

## **Family Engagement for Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team Members: Ensuring Meaningful Participation by Families**

From the [Family Engagement Toolkit and Self-Assessment: Role Specific Guidance](#), page 60.

These strategies are for you to consider as you develop a more comprehensive approach to family engagement for families of children with disabilities and your personal, school or district. The strategies are organized by Core Principles and align with the Self-Assessment. Completing the self-assessment in its entirety is recommended.

### **Core Principle 1: Creating a Welcoming Environment**

#### **Learn more about parent/guardian preferences before Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings (times, places that work best)**

- Host a meeting outside of school (ex. community centers) or at a time that aligns with other commitments families need to attend

#### **Include detailed messaging in advance of IEP (ex. who will be in attendance)**

- Clear messaging review – do they know they are invited to actively participate?
- Additional opportunity to meet members of team

#### **Introduce all members at meetings, provide written list of names and roles**

- Begin with strengths of student

#### **Acknowledge/emphasize expertise of family during meeting**

- Include time in meeting agenda for family
- Invite families to share their knowledge first
- Frame evaluation results as part of developmental process
- Note progress
- Share evaluation results ahead of meeting for parent review
- Don't focus on failures
- Multiple meetings – give parents time to process

#### **Orientation Days before IEP meetings**

- Allow parents to meet Special Education staff on those days

### **Contact Information:**

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- Organize connection with other families before orientation

## **Core Principle 2: Building Effective Two-Way Communication**

### **Regular checks for understanding**

- Professional Development about effective communication strategies
- Peer feedback among IEP meeting staff

### **Establish culture of accountability**

- Ask questions of each other during meetings
- Create staff norms for IEP team participants
- Build culture of trust/responsibility

### **Create time for family's expertise**

- Ask families to prepare for meeting
- Provide families with questions ahead of meetings (see [toolkit](#) pg. 65)

### **Allow time during meeting for family's responses**

- Identify (ID) staff who checks in with families and helps them prepare for meeting

### **Alternative communication strategies**

- Engage in back-and-forth discussion with families
- Bi-directional communication by family preferences (in-person, paper, electronic, such as email, text or app)

### **Use family friendly language**

- Create glossary of common terms for families
- Translate glossary of terms

### **Provide documents ahead of time**

- Staff follow up on docs (ID staff member responsible)
- Translate into primary languages (ID staff member responsible)

### **Use of interpreters or translators**

- Meet with translators ahead of meetings
- Translators selected understand IEP process

### **Meeting norms to set engagement expectations**

- Families participate in developing meeting norms
- Students participate in developing meeting norms

## **Respect various family cultures**

- Make it clear that feedback is always appreciated
- Be culturally curious, ask honest questions
- Incorporate family preferences into action plans
- Ask family mentors/ambassadors to be involved
- Opportunities for involvement are culturally and linguistically affirming

## **Core Principle 3: Supporting the Success of Students**

### **Include families in all stages**

- Families set goals
- Families support assessment
- Families help design measures

### **Regular updates**

- Family informed communication strategies
- Regular “reach out” time

### **Creative family activities**

- Review community activity sources
- Create family calendars with info
- Specify events that support IEP goals
- Provide multiple ways to involve family such as observing, volunteering, and developing materials outside of the early care and education environment

## **Core Principle 4: Sharing Power and Responsibility**

### **IEPs reflect family/student personally**

- Consider hopes, culture, perspectives, insights of family
- Older students lead their own IEP meetings
- Teach students meeting strategies
- Students develop personal goals/objectives

### **Decision making is shared**

- ID opportunities for goals (inside and outside of school)
- Learn family routines and tailor suggestions to fit

## **Special Education Family Advisory Council**

- Foster connections between families and other stakeholders
- Family advisory members participate in district-wide activities
- Training and supports for families so they can participate in meetings (such as IEP)
- ID families who may be interested in leading

## **Provide training and mentorship**

- Co-facilitate council meetings with leadership

## **Core Principle 5: Partnering with the Community**

### **Connect with community organizations to extend learning opportunities in out-of-school environments**

- With families identify places for possible partnership such as Parent training Information Centers (PTIs) and other family support programs
- Map out list of ideas based on the IEP goals
- Create a yearlong plan of outside opportunities

### **Develop a list of resources of organizations that provide supports and services**

- ID person to keep list of resources up to date
- Consider seasonal resources
- Invite organizations to present at school or participate in school event

## **Core Principle 6: Providing Equity and Access**

### **Review Continuous Improvement plan with equity lens**

- Consider Special Education in Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) planning
- Use family friendly language in CIP
- Are students with disabilities considered in goals?
- LEA develops a plan for how they will engage and partner with families in activities such as advocacy efforts, public awareness

### **Cultural curiosity in conversations with families**

- Gauge personal cultural awareness
- Gather information from families on their culture
- Ask questions about how cultural differences may impact decisions (ex. IEP)
- Be honest about self-capacity to meet unique needs that may arise for students of different cultural backgrounds

- Have books, pictures, etc. that represent different cultures throughout the school and meeting rooms, showing the integration of cultures in thinking and practices where the family's child is represented

## **Core Principle 7: Ensuring Sustainability**

### **Periodically review processes and procedures with lens of effective family engagement**

- Administer a family survey analyzing results to advance improvements
- Review Special Education family engagement strategies at same time as whole school family engagement approach

### **Resource List for You to [Dig Deeper](#), page 71-72**

To help support your efforts to engage families of children with disabilities in your professional role.