Beyond Participation: Building Strong Partnerships

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Objectives

Participants will be able to:

• Understand the importance of building partnerships
• Identify barriers to parent participation
• Use strategies to help foster home/school partnerships
Agenda

• Welcome
• The importance of family participation
• Barriers to participation
• Communication
• Positions and interests
• Conflict
• Strategies to improve partnerships
• Available resources
Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.

-Helen Keller
Meaningful Participation

Define meaningful participation.
The Importance of Participation

“...parent/family involvement significantly contributes to improved student outcomes” (Carter, 2002, p.1).

“The evidence is consistent, positive and convincing: families have a major influence on their children’s achievement in school and through life” (Henderson and Mapp, 2002, p.7).

“It is simply impossible to have an island of excellence in a sea of community indifference, and when parents become school partners, the results can be consequential and enduring” (Boyer, 1995, p.61).
An Ounce of Prevention...

### CADRE Continuum of Dispute Resolution Processes & Practices

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#### Assistance/Intervention Options

- Parent Engagement
- Participant & Stakeholder Training
- Stakeholder Council
- Collaborative Rule Making
- Parent to Parent Assistance
- Case Manager
- Telephone Intermediary
- Facilitation
- Mediation Models
- Ombudsperson
- Third-Party Opinion/Consultation
- Resolution Meeting
- Mediation under IDEA
- Written State Complaints
- Due Process Hearing
- Hearing Appeal (Two-Tier Systems)
- Litigation
- Legislation

#### Dimensions that help clarify placement of the options along the Continuum

- Third-Party Assistance
- Decision Making by Parties
- Interest-Based
- Formal & Flexible

- Third-Party Intervention
- Decision Making by Third-Party
- Rights-Based
- Formal & Fixed

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So What’s the Problem?

Recent longitudinal research suggests that parent and student participation in IEP planning is less prevalent than expected (Wagner et al., 2012)
What’s Getting in the Way?
CONFLICT

What comes to mind when you hear the word “conflict?”

How does conflict affect you? Your job? Your life?
“If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those who profess to favor freedom, and yet depreciate agitation, are men who want crops without plowing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters.”

-Frederick Douglas
Dimensions of Conflict

People

Problem

Process

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Effective Listening

Basic skill clusters for effective listening:

**Attending Skills**
- Contact (distance, eyes, touch)
- Gestures
- Body language
- Interested silence

**Responding Skills**
- Reflect content, emotions, meaning
- Ask open-ended questions
- Summarize and clarify

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Tips for Communicating Effectively

• Be mindful of your emotional pressure
• Focus positively on your goals - suppress negative expectations
• Prioritize issues
• Listen to understand the other perspectives
• Ask questions for clarification
• Rephrase and restate
• Be open to multiple solutions
• Keep the focus on the student
• Remember you are human
Bias

Noun:
a particular tendency, trend, inclination, feeling, or opinion, especially one that is preconceived or unreasoned
The Glasses that Shape our View

Our perspectives come from:

- **Beliefs** – specific ideas about the world we hold true, largely unproven
- **Values** – represent what we believe as important about the life and individual behavior

(Evans & Vaandering 2016)
The Ladder of Inference

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Pool of Available Data

Select Data

Assumptions

Conclusions

Beliefs

Action

Reflexive Loop

(Argyris, 1970 and Senge, 1994)
Breaking the Cycle

• How has bias impacted you in your life? Career?
• How has bias impacted families you support?
• How can we break the loop?
Positions and Interests

Positions are:
- Declarative
- Fixed
- One solution
- The “What”

Interests are:
- Hidden
- Underlying need
- Open to many solutions
- The “Why”
Questions For Uncovering Interests

• What will you gain if you get what you’re asking for?
• What are you afraid will happen if we do ___?
• Why is that important to you?
• How does this solve the issue?
• Why isn’t this option acceptable to you?
• What is standing in your way?
How Do You Respond to Conflict?

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How Do You Respond to Conflict?

Controller  Collaborator

Compromiser

Avoider  Accommodator

Personal Goals  Relationship Goals

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Always Ask Yourself

“Is this approach (style) the best one to use right now in order to reach a successful outcome to the problem at hand?”
Strategies for Building Partnerships

• Prepare families for conflict.
• Help families identify their interests rather than focusing on positions.
• Be aware of bias, both yours and your client’s.
• Model positive communication techniques.
• Teach reflective listening.
• Remember - building partnerships is an ongoing process.
Resources

Engaging Parents in Productive Partnerships

Educators contend with significant pressures resulting from insufficient resources, inadequate professional development opportunities, and an ever-changing landscape of educational initiatives and mandates. Despite such challenges, school staff partner successfully with parents in millions of meetings each year to create appropriate individualized education programs (IEPs) for students who receive special education and related services.

If you invest early in building trusting working relationships with the parents of students in your school, your contacts with each other can be transformed into more positive experiences. Mutually satisfying interactions can create a shared history that you can draw upon to prevent disagreements and misunderstandings from escalating into conflict, allowing the time and space to find solutions in challenging situations.

IEP teams are intentionally composed of parents, educators, and service providers who bring different expertise to the development of effective educational programs. This diversity may lead to conflict rather than collaboration. Difficult conversations may ensue when you find yourself at odds with your colleagues or with the parents of students attending your school. These difficult conversations can create stress or anger as strong feelings are expressed or left unspoken.

Fortunately, there are things we can do to communicate more effectively when disagreements occur, opinions diverge, and strong emotions are present. The skillful integration of team member expertise, whether based upon personal experience or professional training, is a critical factor in designing successful IEPs. The following strategies can go a long way toward resolving disagreements, improving relationships, and producing positive outcomes for students with disabilities.

Help People Be at Their Best

It is both considerate and sensible to schedule and plan meetings so critical members of the team are able to attend and participate fully. This means scheduling meetings at times and locations that are convenient for all participants. Being attentive to this detail can significantly improve the likelihood that everyone who needs to attend will be present and able to focus on the student and his or her needs. It is also important to allow enough time to accomplish the objectives of the meeting. Otherwise, discussions and decision-making may be disjointed or incomplete. Sometimes the use of scheduling software programs can simplify this task.

Even though we may be physically present in a meeting, all of us experience times when our capacity to engage with others and focus fully on complex problems is limited. We may be troubled by physical conditions (hunger, forgotten medication, plunging nicotine levels, need for a bathroom break, etc.) or pressing issues (cell phone that keeps buzzing with an urgent call; sick child at home, etc.) that adversely affect our ability to concentrate and contribute. At moments during meetings when any participant seems distracted or distressed, a brief break can afford an opportunity to get back on track. Attention to your own needs, as well as those of others, is helpful for the whole team.

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Video resource available on the CADRE website
Questions
Debrief

What Worked? | What Can We Improve?

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cadre@directionservice.org

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