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Family Engagement for Evaluation and Planning Team (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 in your 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 Individual Education Plan (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
- 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 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 (Identify (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.