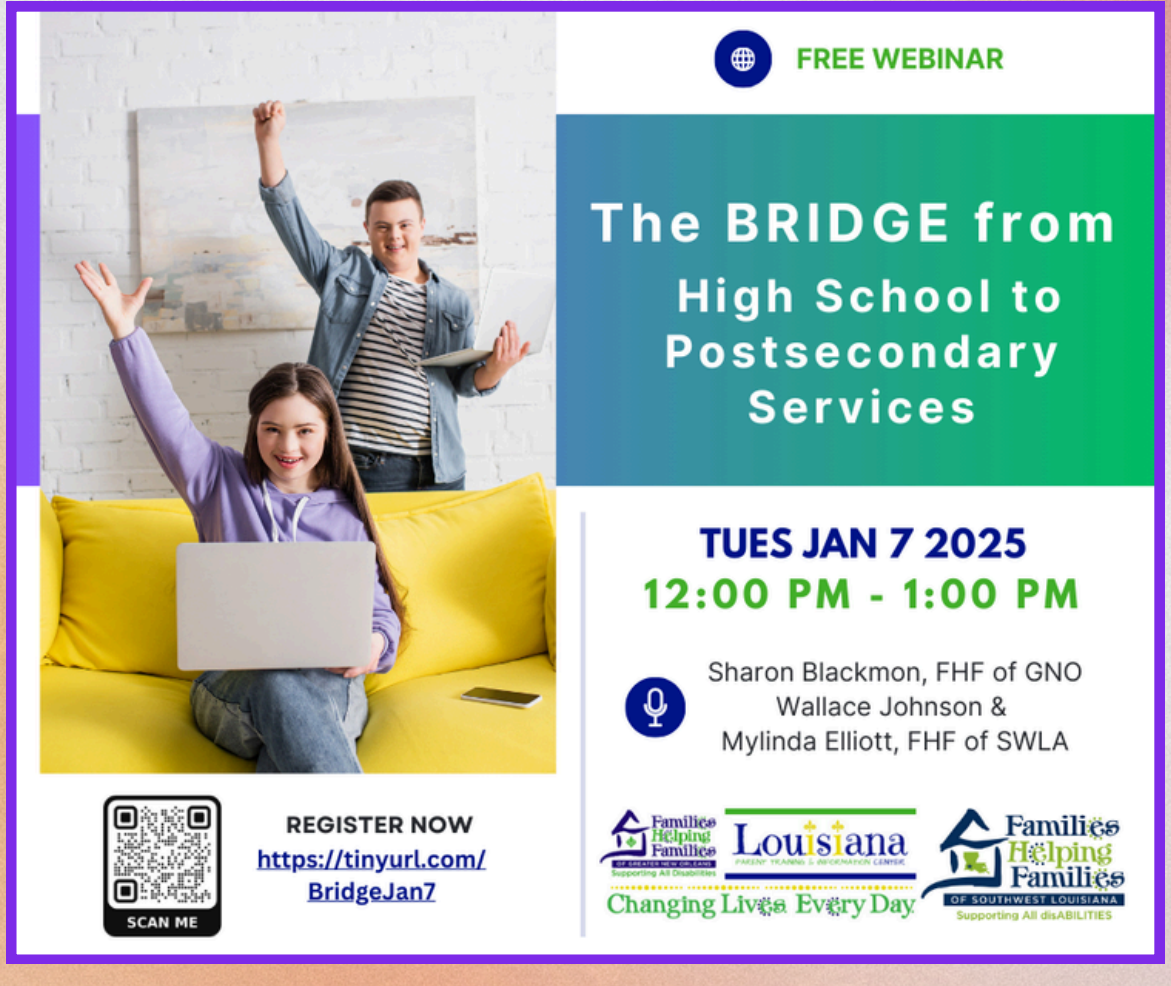
Link to Register:
https://tinyurl.com/ParentsRightsSPED12225

Join us for this free webinar where we will discuss parent rights in special education.

Presented by:
Mylinda Elliott &
Wallace Johnson
Education Support Specialists

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Supporting All disABILITIES





Learn How to Stop Bullying!

We are so excited to introduce you to Louie Louisiana & Krewe! This Children's Coloring Book was created with you in mind! It was designed to help you learn How to Stop Bullying! We also have included games and puzzles featuring some animal friends from our home State of Louisiana!

The Louisiana Children's Trust Fund was created in 1983 by the Louisiana Legislature to allocate funds to agencies and organizations that are addressing child abuse and neglect prevention throughout our State. The mission of the Louisiana Children's Trust Fund is to prevent child abuse and neglect among Louisiana's children and families through building strong cross-sector partnerships and through increased child safety public awareness.

