

Q. How did grassroots advocacy by parents in the 1950s and 1960s set the stage for the PARC case and its landmark outcome?

A. Parents became increasingly concerned about the well-being of their children, in how various, but not all, school districts in the Commonwealth were using statutes to exclude educational or job training opportunities to students depending upon their perceived abilities and age. Because these statutes were not intended to be used in such a manner, their advocacy led to PARC's law team successfully challenging the schools and the state Department of Education in court.

Q. In your view, how did the PARC v. Pennsylvania case redefine both the rights of individuals with disabilities and the responsibilities of public education systems?

A. Due to this decision, Congress took action to require adequate education and training for children with IDD. Education for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities must be meaningful, appropriate to the child's capacity for every student between the ages of six to 21, and if the school provides pre-school, then these students also must be provided with such a level of educational opportunity as well. Placement in regular public-school class was finally determined to be the preferable placement before special classes or outside placement. Education was determined not just to be academic, but also a continuous process by which individuals learn to cope and function in their environment. The decision also led to parents being entitled to certain due process when determining the educational environment and programs for their child. It also completely reformed education in the states because it required a state plan for the identification, location, and evaluation of children suspected of having an intellectual or developmental disability. It furthermore required a state plan for special education for those who were identified.

Q. What role did organizations like The Arc play in providing support and advocacy for families during the PARC case and in the years that followed?

A. The Arc was the organization parents turned to for support and services and continues to be the premier organization at the national, state, and local levels to advocate for, and even provide programming to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Q. How do you see the principles established by PARC influencing current advocacy for inclusive education policies?

A. Recently the state's Basic Education Funding Commission showed that funding for education was inadequate, and inequitable. The same will soon be shown again when the Special Education Funding Commission meets. State funding for special education is being far outpaced by the costs associated. This leaves an extreme burden at the local level and

provides inadequate and inequitable educational opportunity to students receiving or needing special education services.

Q. What advice would you offer young advocates and students who want to continue advancing the rights of individuals with disabilities?

A. Listen to the voices of those who live these lives. This includes self-advocates, families, educators, workforce developers, and caregivers.

Q. What challenges remain in ensuring that public institutions fulfill their responsibilities to provide equitable opportunities for individuals with disabilities?

A. We must fully include individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in society. Early intervention needs to be prioritized. Special education needs to be properly funded at the state and national level. The workplace needs to be accommodating and open to the skillsets that these individuals have, as they are an untapped resource especially when we have a workforce shortage. Public places need to be accommodating as they are to be for all people.

Q. How has the advocacy landscape for people with disabilities changed over the years, and what do you see as the next frontier for The Arc's mission?

A. After certain wins, as with most issues for advocacy, there is a shift in involvement. But nobody is included until everyone is included. In the coming year, the Arc of Pennsylvania will begin working with other organizations to address disparities in the criminal justice system that are beyond training law enforcement to recognize behavior abnormalities. We will look at all branches of the system, not limited to juvenile detention and the pipeline from special education, probation, corrections, and the courts.