



Parental Involvement, Communication, and Conflict Resolution

The Centers for Disease Control defines parental engagement in schools as parents and schools working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents.

A key component to a successful educational program is parental engagement, especially for children with disabilities. The challenge is getting it.

Benefits:

- o Increased involvement and collaboration from parents
- o Greater confidence in parents in understanding the special education process
- o Better understanding of parent concerns for teachers

Barriers:

- o Cultural or language differences
 - (just because it's different doesn't mean it's wrong)
- o Special education laws and regulations that are difficult to understand
- o Past negative experiences
- o Lack of training for staff

Keys to eliminating barriers and increasing parent involvement/engagement

- o Treat parents as partners
 - IEP planning
 - Work schedules
 - Sit beside the parent
 - Meet the parent at the door
 - Ask the parent to share their concerns or questions first
 - Explain acronyms and sped jargon
 - Listen like you care (even when you don't)
 - Be honest and tactful
 - Make the first contact a positive one
 - Ask a parent to tell you about their child
 - Use person-first language
 - Acknowledge GOOD behavior
 - Express value of the child/not challenges



Parental Involvement, Communication, and Conflict Resolution

Create a Communication System: **EASIER IS BETTER**

- Notebook, Email, Phone
 - Behavior charts/logs
 - Make the first contact positive. This will set the tone for the year
 - Read any email twice before sending when frustrated
 - In challenging situations, copy administration (ask sped director who she/he wants in the communication loop)
 - Set boundaries early in the school year. Send a home letter with available times to talk and ask policy on texting
-
- Parents are considered to be full members of the IEP team, along with school personnel. Parents are crucial members of the team because they have unique knowledge of their child's strengths and needs. Parents have the right to be involved in meetings that discuss the identification, evaluation, IEP development, and educational placement of their children. They also have the right to ask questions, dispute points, and request modifications to the plan, as do all members of the IEP team.
 - In order to fully participate in developing their child's IEP, parents must be knowledgeable about their child's disability, their rights under federal and state law, and the policies and procedures of the LEA. Often parents do not have this knowledge when their child is initially identified as having a disability. Under IDEA Part D, the USDE funds at least one parent training and information center in each state and most territories to provide parents the information they need to effectively advocate for their child. Some centers may also provide a knowledgeable person to accompany a parent to IEP meetings to assist the parent in participating more fully in the process.
 - Communication with families whose children have a 504 Plan or IEP involves more than just general updates on their children's social and academic progress. Many families who have been navigating the special education bureaucracy have had less-than-positive experiences with communication between home and school. Establishing a relationship of trust with these families early in the process ensures that communication remains open throughout the year as you demonstrate that you share the same goal as the family: the success of their child.
[\(www.advancementcourses.com/courses/communicating-with-parents-of-students-with-special-needs/\)](http://www.advancementcourses.com/courses/communicating-with-parents-of-students-with-special-needs/)



Parental Involvement, Communication, and Conflict Resolution

Communicate messages between school staff and parents regularly in a positive, understandable, and respectful manner.

One parent mentioned that she was often reminded by educators of her child's "low" IQ and that the educators frequently expressed limitations regarding academic capabilities with a statement such as "your child has plateaued." Effective communication implies both understanding and supportive behaviors that enhance communication, such as actively listening in a nonjudgmental manner — and responding positively and frequently to parental concerns.

Encourage a strong commitment to child and family. (don't always start with deficits)

One factor that contributes to parents' perceptions of lack of commitment is discrepant views of their children — or children's needs. Parents remarked that some school professionals would often describe their child from a "deficit perspective." Professionals should affirm and reaffirm the strengths of the child. To maintain constructive collaboration and decrease conflict, both parents and practitioners should attempt to narrow the gap between their views regarding the student's needs.

Acknowledge parental prerogatives. (listen, even when you don't want to)

Although parents of children with disabilities and school professionals have mutual responsibilities and partnerships in the shared decision-making required to plan and provide appropriate special education services, they are also the senior partners whose actions influence their children's academic development. When parents' knowledge and preferences are not regarded — as well as stereotypical and biased responses to parental concerns are demonstrated — oftentimes conflict between home and school can occur.

Engage in equality and shared decision-making with parents

One parent said, "Well, they claim that I am an equal member of the team. Sometimes I don't feel that way, but most of the time I may not feel that — if they all make a decision, and I wasn't really part of that process." Professionals should solicit parental input, and ensure that shared decision-making is enforced.



Parental Involvement, Communication, and Conflict Resolution

Demonstrate empathy and actively listen when interacting with parents

Consider the parents' perspectives by trying to understand and appreciate the great responsibilities involved with parenting a child with a disability. Not only is it important to actively listen to and validate parent concerns, but also invite feedback and ideas from parents. For example, restate any concerns they share and ask them what strategies they have found effective at home. Together, you will find solutions.

Acknowledge parental prerogatives. (listen, even when you don't want to)

Although parents of children with disabilities and school professionals have mutual responsibilities and partnerships in the shared decision-making required to plan and provide appropriate special education services, they are also the senior partners whose actions influence their children's academic development. When parents' knowledge and preferences are not regarded — as well as stereotypical and biased responses to parental concerns are demonstrated — oftentimes conflict between home and school can occur.