

Title: Special Education Training for Parents: "EPIC 2-Day Advocacy Intensive"

Draft: 1

Date: March 24, 2026



Request for Use of Utah State Board of Education Discretionary Funds for a Special Education Advocacy training: "EPIC 2-Day Advocacy Intensive"

Introduction

Karen Mayer Cunningham provides training across the nation about special education, specifically the development and implementation of an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Her goal is "empowering parents, advocates, and educators to navigate special education with confidence".

The "Epic 2-Day Advocacy Intensive" training includes:

- "Step-by-steps training on IEPs and 504s
- Shared language, strategy, and expectations
- Practical guidance for meetings, evaluations, and services"

Estimated Costs

Speaker cost per event: $\$15,000 \times 2 \text{ events} = \$30,000$. Ms. Cunningham would arrive the night before the first two-day event, have one day after the first event to travel and get to the next event, then complete the final two-day event and fly out the day after. (For example: She would fly in Sunday, present on Monday and Tuesday in northern Utah, use Wednesday to reset and travel to southern Utah, then present on Thursday and Friday in southern Utah, and fly out on Saturday).

Karen will present to as many people as we want to invite.

The only items USBE would be responsible for are hotel rooms the night before the first event and the night between the two days of training. The state rate for hotel rooms is about \$100 a night so it would cost about \$200 per parent/couple that lives more than 50 miles from the conference Venue.

USBE would also need to secure and pay for the venue, but we would secure a school district or university auditorium to minimize venue costs.

USBE staff consulted with Utah Parent Center (UPC) staff to determine how many parents they would expect to attend. They were concerned that a few parents might attend an all-day session but they are concerned that few parents would attend a two-day session. In their recent experience, parents prefer sessions of 1-2 hour durations, after the dinner hour.

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This draft is for consideration during the Finance Committee Meeting (April 3, 2026)

Rule/Statute: [R277-750](#)

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Consideration

Ms. Cunningham came as a keynote presenter to the Utah Institute for the Post-Secondary Transition for students with disabilities in June 2024. Parents were invited but were not the key audience targeted. About 20 parents registered, which included staff from the UPC. Feedback about the session was mostly positive (on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being "excellent: and 1 being "poor", her average rating was 3.9 from 98 respondents.) Most attendees found her engaging and appreciated her message about the need to advocate for students eligible for special education, but several attendees were put off by their perception of her stereotypical attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, especially those with autism.

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