

PANEL TWO: Parents Lead the Way (1960-1974)
EDUCATOR DISCUSSION GUIDE
For K-12 Teachers

Overview: This panel explores how parent advocacy in the 1960s-1970s transformed disability services in Missouri. Students will learn about grassroots organizing, the power of collective action, and how ordinary citizens can change laws and systems.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (Grades K-5)

Key Concepts for Young Learners:

- Parents worked together to help their children
- When services didn't exist, families created them
- Communities can vote to help neighbors who need support

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean when the panel says parents "rejected this advice and began organizing for change"?
2. The panel mentions parents started preschools, summer camps, and therapy programs. Why did they have to start these programs themselves?
3. What is brave about parents telling lawmakers that children with disabilities deserve help?
4. The panel talks about parents holding bake sales and meeting in church basements. Why do you think they worked so hard?

Activity: "Building What We Need"

- Divide class into small groups
- Present a problem: "Imagine your school doesn't have a playground. What would you do?"
- Have students brainstorm solutions: fundraising, asking for help, organizing families
- Connect to panel: "This is what parents in the 1960s did—they found solutions when no one else would help"
- Create poster showing their problem-solving plan

Book Connections:

- "The Day You Begin" by Jacqueline Woodson (about belonging and advocacy)
- "What Do You Do With a Problem?" by Kobi Yamada (about solving challenges)
- "Separate Is Never Equal" by Duncan Tonatui (about parents fighting for educational rights)

Simple Concept - Senate Bill 40: "Grown-ups in Missouri decided communities could vote to help families who needed support. This meant that if neighbors wanted to help

children with disabilities, they could vote to use some of their tax money to create programs. Lots of communities said yes!"

MIDDLE SCHOOL (Grades 6-8)

Key Concepts:

- Grassroots organizing can create systemic change
- Legal and policy victories often follow years of community building
- Parent advocacy connected to broader 1960s-70s social movements
- Local action (county boards) combined with national efforts (federal legislation)

Discussion Questions:

1. The panel says families were told in the 1960s that their children "could not be educated." What assumptions about disability drove this advice?
2. Compare the parent movement for disability rights to other civil rights movements of the 1960s-70s (African American civil rights, women's rights, farmworker rights). What strategies and tactics were similar?
3. Why did parents focus on creating grassroots programs BEFORE pushing for legislation? How did running preschools and camps help them make a political case?
4. Senate Bill 40 gave counties the power to tax themselves to fund disability services. Why might local control have been important? What are advantages and disadvantages of county-by-county funding versus statewide programs?
5. The panel mentions parent groups held bake sales and met in church basements—describing very modest resources. How did they turn such small beginnings into statewide policy change?

Activity: "Advocacy Campaign Simulation"

Students role-play a 1960s Missouri parent advocacy campaign:

Roles:

- Parent advocates (creating a program and seeking funding)
- County commissioners (deciding whether to support SB 40 tax levy)
- Local newspaper reporters (covering the story)
- Community members (voting yes or no)

Steps:

1. Parent advocates prepare a 2-minute presentation: Why do children need services? What will the program do? How will tax dollars be used?
2. Commissioners ask tough questions
3. Community members debate pros and cons
4. Class votes on funding
5. Debrief: What arguments were most persuasive? What challenges did advocates face?

Research Project:

Have students investigate one of these topics:

- History of The Arc in Missouri (St. Louis, Kansas City, or state chapter)
- Missouri Senate Bill 40 and its implementation in different counties
- Timeline of federal disability rights laws (1960s-1970s)
- Comparison: Disability rights movement and another 1960s-70s social movement

Writing Prompt:

"Imagine you're a parent in 1965 Missouri with a child who has Down syndrome. Doctors have told you to institutionalize your child. Write a letter to other parents in your community explaining why you're starting a support group and what you hope to accomplish together."

