

Best Practices for Improving IEP Meetings with Parents

Presenter Notes:

Slide 2:

- Today we are going to focus on discussing the importance of family involvement
- We will be discussing specific strategies that if applied correctly can improve the school's approach to family friendly practices
- Finally we will discuss how these strategies impact our environment & how we can take steps towards improving partnerships with families in our schools.



Slide 3:

- Review the definition of Indicator 8 of Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Focus on the importance of involving families in the education process and strengthening partnerships between families and schools.

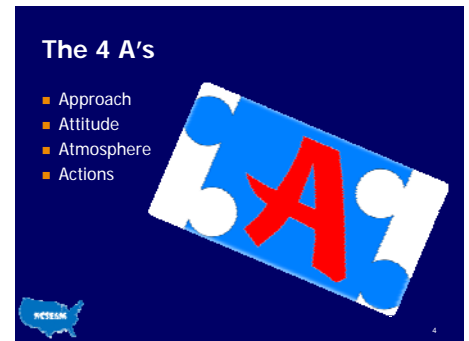
Every school in every state is responsible for taking positive steps to include families. The Department of Education monitors parents perception of how well schools reach out to families and how this improves services for their students.



Slide 4: The 4 A's

* More information is contained in the PowerPoint presentation at the end of this document*

- For flourishing family-school partnerships to occur, certain condition should be met.
 - These include:
 - An *approach* that invites and expects family involvement
 - Positive *attitudes* educators hold regarding family involvement
 - A welcoming *atmosphere* created by educators.
 - Once these conditions are in place, effective family-school partnerships can take place (*actions*).



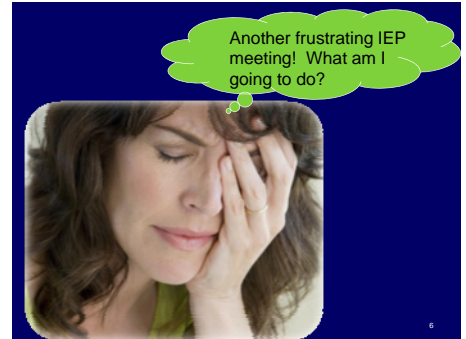
Slide 5:

- Discuss how the approach, attitude and atmosphere must be appropriate **before** parent friendly “action” can be taken. Conduct a discussion with the audience of suggestions of how these areas can be improved within your school environment.
- This is a schematic to better understand how the 4 A's connect



Slide 6:

- Talk about how parents can many times leave meetings feeling frustrated.
- The purpose of this presentation today is to talk about strategies we can put in place to hopefully change the parent's emotional outcome after future meetings



Slide 7:

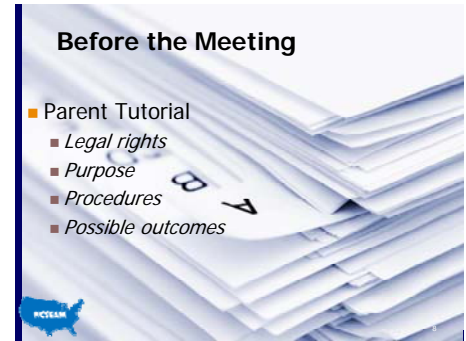
- Our goal should be to not have any more IEP meeting where everyone is feeling like this!



Slide 8:

Things to consider prior to the IEP meeting with the parents

- Role-play with parents if possible.
- Allow parents to directly observe an IEP meeting or watch a video of a meeting. Good resource for online IEP videos-(www.alaskamentorproject.org)
- Minimize educational jargon during the meetings to enhance parents’ understanding. Try to refrain from using acronyms!
- Provide opportunities for educators to learn more about the child and the home environment. Learn about the families’ cultures and important traditions.
- Provide opportunities for parents to learn more about the school environment.
- Invite parents to visit their child’s classroom and special events.
- Make sure all communications are in language that the parent understands.
- Ask parents who they would like included at the meeting. Make sure all of the appropriate people attend, and inform the parents of who will be present

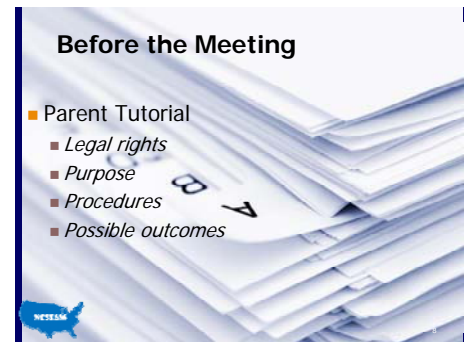


Slide 8: Continued

- Tell parents about the purpose, procedures, and possible outcomes of the meeting.

