

2026 ADVOCACY DAY FOR ACCESS & INDEPENDENCE TEACHER'S GUIDE



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ADVOCACY DAY FOR ACCESS & INDEPENDENCE (ADA I) OVERVIEW

People with disabilities face unnecessary and discriminatory barriers to full and integrated community participation. Advocacy Day for Access & Independence is our day to use the grounds of the South Carolina State House to rally and call on the lawmakers to Unlock Barriers, advocate for disability rights, and a Barrier-Free SC!

This guide can be used by educators in any setting - high school, college, after-school programs, ministries, and others - to help students learn how to build advocacy skills. It offers activity ideas for classroom activities prior to Advocacy Day and ideas for how to integrate Advocacy Day into your classroom during the event, in person or virtually.

Learn more about Advocacy Day and sign up to support: www.unlockingbarriers-sc.org

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We hope this guide is the first step in helping your students build disability pride and develop an interest in advocacy that will serve them on their lifelong journey of pushing for access and independence.

TOPICS

Learn how we can unlock barriers around:

- Discrimination
- Employment
- Housing
- Transportation
- Healthcare
- Education

FORMAT

Advocacy Day for Access & Independence is a hybrid event.

- Come and engage with us at our Statehouse speeches and events, or join the Livestream virtually through YouTube
- State legislators, officials, and activists from the disability community will be speaking about the barriers that South Carolinians with disabilities regularly face and the ways we can fix them
- Everyone will be walked through the process of contacting their representatives about the issues that matter to them, and they will be given tools to make advocacy easy

ACCESSIBILITY

What about accessibility?

- CART live-captioning services and American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters will be available to all viewers throughout the event
- Speeches are written largely in plain language, so that more people can understand what is said without having to know specific terms or a lot of background knowledge

OPTIONAL PRE-EVENT CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Here are some optional events that you can include in your curriculum in the days and weeks leading up to advocacy day to generate interest and give them background knowledge so they can get the most out of the event.

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POSTCARDS

Through our “Pillars of Truth” installation at ADAI, we are asking people to write a postcard to each of their lawmakers. Volunteers will add keys to the postcards you make and give them to lawmakers. Lawmakers will be given locks and use the keys they get from postcards to unlock them, symbolically unlocking the barriers for people with disabilities. Your students can write postcards to be included!

- Download our [postcard template](#) and print a class set
- Guide students in writing a sentence or two on a postcard
 - Make sure students limit themselves to one issue area for each postcard, but students can fill out multiple cards
 - Postcards written should speak about the barriers discussed in the official Advocacy Day issue area booklet produced for lawmakers.
- Assist students in mailing the postcards to their respective lawmakers

POSTERS

On advocacy day, volunteers and individuals hold posters facing the road, so that traffic and pedestrians can look to the statehouse and see all the people fighting for access and independence. These posters have slogans and icons that show what's important to the disability community. Your students can create posters in the same style and bring them to the in-person event. Have students research slogans that have been used in other disability rights protests so they can learn where the sayings come from. Be mindful of slogans and pictures that accidentally portray people with disabilities as objects of pity or false inspiration, like: “If I can do it...” or “What’s your excuse...”. Don’t be afraid to say DISABILITY, it’s not a bad word! The more we use it, the more we can break the stigma around it. Avoid saying things like “Differently Abled” or “Special Ability”. Disability isn’t good or bad, it just IS!

- As a class, school, or individual, make a sign, prop, statue, or art piece representing your perspective on the disability rights movement.
- Use slogans like:
 - Accessibility Is A Human Right
 - Nothing About Us Without Us
 - Progress Not Pity

DISABILITY HISTORY PROJECT

For youth to understand the present state of disability rights, they have to understand its history. Have students (in groups or individually) pick a person from the Disability Rights movement and research them using online resources, then share that information.

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- Have your students pick a person from disability rights history and research them.
 - Have them write a short report
 - Give a presentation, even dressing as the person
 - Record a short video as the person
- Some examples:
 - Judy Heumann
 - Alice Wong
 - Ed Roberts
 - Haben Girma

MOVIE

Movies are a great way to engage youth and have them see the journeys of other young advocates with disabilities throughout history and now. The two examples below feature advocates from history (like Judy Heumann) when they were high-school aged, and current young disability advocates like Samuel Habib. Both films come with an educator guide filled with discussion topics and project ideas. Be sure to review films before screening to ensure they align with your school's policies.

- Show clips from the movie *Crip Camp* (Rated R) or *The Ride Ahead* (Rated R) and use the guide to discuss disability rights
 - [Crip Camp](#)
 - [The Ride Ahead](#)
 - [Crip Camp Educator Guide](#)
 - [The Ride Ahead Educator Guide](#)

ADVOCACY APPS AND TOOLS

The three accessible digital tools below are a great way for students to learn about how local and federal laws that impact the disability community are made and passed. Exploring and using these tools is a great way to practice citizenship and real-world advocacy, and actually influence the decisions your representatives make beyond voting!

- Find your representatives using the link below and discuss their record on voting for or against measures affecting disability rights and access
 - [Find Your Legislators](#)
- Learn how to find bills that can affect your rights by looking at the “How do I” page on the State Legislature website
 - <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/howdoi.php>
- Explore the free “SC Legislature” app and learn how to follow the progress of bills
 - [mobile app](#)

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TAKE A FIELD TRIP

Visit us in person at the state house on Advocacy Day to see it all happen! We will have staff at the statehouse to help guide students through an interactive tour of everything ADAI has to offer.

- Listen to the speakers throughout the event
- Make a poster at our poster station
- Participate in the “Pillars of Truth” installation by writing a postcard to each of your lawmakers.
- Participate in a fun scavenger hunt to learn about the statehouse
 - [Statehouse scavenger hunt](#)
- Find your representative in the statehouse and deliver a postcard in person at the “Find My Lawmaker” booth.
- Take part in our on-stage closing ceremony!

TAKE A VIRTUAL FIELD TRIP

If you can't attend in person, visit us online during Advocacy Day to see it all happen virtually!

- Stream the event and listen to the speakers
- Download the statehouse app and complete a virtual tour
- Go to the “Find My Lawmaker” website and find your representative, and send an email as a class.
- Email videos and pictures of your classroom engaging in the event to show your community that you are advocates!