Connection to Today:

- How do parent advocacy organizations work today?
 - What issues are parents currently organizing around (education, healthcare, housing)?
 - Find examples of modern grassroots organizations in your community
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HIGH SCHOOL (Grades 9-12)**Key Concepts:**

- Policy change often follows successful demonstration projects
- Grassroots movements build power through service provision, not just protest
- Federalism (local, state, federal) shaped disability policy development
- 1960s-70s social movements were interconnected and influenced each other
- Parent activism challenged professional/medical authority

Discussion Questions:

1. **Strategy Analysis:** Why did parents focus on creating services (preschools, camps, therapy clinics) rather than immediately pursuing legislation? How did running programs strengthen their political case?
2. **Federalism and Policy:** Senate Bill 40 created county-level control rather than a statewide program. Analyze the politics of this choice. Why might local control have been more achievable in 1969? What are the equity implications when different counties fund services at different levels?
3. **Challenging Medical Authority:** In the 1960s, doctors held enormous authority, and most told parents to institutionalize children with disabilities. How did parents—many of whom were mothers without professional credentials—challenge this medical consensus? What gave them the credibility to say doctors were wrong?
4. **Intersecting Movements:** The panel notes this occurred during the civil rights era, women's movement, and other social upheaval. Research how disability advocates borrowed strategies from other movements. Did they face similar opposition? Were there coalition opportunities?

5. **From Grassroots to Federal:** Trace how parent organizing in places like Missouri contributed to federal legislation. What was the pathway from local preschools (1960s) to state law (SB 40, 1969) to federal law (IDEA, 1975)?

Research Project Options:

Option 1: Legislative History Deep Dive

Research Missouri Senate Bill 40:

- Who sponsored it? What was the legislative debate?
- How did it pass? Was there opposition?
- How was it implemented across different counties?
- Interview someone who worked with an SB 40-funded board
- Analyze: Did local control lead to inequities? Which counties moved quickly? Which lagged?

Create a detailed timeline and policy analysis paper.

Option 2: Oral History Project

Interview someone who was involved in parent advocacy during 1960s-1970s:

- What motivated them to get involved?
- What strategies did they use?
- What obstacles did they face?
- What surprised them about their success?
- What advice do they have for today's advocates?

Record and transcribe interview; create a short documentary or written narrative.

Option 3: Comparative Movement Analysis

Compare the disability rights parent movement to another 1960s-70s social movement:

- What tactics and strategies overlapped?
- How did movements influence each other?
- What made disability advocacy unique?
- Which movement achieved policy victories faster, and why?

Create a multimedia presentation with primary sources.

Option 4: Policy Impact Study

Research the long-term impact of SB 40 in your county or another Missouri county:

- What services does the board fund today?
- How much money has been raised over 50+ years?
- How many people have been served?
- Interview current board members or service recipients
- Evaluate: Has this model been successful?

Philosophical Discussion:

1. **Authority and Expertise:** When should parents' experiential knowledge outweigh professional medical advice? How do we balance expert opinion with lived experience?
2. **Charity vs. Rights:** The panel shows parents starting with charity-based services (bake sales, volunteers) and progressing to rights-based public funding. What's the difference between charity and rights? Why does it matter?
3. **Democratic Change:** Parents convinced their neighbors to vote for increased taxes to fund disability services. What does this say about democracy's potential to address minority needs? What conditions make this kind of local decision-making possible?

Connection to Current Issues:

- Research current parent advocacy organizations (local, state, national)
- Identify contemporary education or disability policy debates where parents are organizing
- Compare parent organizing tactics: What's changed since the 1970s? What's stayed the same?
- Social media advocacy: How have digital tools changed grassroots organizing?

Writing Assignments:

1. **Argumentative Essay:** "Was the Missouri approach (county-by-county through SB 40) better than a statewide program would have been? Defend your answer considering equity, local control, and practical politics of 1969."
2. **Historical Analysis:** "Analyze the relationship between Missouri parent organizing and federal IDEA legislation. How did local efforts contribute to national policy change?"
3. **Creative Historical Writing:** Write from the perspective of:
 - A mother testifying before the Missouri legislature in 1969
 - A county commissioner deciding whether to support an SB 40 levy
 - A child attending one of the first parent-run preschools

INTERACTIVE QUIZ

10 Questions for Google Forms or other

Question 1: In the 1960s, what were most families told to do when they had a child with a disability?