Our primary purpose is to support community-based efforts to develop, operate, expand, enhance, and coordinate initiatives, programs and activities to prevent child abuse and neglect, to support the coordination of resources and activities to better strengthen and support families to reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect, and to foster understanding, appreciation, and knowledge of diverse populations in order to effectively prevent and treat child abuse and neglect. LCTF is managed by an appointed Executive Director and overseen by a Board of Directors. We are located in the Governor's Office of Programs and Planning and are thrilled to continue fighting to protect the State's most important asset...OUR CHILDREN!



For coloring book or coloring sheets:





earlySteps

louisiana's early intervention system

EARLY STEPS FAMILY ORIENTATION WEBINAR

JANUARY 30, 2025
11 AM - 12:30 PM

LINK TO REGISTER:
https://tinyurl.com/ESF013025

EARLY STEPS TRANSITION WEBINAR

JANUARY 30, 2025
1 PM - 2:30 PM

LINK TO REGISTER:
https://tinyurl.com/EST13025



Families Helping Families
OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA
Supporting All disABILITIES

As a parent/caregiver of a child currently receiving services from EarlySteps, I would like to invite you to a parent orientation workshop to help you and your child get the most out of your experience from the services provided.

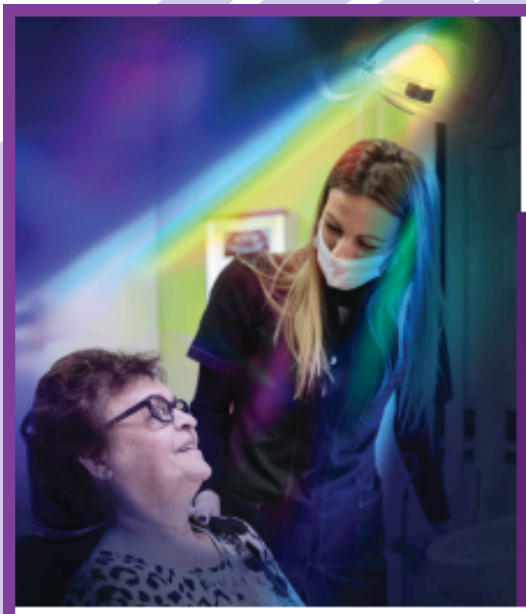
These topics and more will be covered:
What is EarlySteps?
What are my roles and responsibilities?
What are my rights as a parent?

Join us to get more Information about Early Steps Transition.

China Guillory- Community Outreach Specialist will walk you through the process of Transition from Early Steps.

Guest Speaker: Mylinda Elliott, Education Support Specialist, will discuss Transition for 3 year olds.

For More Information
Contact China Guillory
(337) 436-2570 ♦ 1-800-894-6558
info@fhfswla.org ♦ https://www.fhfswla.org



Dental Lifeline Network. 50 YEARS

Are you in Need of Dental Assistance?

Dental Lifeline Network's Donated Dental Services (DDS) program provides comprehensive dental care to adults who are elderly, have disabilities, or are medically fragile across the United States.

Visit DentalLifeline.org/help to learn more and apply for help today.



LaCAN-FHFSWLA Legislative Roundtable for Southwest Louisiana Area

Tuesday, February 18, 2025 from 10 AM to 12 PM

Join Families Helping Families of SWLA, LaCAN, and the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council as we meet with Individuals with disabilities, their family members, and the professionals who support individuals with disabilities, to discuss the LaCAN 2025 Legislative Agenda with area legislators.

Our co-host is: Senator Stine

Link to Register: https://tinyurl.com/LACANRT5-21825

Ensuring Access: Resources for Medical Transportation Assistance

Getting to and from doctor's appointments is an essential part of maintaining our health and the health of our family members. However, for some, accessing these appointments can be challenging for various reasons. It might be due to a family member being unavailable to provide transportation or because your vehicle isn't equipped to accommodate medical devices such as wheelchairs.

Access to healthcare is a necessity and should not be put on hold due to a lack of reliable transportation. So, what can you do? Most insurance providers—whether Medicaid, Medicare, or private insurance—often offer services you can utilize for medical transportation. Be sure to explore your provider's services and know what is available per your policy.

You can also locate local community resources that may offer transportation services. Your region's Families Helping Families organization would likely be happy to provide you with resources specific to your area. Another idea is to check if your city offers public transit options that are accessible to you.

