

Collaboration with Parents in IEP Meetings

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WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT PARENT EXPERIENCES WITHIN THE SPECIAL EDUCATION SYSTEM

- IEP meetings can be stressful
- The special education system can be overwhelming and confusing
- There is a power imbalance.
- Conflict can occur if families do not feel as if their voices are heard.

PARENT PERSPECTIVE

"We have all heard the phrase, 'It takes a village to raise a child.' Well, the person that came up with that saying must have had a child with challenges. When I look around the room at one of my son's team meetings, I see a village of people coming together for the common good of our child."

"The overall benefits of team meetings have been invaluable to us as a family. We have learned so much from these professionals who work with our son. Most of all, the team meetings have opened the door to a much higher level of communication between teachers, therapists, aides, and family members. It gives a greater understanding of how everyone is working with our son to become independent and successful."

Karen Whitty, Parent (2008)
www.tsbvi.edu.



7 PRINCIPLES OF COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP Best Practices

COMMUNICATION

- Develop a communication plan with families at the beginning of the school year.
 - Do they prefer text, phone, email?
 - How frequently do they like to be communicated with?
 - What types of things do they want to hear about?
- Be friendly
- Listen.
- When families reach out about something, it's usually something they have been worried about.
- Be clear in your communication.
- Be honest, even when it's bad news.
- Ensure families have the information they need to make decisions.
- Check in with families before the IEP meeting and frequently during the year.
- Send a draft IEP in advance – no surprises though.

PROFESSIONAL COMPETANCY

- Make sure you understand the student's needs.
- What can you learn from the family?
- If you don't know the answer, be honest about it. Try to find out the answer.
- Seek out appropriate professional development opportunities.
- Set high expectations for students.
- Ensure students are set up for success.
- Help parents to be realistic about goals and expectations.

PARTNERSHIP AND COLLABORATION

Collaboration benefits both families and professionals.

- We are “all in the business of education, together” (student, professionals, and families)
- There are student benefits to partnership – improved outcomes
- Can reduce or prevent conflict

Many things influence partnership

- Past/current relationships
- Trust
- Belief that child needs are being met.
- Professionals genuinely care and know their child
- 7 principles of partnership

10 STEPS TO IEP SUCCESS

1. Pre-plan
2. Have an agenda
3. Agree on meeting norms
4. Share student strengths/areas of need
5. Agree on outcomes
6. Ensure a supportive environment
7. Gain consensus
8. Use a parking lot if necessary
9. Allow time for questions, comments, and clarification
10. Create an action plan.

VERB PHRASES THAT KEEP THINGS NEUTRAL AND FACTUAL

- What I hear you saying is...
- Help me understand...
- It sounds like what you would like is...
- I hear you asking a question about...
- I hear your concern about...
- It sounds like we need to further investigate your request for...

RESPECT

- Honor cultural diversity
- Think about curriculum content.
- Invite families to share about their culture.
- Affirm the strengths of the students and family.
- Treat students and family with dignity.
- Regard the child as a person, rather than a student with a disability.
- How do you address the family? Informal or formal greeting?
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Consider seating arrangements in IEP meetings.

EQUALITY

- Foster family and student empowerment.
- Promote family input in meetings.
- Ask for family input.
- Provide an environment that makes them feel comfortable.
- Help families take action to solve a problem.
- Provide options for families.
- Be flexible and creative in finding solutions.

COMMITMENT

- Be sensitive to the emotional needs of families.
- Be available and accessible
- Give families a way to reach you outside of school hours for emergencies.
- Schedule IEP meetings during times that work for families.
- Be sure all IEP members attend meetings and are truly present. Don't come in and out of meetings, come late, or leave early.
- Follow through on IEP goals.
- Be reliable.
- Be committed but be clear about boundaries.

ADVOCACY

- If you see a problem, don't just pass it to someone else.
- Be alert to opportunities to advocate.
- Put yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Clearly document problems as soon as they happen.
- Provide evidence about the nature and extent of the problem.
- Have an “all in this together” attitude.
- Create win-win solutions.
- Make sure the student understands what is in their IEP. How can the student be involved in their IEP meeting?

TRUST – THE FOUNDATION OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

- **COMMUNICATION** - By exchanging information openly and honestly.
- **COMPETANCY** - Being skilled in educating the child.
- **RESPECT** - Honoring a family's cultural and other values.
- **COMMITMENT** - Going above and beyond.
- **EQUALITY** - Shared decision making.
- **ADVOCACY** - Advocating for the family and child's rights.