



North Country Family-School Partnerships in Special Education Forum Summary

A World Café style forum was held in Berlin, NH on November 16, 2011 at the Berlin High School Library. Three guided questions were used to facilitate a discussion about expanding family-school partnerships in special education in our region.

Participants represented families, schools and community members from the surrounding communities. On the back you can find a summary of the discussions that took place at the Forum.

NH Connections will be holding 3 additional round table discussions to continue the important conversations on family-school partnerships in special education that were started at the Regional Forum.

- ✓ Understanding how the newly adopted PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships can support Family-School Partnerships in Special Education. (Discussion set for January at Berlin High School)
- ✓ Strategies for using the results of the New Hampshire Department of Education's Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education in your district (TBA)
- ✓ Strategies for increasing your district's response rate for the New Hampshire Department of Education's Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education (TBA)

Please join us in these important discussions! You can also learn more about what NH Connections is doing to support improving family-school partnerships in special education on our website www.nhconnections.org and access resources

To learn more about NH Connections and how we can support you in strengthening family-school partnerships in special education, please **contact:**

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Highlights from the North Country Family-School Partnerships in Special Education Forum

Q1- What are the ingredients of a successful family-school partnership in special education?

The participants at the Forum made it loud and clear that is a combination of ingredients that is required for successful family-school partnerships. These include having a common goal (the child), real two way communication, the participants being respectful in their differences and having an open mind.

It was also highlighted that both sides need to be active participants. They need to be willing to work together. The school needs to be willing to look outside the box or beyond business as usual, and families need to trust the school enough to ask for what they need.

Q2- How is your school a community?

Due to the economic hardship in the region, schools are being asked to do more for their students and their families. Services traditionally provided by other agencies are now left to the schools. These include helping families with their basic needs.

Schools are looking at families as a whole unit. They are working to assess needs, set goals and have a workable plan in areas other than education.

Changes in family structure have also created the need for more services from the school. The population has become more transient and families no longer have an extended family to fall back on for support.

Everyone has a role. Everyone brings something to the community. We all need to work together for the future of our children.

Q3- Who is responsible for educating children with disabilities and why?

“It is everyone’s job” was the answer to who is responsible for educating children with disabilities. Teachers, families, peers, bus drivers, lunch personnel as well as members of the community are all responsible. Families are the primary teacher and the schools need to include the families.

“We have become an instant gratification world”. We want quick fixes and quick answers. We need to realize that it takes patience and time to achieve results. Economic times, changes to family structure and being a more mobile society have placed more demands on our schools in a time of shrinking budgets. Schools are being asked to do more and more with less.

The stigma attached to those receiving special education can have far reaching effects. They do not stop upon leaving school but are carried into adulthood. These include feelings of rejection and “being pulled out” of the classroom.

And the answer to the why is “they are our future, they will become our caretakers, and taxpayers.”