This could also include rideshare services like Uber and Lyft, which provide specialized options such as Uber Health and Lyft Healthcare. These services partner with healthcare organizations to offer rides to medical appointments. Additionally, contacting your clinic or hospital may be a viable option, as some facilities provide transportation assistance.
All this is to say there are services available that can be utilized for your health and well-being. However, in more rural areas, accessing these services may be more challenging. Below, you'll find links to resources and information about medical transportation options that can help make accessing care easier.

Bureau of Health Services Financing (Medicaid) - LDH - Medical Transportation
Provider & Plan Resources - LDH - Medical Transportation Provider Resources
Sign Up for Lyft Healthcare
Uber Health - Home Page
Louisiana Healthcare Connections - Information for Transportation to Appointments
Healthy Blue Transportation Services
Humana Medical Transportation Services
Aetna Medical Transportation Services

For further reading on Rural Healthcare visit: Rural Health Information Hub



Louisiana FAMILY VOICES®

Louisiana F2FHIC FAMILY to FAMILY Health Information Center



FHF will be closed
January 20, 2025
for
MLK Day









March 9, 2025
Time change -
Spring Forward one Hour

March 20, 2025
First Day of Spring









LaCAN Membership & FHF Advocacy Training Webinar

Why You will love it:

- Meet Other Advocates for People with Disabilities
- Learn About LACAN's Advocacy Efforts
- Pick Up Tips on How to Advocate on State Level

FRIDAY
JANUARY 24, 2025
AT 10 AM

Register At:

https://tinyurl.com/LACANAT12425

For more information:
contact Families Helping Families
of Southwest Louisiana
337-436-2570 • 1-800-894-6558
info@fhfswla.org • www.fhfswla.org

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VITA Initiative - Tax Preparation

People in great need often file early - and at great expense - through commercial tax preparation services that charge large fees. We want to spread the word that FREE tax help is available. By filing returns at local VITA sites people receive 100% of their refund. IRS-trained volunteers can help you find special tax credits. Our VITA initiative offers free tax help to individuals, families, persons with disabilities, the elderly and limited English speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns. IRS-certified volunteers provide free basic income tax return preparation with electronic filing to qualified individuals.

WHAT SHOULD I BRING WITH ME?

- Current Photo ID (both spouses, if joint return)
- Social Security Card or ITIN for each family member to be claimed on the tax return
  - Can substitute with a Social Security Income Statement(s)
- All forms of income from 2024 (W2, 1099-NEC, 1099-MISC or 1098)
- End-of-the-year retirement plan statements (401K, IRA, etc.)
- Childcare provider name, address and tax ID number
- Record of expenses (child care, education, medical, dental, etc.)
- Receipts for charitable donations, business expenses, etc.
- Health Insurance Marketplace Statement (1095a) if applicable
- Banking Information for direct deposit (voided check or routing/checking account numbers)
- Last year's tax return, if available

APPOINTMENTS ARE EASY TO MAKE UNITEDWAYSWLA.ORG/VITA or DIAL 211

UNITED WAY Southwest Louisiana

VITA Volunteer Income Tax Assistance
A United Way of Southwest Louisiana Initiative

UNITEDWAYSWLA.ORG/VITA
ALLEN - BEAUREGARD - CALCASIEU - CAMERON - JEFF DAVIS

United Way Southwest Louisiana · IRS · entergy · Capital One

FAMILIES HELPING FAMILIES
IT'S WHO WE ARE!
IT'S WHAT WE DO!

Invest in Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana.

FHFSWLA is a 501 (c)3 nonprofit agency that relies on donations to meet the needs of our agency's mission and vision. By donating to FHFSWLA you are investing in the lives of people with disabilities and their families. If passion paid, we would be the richest nonprofit in SWLA. Unfortunately, passion alone does not fully support our organization.

Please consider making a contribution so families who are touched by disability can be assured this one of a kind, family directed resource center is always here when they need us.

Contributions can be made to:
Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana
P O Box 1627
Lake Charles, LA 70602

FHF is funded in part by a contract from the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council.

Families Helping Families
OF SOUTHWEST LOUISIANA
Supporting All disABILITIES



Families Helping Families of Southwest Louisiana
MAILING ADDRESS: P O BOX 1627, LAKE CHARLES, LA 70602
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(337) 436-2570 • 1-800-894-6558 • (337) 436-2578 FAX
EMAIL: INFO@FHFSWLA.ORG
WEBSITE: HTTPS://WWW.FHFSWLA.ORG
FACEBOOK: https://www.facebook.com/fhfswla

Riddle Answer:
The letter "R"

Opinions contained herein do not necessarily represent those of the funding source, and no endorsement should be inferred.