



Family-School Partnerships in Special Education

A World Café style forum was held at Great Bay College, Portsmouth, on November 3, 2011 with participants representing families, schools and community members from Hampton Falls, Portsmouth, Rochester, and Seabrook. Please see the back for a summary of the discussions that took place.

NH Connections will be holding three additional round table discussions focusing on:

- ✓ **Understanding how the newly adopted PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships can support family-school partnerships in special education.** December 8, 2011 at Community Campus, 100 Campus Drive, Portsmouth.
- ✓ **Strategies for using the results of the NH Department of Education's Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education in your district/school.** January 2012 in Rochester
- ✓ **Strategies for increasing your school/district's response rate for the NH Department of Education's Parent Involvement Survey in Special Education.** March 2012 in Seabrook

These discussions will provide you with an opportunity to learn new information about family-school partnerships in special education, connect with others, share perspectives, and generate new ideas. Leave with concrete ideas that make a difference for your school!

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

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To learn more about what NH Connections is doing to support and improve family-school partnerships in special education, visit our website at www.nhconnections.org.

Highlights from the Seacoast Region Family-School Partnerships in Special Education Forum—11-3-11 Great Bay Community College, Portsmouth

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

The group recognized that building trust is important in family-school partnerships and takes time through appreciating each other's perspectives, sharing information, and focusing on a common goal. Additionally, opportunities to build respect for each other through really listening, spending time together outside of a meeting and sharing perspectives on "a day in the life of the family" or "a day in the life of a teacher" is critical to the success of a family-school partnership in special education. Other important ingredients include:

- Keeping the child at the center of all that we do.
- Believing that "Every man is my mentor, and I can learn from him" and that we all have something to offer and have equal status.
- Open two way communication including access to information in advance and clear ground rules to keep interactions positive.
- Having a welcoming environment.
- Regular access to resources (people and information).

How is your school a community?

There is a desire and commitment to educate all students together, and to bring families together with school personnel for a mutual purpose. The group felt that while administrators set the tone for the school and its personnel—from a welcoming experience upon entry to school to disagreeing respectfully at meetings, that parents also have the responsibility to seek opportunities to work with and support their school. Schools are also community through:

- Connecting parents to other parents in a variety of ways (family-school cookouts, workshops, volunteering, attending sporting events)
- Presenting on topics the educate students/staff/parents together.
- Offering after school programs that include all children (eg, Unified Soccer)
- Using technology to help students and families participate in school activities.

Who is responsible for educating children with disabilities and why?

The group believed that it "takes a village,"—everyone (schools, families, students, communities) shares the responsibility in educating our students. Students, parents and the community need the opportunity to interact with others with a variety of abilities as teaching tolerance is a community effort. Parents have to advocate for their children, but they need to learn about the process, resources and tools, and to be reasonable. The focus of education needs to move beyond tests and test scores, but also focus on meaningful education and alternatives. Both parents and schools need to begin to look beyond the boundaries and ask the community for their time and talents.