- A) Enroll them in special public schools
- B) Institutionalize them and "move on with their lives"
- C) Seek early intervention therapy
- D) Apply for government funding for home care

Correct Answer: B

Explanation: As recently as the 1960s, doctors routinely advised parents to place children with disabilities in institutions, claiming they could not learn or benefit from family life.

Question 2: How did parents initially respond to lack of services in the 1960s?

- A) They accepted doctors' advice and institutionalized their children
- B) They waited for the government to create programs
- C) They created their own grassroots programs—preschools, camps, therapy clinics
- D) They moved to other states with better services

Correct Answer: C

Explanation: When public services didn't exist, parents created them—launching preschools, summer camps, and therapy clinics, often meeting in church basements and funded by bake sales.

Question 3: What was Missouri Senate Bill 40, passed in 1969?

- A) A law requiring all schools to accept children with disabilities
- B) Legislation allowing counties to create tax levies to fund disability services
- C) A state mandate to close all institutions
- D) Federal funding for special education

Correct Answer: B

Explanation: Senate Bill 40 empowered individual counties to establish special property tax levies—approved by local voters—to fund services for people with developmental disabilities.

Question 4: Why was Senate Bill 40 significant?

- A) It was the first disability rights law in America
- B) It provided federal funding for Missouri programs
- C) It gave communities local control and sustainable public funding for disability services
- D) It required all Missouri schools to offer special education

Correct Answer: C

Explanation: SB 40 was significant because it allowed communities to raise their own money through voter-approved tax levies, creating sustainable public infrastructure rather than relying on charity or volunteer efforts.

Question 5: What strategies did Missouri parents use to advocate for change?

- A) Only wrote letters to politicians
- B) Created demonstration programs, testified before legislators, and built coalitions
- C) Focused only on court cases
- D) Relied on professional advocates to speak for them

Correct Answer: B

Explanation: Parents used multiple strategies: they created working programs to prove children could learn, testified before legislative committees, organized letter-writing campaigns, and built coalitions with sympathetic professionals.

Question 6: How did the parent-run programs help change public policy?

- A) They didn't affect policy
- B) They demonstrated that children with disabilities could learn, providing evidence for policy arguments
- C) They replaced the need for public programs
- D) They only helped a few families

Correct Answer: B

Explanation: The grassroots programs parents created proved that with appropriate support, children with disabilities could learn and thrive. This evidence strengthened their political case for public funding.

Question 7: The panel mentions that Missouri's parent movement connected to national efforts. Which federal law was being developed during this period?

- A) Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- B) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
- C) Education for All Handicapped Children Act (later called IDEA)
- D) Social Security Disability Insurance

Correct Answer: C

Explanation: During 1960-1974, parent advocacy across the nation built momentum for the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), which passed in 1975 and later became IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

Question 8: What does the panel mean when it says parents "proved that children could learn"?

- A) Children passed standardized tests
- B) Through their programs, parents demonstrated children could make progress when given appropriate support
- C) All children were cured of their disabilities
- D) Medical understanding changed overnight

Correct Answer: B

Explanation: Parents' programs showed that children with disabilities could learn and develop skills when given appropriate educational support and therapy—directly challenging the medical establishment's claims that such efforts were pointless.

Question 9: Why was local control (county-level decision-making through SB 40) important?

- A) It wasn't important—state control would have been better
- B) It allowed communities to respond to local needs and gave neighbors a voice through voting
- C) Counties had more money than the state
- D) Federal law required local control

Correct Answer: B

Explanation: Local control meant communities could tailor services to their needs and citizens could vote directly on whether to fund disability services, creating democratic buy-in and sustainable support.

Question 10: What historical lesson does this panel offer about creating change?

- A) Change requires wealth and political connections
- B) Only professionals can create effective programs
- C) Ordinary citizens organizing together can build services, change laws, and transform systems
- D) Change happens quickly if you ask politely

Correct Answer: C

Explanation: The panel shows how ordinary parents—without professional credentials, wealth, or political power—organized together to create programs, secure public funding, change state law, and contribute to national policy reform.

BONUS REFLECTION QUESTION (Open-ended):

"The parents in this story were told their efforts were pointless and their children couldn't learn. What do you think gave them the courage to keep organizing anyway? What can we learn from their persistence?"
