OMG! Meeting Magic in Education

School Communication to build Collaborative Family Engagement © 2018

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Confrontational
- Demanding
- Legalities
- Educational Jargon
- Intimidating

Engaging
- Child-Focused
- Relationships
- Meaningful
- Personalization
Prior Knowledge

Getting to Know the Parents/Family

- Where do they work?
- Other children in the family?
- Past positive or negative experiences with the school district?
- Most “workable” family member
- Always shake hands at start and end of meeting
- Ask about Advocate in the meeting
  - Prepare family by sharing all who will be present
  - Take away the “unknowns”

Visit student in classroom prior to meeting

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Prior Knowledge

Purpose of the Meeting

● Within the IEP meeting, what are additional things that the family will ask? Special programming, special school, special curriculum?
● Research what they want to learn more about so you are prepared
● Have educated conversations with families
  ○ Speak in education layman terms, not education jargon
  ○ Let them know you care about their child
Prior Knowledge

Setting

- Find a conference room that is comfortable for the amount present
- Don’t require family to move through the building (parents may have prior bad experiences) - Meet them at the office
- Necessary privacy (consider glass, mini-blinds, IEP on screen, etc.)
- Avoid, “My son saw you at school in some big meeting, what’s going on?”
- Seating arrangement for the meeting
- Kleenex - Just have it on the table
Personalize the Meeting

Get to Know the Parent/Family Member

- Talk about their children
- Share personal experiences to build respect & relationships
  - Shared hobbies, common interests, etc.
- Share what you see in the classroom
- Make the parents feel important
  - They are expert of their child
  - Learn about the parents
  - Recognize their education knowledge
  - Tone of voice
## Types of Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Biological</th>
<th>Foster</th>
<th>Adoptive</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Never planned to have a child with disabilities</td>
<td>● More negotiable in working with the school for the child they are fostering</td>
<td>● Made a commitment to have this child in their lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Either in denial or grieving phase</td>
<td>● Trust and needs school to assist them</td>
<td>● “I gave my life and money to commit to this child and I know what is best to help this child.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Guilt abounds</td>
<td>● Not their fault and they are temporarily supporting the child with special needs</td>
<td>● See themselves as a “savior” because they adopted child with special needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Types of Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step-Parent</th>
<th>Grandparent</th>
<th>Boyfriend/Girlfriend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Made a commitment to have this child in their lives</td>
<td>Some trauma in their own child’s life has lead them to be the guardian</td>
<td>Trying to earn the love of the parent and child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship with child may range from close to tenuous</td>
<td>They feel guilt and anger about their own child’s problems and are determined to make up for this in raising their grandchild</td>
<td>Maybe trying to demonstrate how caring they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May see themselves as stepping in to fill a void and “save” the child</td>
<td>They are emotionally determined</td>
<td>Have a limited history of the child’s needs or difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May not have the educational background knowledge</td>
<td>Sometimes may blame school for their child’s issues and won’t let the same thing happen to their grandchild</td>
<td>If child is an emotional or behavior challenge, may think they are going to “straighten them out”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could be more concerned about meeting the spouses need then the child’s</td>
<td>May or may not have legal authority</td>
<td>Relationship with child may range from trusting to estranged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have no legal authority</td>
<td></td>
<td>Have no legal authority but may not accepting of this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Meeting Facilitation

Positionality

- For school personnel, it is another meeting, for the family, it is an event
- Take away the “us against them” and create “we’re working as a team to help your child”
- Use student’s name at all times, including when reading Parental Rights
- Call parent by title (Dr.) or if an attorney, ask, “Are you here today as a parent or as your child’s attorney?” (You are recognizing their educational & professional background)
Meeting Facilitation

Barriers

● Table creates a natural barrier
● Parent Advocate present? They will typically sit across from family to visually see them and give them non-verbal cues
● Have key person sit next to most “workable” parent
● Have key person sit across from parent advocate to watch non-verbals
Meeting Facilitation

- **Prepared Agenda**
  - Review at start of meeting, amend as requested by parent

- **Allow Time**
  - Plan longer than you can imagine
  - Rushing through a meeting implies the school doesn’t care about their child—all team members stay for entire meeting
  - Time in meeting builds trust

- **Technology**
  - Are staff members on laptops/phones? Don’t be. One person on laptop and tell family that they are adding things to IEP
Meeting Facilitation