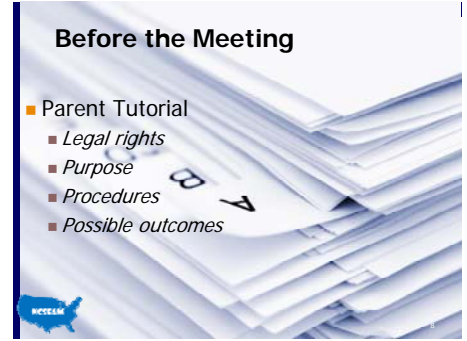
- Legal Rights: Highlight some of the important legal considerations parents may not be aware of & develop a “Quick Facts Sheet” for them:
 1. They are permitted to bring anyone to the meeting – they don’t have to come alone
 2. Their child can attend the meeting
 3. Right to disagree with the IEP
 4. Right to be notified before evaluation/re-evaluation, IEP meetings, changes to the IEP, change in placement
 5. Right to an independent educational evaluation
 6. FERPA (access to records)

- Purpose of the meeting: to share testing results; determine if the student is eligible for special education services; decide upon appropriate learning goals for the student’s achievement; specify which special education services will this child receive that will assist in attaining these goals – ANNUAL – check progress and modify/delete goals as appropriate



Slide 8-Continued

- Procedures that will take place:
 - Introductions
 - Evaluation results of formal testing will be shared
 - Information will be offered from the classroom teacher regarding academic performance & behavior
 - Placement decisions made
 - Signatures obtained – signature for being present at the meeting (attendance) & signature of agreement (or disagreement) with the IEP
 - All protocols collected if not already done so
- Possible Outcomes
 - Placement decisions



Slide 9:

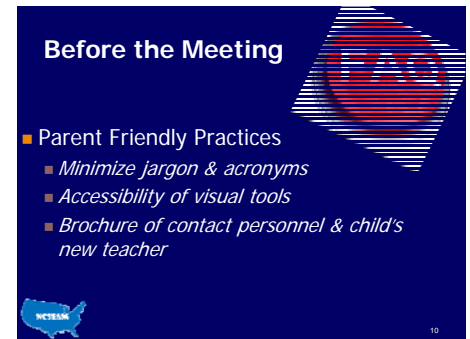
Call the parent on the phone to inform them about the meeting, rather than relying on letters or emails.

- Tell parents how valuable their input and contributions will be.
- Accommodate parents' schedules as much as possible.
- Consider transportation logistics with them
- Identify a convenient location for parents (think outside the school building)
- Be prepared to welcome parents' contributions.



Slide 10:

- Eliminate professional jargon & use of acronyms
Develop and provide a list of commonly used acronyms to the parents (see list included in this handout)
 - Make sure that there is a comfortable physical environment (room, table, chairs, etc) for the IEP meeting.
 - Ensure that changes being made to any documentation are easily observable by the family members. For example, use an LCD projector if making changes in the computer.
 - Develop a brochure that contains contact information for special education personnel. This should include identification of the teacher and other support personnel who would be responsible for the child's programming depending on decisions regarding special education needs.
 - Ask yourself: What role do I believe the parent should play on the team? Observer? Provider of information? Decision maker? As a team, decide how you will involve the parents in decision-making.
 - Ask yourself: Do I believe that the parents are equal partners with me in the education of the child? Am I aware of cultural or language differences that might make the parent uncomfortable? If the answer is "no," the parent will pick up on it!
 - Send information to parents prior to the meeting so that they have an opportunity to view it in advance.
 - Make sure all communication is in language and at a literacy level that the parent understands.
 - Include a phone number and email address for a contact person in case the parent has questions.
-
-
-






