



COPAA presents Diane Lipton Advocacy Award to Ellen Chambers at March 2009 COPAA Conference

The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. is proud to announce advocate Ellen Chambers as the recipient of the 2009 Diane Lipton Award for Outstanding Educational Advocacy on Behalf of Children with Disabilities. Ellen is the founder and Executive Director of SPEDWatch, Inc, a non-profit civil rights organization working to secure the educational rights of all Massachusetts students with special needs.

The award was presented at the Eleventh Annual COPAA Conference in Washington, D.C. on March 6, 2009. The COPAA conference, a four-day event, features workshops about legal and advocacy issues affecting the rights of children with disabilities.



Ellen M. Chambers, MBA

Ms. Chambers has dedicated the last 13 years of her life to special education rights and advocacy. She began her career as a special education advocate in 1995, fighting as many do, for her own child's rights. She went on to advocate for hundreds of families.

Ms. Chambers created SPEDWatch in 2005, after years in practice as a special education advocate assisting parents of children with disabilities. SPEDWatch provides an infrastructure for a membership-based civil rights and social change movement devoted to the rights of children with disabilities in Massachusetts.

With few resources or staff, Ms. Chambers has worked to alter the Massachusetts special education landscape by issuing a report, "Broken Promises" exposing the scope and consequences of school district noncompliance with special education law; launching a website to stimulate broad discussion of children's special education rights in Massachusetts; staging protest demonstrations; creating briefing papers for parents to use; publishing a newsletter devoted to fighting for special education rights; advocating for a television program featuring special-education issues that aired in November 2007; and creating an advocacy listserv for parents, teachers, and professionals.

The Diane Lipton Award honors the memory of founding COPAA Board member Diane Lipton, a tireless advocate for children with disabilities for over two decades. She began as a parent-advocate on behalf of her own daughter, Chloe, who had been placed in a segregated school, separated from her non-disabled peers by a chain link fence. Ms. Lipton became an attorney for the Disabilities Rights Education and Defense Fund.