



Communication to Improve Family/School  
Partnerships in Special Education - April 7, 2011  
Hosted by Allenstown School District

## Feedback Brief - Share & Learn Communication Strategies

24 Participants: 8 parents; 4 teachers, 2 special education case managers; 2 professionals; 1 paraprofessional; inclusion facilitator, school psychologist, guidance counselor, principal, assistant principal, district special education director and family-school coordinator.

The evening began with pizza and a FISH Video - the story of Seattle's World Famous Pike Place Fish Market - using four principles; they have changed the way they interact with each other and their customers: Play, Make Their Day, Be There, and Choose Your Attitude!

**Let's Get Hooked!!!** Anthony Blinn tied the district's philosophy on parent involvement and his interactive presentation to the video with open discussion.

### Play

- Getting involved - parents and educators
- Parents are involved at different levels and different ways.
- How parents are involved changes in elementary, middle and high school.

### Make Their Day

- Remember to say thank you! parents and educators
- Level of respect for parents and educators
- Think of parents as the customer, when dealing with the IEP (Individualized Education Program)
- Serving parents to the best of our ability, in making open communication
- Love your job-it shows and will affect somebody

### Be There

- Be there in the moment, pay attention
- Be aware of what parents/educators are saying
- Be present with people: taking care of just them
- Acknowledge people, don't ignore them

### Choose Your Attitude

- Choose your attitude whether it's open and inviting or not
- It's a simple choice - that's all it is, be happy or don't be happy

**Circle of Partnership** - We look at what families need globally and then at what additional requirements families of children with special needs have. They require a closer relationship in order to coordinate programs to ensure high student success.

**Presuming Positive Intentions** - assuming that others' intentions are positive promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and discussion, and prevents unintentional put-downs. Using positive intentions in speech is one manifestation of this norm. [The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups](#), 2nd edition

## **Open Discussion - What are your expectations for communication?**

To establish effective individual partnerships, we need to understand what school and families expect for communication!

- Create a welcoming environment to establish trust and open lines of communication
- Having consistent people in the child's life builds trust and confidence within the team, they carry knowledge of child's history which results in valued judgment; how much information is shared may depend on the level of respect and trust of the relationship
- Establish communication prefaces at the beginning of the year - for parents and educators; if it's not working for you, let someone know, frustrations could build that are not necessary
- Build the relationship in order to know communication needs and preferences; not a boiler plate approach
- Communication related to IEP's - establish how much communication is needed and wanted, built on individual needs, do not assume; families' needs change over time.
- Be sensitive to the communication needs of parents in the special education process - many are multitasking in IEP meetings - learning the special education process, keeping up with the new language of special education acronyms and jargon while dealing with emotions. Consider teaching the special education process outside of the meeting so parent can concentrate on the meeting at hand.
- Sharing information that is understandable and jargon free; support for families
- Educators consider information you want to share- think of the individual needs of that family; convey using positive approach
- E-mails should be short and simple, to the point - not for long histories or complicated issues; remember they do not convey body language, gestures, careful of reading more meaning into them than is really there
- Assume positive intentions and the importance of listening
- Person-to-person communication - observe body language - how a person is feeling that day- are they approachable
- Phone calls to teacher's extension- parent likes being able to contact teacher (at their convenience - has a moment), knowing she will reach her or be able to leave a message
- When do you use phone calls, e-mails, write a letter, meet in person = use your judgment based on your relationship
- Support learning at home, parents need to know how;
- People need to know "how" to be involved, what's expected of them;
- Home updates to staff, example child had a bad night, especially important in the preschool years
- Communication is reciprocal between home and school; sending positive messages often, both ways - parents and educators; notes and thank you
- Rainbow awards to go home weekly they are positive notes from school - every child should receive one; half letters - open lines of communication, you can tweak it so that it's individualized;
- Stickers used to alert the parent to an important message, example- the use of a sticker on child's clothes because they lose notes by the time the child gets home;
- Notes dictated by student to teacher called "my morning...";
- Using notebooks for two-way communication
- Child led decision - no communication log (student too old) parents and educators switched to e-mail once a week for updates

## **Sakai- Online Communication discussion - Jan Santosuosso of Epsom School District**

- Create equal footing for the team which includes parents and related service providers
- It's a virtual team meeting every day, anyone can add to the written discussion on message board
- Team members can create folders to inform all team members, such as communication log, announcements, assignments, resources, web links, pictures can be uploaded or videos of the child

## **The WGRATI principles of family/school partnerships - Judith Howe**

- Ask them - use a family-friendly approach survey
- Meet their needs: family, food, fun

### **W- what do parents want?**

Tired after a long day of working - who wants to head back out the door? What are the family's needs? get dinner, kid's homework, childcare...take care of their needs - offer pizza/snacks, childcare and fun activities for the children.

### **G- go where they are-meet their needs.**

Example: meet at Dunkin' Donuts or go to their workplace

### **R- reach out-be persistent!**

Call or reach out multiple times, not just once.

### **A- advertise**

Great ideas are worthless if no one knows about them.

### **T- thank you and appreciation - to parents, staff, and the children**

### **I- ideas - try new approaches...coffee hours, evening workshops, etc.**

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