Slide 11:

- Try to decrease the number of people at the meetings -- unless parents prefer to have certain individuals present -- to make the atmosphere less intimidating and more comfortable for parents.
- Sit beside the parent, rather than across the table from him/her to minimize physical barriers.
- Share all ideas by writing them out so all IEP team members see them.
 - White board
 - LCD projector
 - Chalk board
 - Overhead projector

During the Meeting

- Minimize personnel in attendance
- Physical proximity
- Visual presentation of ideas



Slide 12:

- Consider having a photo of the child strategically placed on the table during the meeting as a method to try and keep the conversation focused on the child.
- Create a “homey” environment. (i.e., set the table with a table cloth)
- Begin the meeting by reviewing the strengths of the child and focus on the positive aspects of the family and student throughout the meeting.
- Determine what information is critical for all team members to have, and what only certain members might need to better serve the child. Respect family members’ desires to keep certain information confidential.

During the Meeting

- Photo of child
- Review child's strengths
- Critical information only



Slide 13:

- Be aware of your own nonverbal communication as you interact with parents (facial expressions, gestures, posture, or body position).
 - Attempt to provide positive nonverbal messages that show parents your interest and encourages their participation.
 - Make eye contact, face parents as they speak, and keep hands and arms open rather than crossed.

- Check for parents' understanding of key points made.
 - Watch parents' body language for signs of confusion or disagreement.
 - Ask parents to let you know if they are confused or have questions.
 - Ask parents to make comments if they are quiet.



- Ask for parents ideas directly, rather than simply telling them to feel free to contribute.
 - Respect their opinions and perspectives as their own, even if they differ from yours.
 - Use validating statements such as "That is an interesting idea/observation" or "You really know your child well!"

Slide 14:

- Clear explanations of:
 - Placement decisions
 - Related services
 - Modifications & Accommodations

During the Meeting

- Awareness of nonverbal communication
- Check for parent understanding
- Solicit parent opinion



13

During the Meeting

- Clear, Specific Explanations
 - Placement decisions
 - Related services
 - Modifications & accommodations



14

Slide 15:

- Timelines
 - IEP is valid for 1 year
 - Quarterly progress updates
 - When can parents expect to receive these (e.g. during report card conferences/distribution)

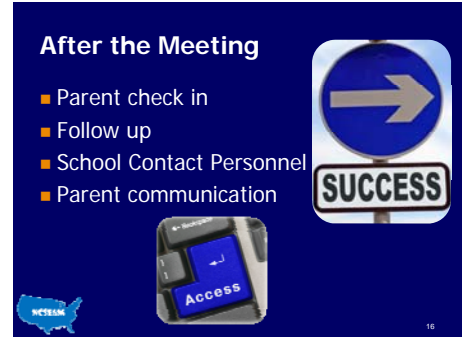
- Team member roles & responsibilities
 - Who will be responsible for delivering each service
 - Who will be responsible for monitoring goals & updating progress on the IEP
 - Who will be responsible for disseminating this progress monitoring information to parents
 - Who should parents contact with questions or problems

- Recap of parent rights
 - Highlight some of the important legal considerations parents may not be aware of & develop a “Quick Facts Sheet” for them (see section in general suggestions)



Slide 16:

1. Ask the parents if they feel as though their questions were answered and their perspectives heard.
2. Make sure there is appropriate follow-through of IEP decisions on the part of individuals on the educational team, and on the part of parents.
 - Parent receives copy of the IEP
 - Delivery of services
 - Goal monitoring
 - Progress of goals reported to parents
3. Provide parents with information on the best way to contact necessary educational staff in case questions arise. This brochure with contact personnel should have been developed before the meeting. For example a folder including IEP information, contact information, acronym page, national websites, Procedural Safeguards (all 10 pages), free local legal services, and the principals business card would be a great tool to provide parents for their efforts to be involved in their child’s IEP process.
4. Ask parents for easy and preferable ways to communicate with them, including times, days, and contact information.



Slide 19

- Discussion Points for you and your staff