Staff Expectations

- Being engaged
- Providing meaningful feedback—show knowledge & relationship with their child
- Not multitasking (No sidebar conversations)
- Provide eye contact
- Share strengths of student (everyone knows the weaknesses)
  - Parents often embarrassed of their child’s behavior and don’t want to hear the details
  - Don’t say anything that infers that the parent is not being honest (“He seems fine when he is in school,” “Oh, we haven’t seen that.”)
- Continue focusing on the positive

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Meeting Facilitation

- **Sitting next to the parent**
  - Touch their forearm
  - Put a calming hand on the table (pat the table as if it’s them)
  - Look them in the eye
  - Reinforce their feelings - “I can’t imagine what you are going through….”

- **Educational Jargon**
  - Clarify words - “I know this is educational jargon, and I apologize. Is there something we can explain?” or clarify it as the conversation naturally occurs
  - Typically educated families will not admit they don’t know a phrase or jargon, while non-educated families will admit and ask for clarification

- **Never say, “We are going to provide your child with the best education”**
  - Instead say, “We are going to provide your child an appropriate education based on a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).”
Meeting Facilitation

Recording Devices

• If parent pulls out recording device, then have one ready and pull yours out (no verbal explanation needed)
• When parent knows they are being recorded as well on your device, they do not have the same type of control. It takes away their power and levels the playing field
• Watch body language and adapt
Meeting Facilitation

Aggressive Parents

● Body Language
  ■ Non-verbal
  ■ Eyes drift
  ■ Fidgeting
  ■ Lifting eyebrows means “I need help.”
  ■ Crossed arms
  ■ Parents touch each others legs to calm them

● Verbal
  ■ Voice inflections
    ● Parent escalates and becomes louder, you speak softer and more calm
    ● Validate their frustrations, “I know you’re angry and frustrated.” Review their parental rights again. Explain due process
Meeting Facilitation

Aggressive Parents

- Paraphrase items
  - “I hear you saying you aren’t seeing these behaviors at home (validate their opinion). How can we work together to allow {child} to be as successful at school as at home? What can we do collectively as a team to help your {child} successful both at home and at school?”
Meeting Facilitation

Don’t get worked up over threats

“Taking this to the Superintendent and/or School Board”
- An IEP team decision cannot be overturned by the Superintendent or School Board. They must file due process complaint through the AEA

“Calling my attorney”
- Your response, “We would be glad to put your attorney in touch with ours to allow the conversation to begin.”

“Filing a Office of Civil Rights” complaint
- Your response, “We will be happy to provide OCR the necessary documentation to justify our decision and whatever OCR determines, we will follow.”
Ending the Meeting

Positive Meeting

- Ask, “Did we cover everything you were hoping to cover?”
- Share that a copy of the IEP will be sent based on the meeting
- Share that if they feel we have missed something or captured their information accurately, please let the roster teacher know and we will review the IEP for accuracy and make sure your “voice” is present
- Parents must leave feeling empowered and that they had a “voice” in the meeting
- Shake hands with parent

Difficult Meeting

- Review parent rights (due process)
- Give them the name and phone number of the person to contact at AEA (this shows the school's confidence in the decisions made)
- Wrap around personalization (Are you going to an Iowa game soon?)
- Shake hands
- Thank them for coming
- Eye contact
Debrief Meeting

- Roster teacher send IEP to family
- Identify who will make follow up parent phone contact
- **Difficult Meeting**
  - Support teachers as they may be scared or have other emotions
    - “What are your concerns?”
    - “What scares you?”
    - “How can I continue to support you?”
    - “What are the next communication steps?”
    - “How to respond if parent contacts you?”
Debrief Meeting

● Next Steps
  ○ Explain options for family
    ■ Mediation
    ■ Due Process
    ■ School Attorney will be present
  ○ Remain Confidential & professional
    ■ Proof written communication
  ○ If all else fails, you can always ask for a full re-evaluation to gather data to identify needs and update IEP
Determine who will make contact with family

- “Last time we talked, we set some things in motion. Do you feel things are going better for your child?”
- Share what you know has occurred so trust is built
- Listen
- Use communication that the family is most comfortable with
- Periodic written communication to maintain connections with the family and reinforce openness for collaboration
Questions?

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