Powerful Partnerships: Strategies for Navigating the Family-School Relationship

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Seattle, WA
Our mission: We work with families, communities, and schools to navigate educational challenges and increase collaborative problem-solving so that every student can fully participate in and benefit from public K-12 education in Washington.
What OEO Does
We listen. We inform. We help solve problems.

CASEWORK

TRAININGS AND OUTREACH

POLICY
Special Education Information

Toolkit: Getting Started with Disability Supports at School  English  Spanish
Protecting the Educational Rights of Students with Disabilities  English  Spanish
Nothing About Us Without Us Webinar PowerPoint
Nothing About Us Without Us Webinar
What is Special Education?
How a student becomes eligible for Special Education (Evaluations)
Individualized Education Programs (IEP)
Special Education resources
Role of Seattle Children’s Autism Center

Supporting Positive Family-School Relationships

• Role of Center
• Role of clinical providers:
  ✓ Diagnosis
  ✓ Evaluation (may include psychological testing)
  ✓ Recommendations
Diagnostic evaluation reports: educational recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Should include</th>
<th>Should not include</th>
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<tr>
<td>✓ specific interventions</td>
<td>✓ specific placement</td>
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<td>✓ specific accommodations</td>
<td>✓ specific school</td>
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<td>✓ other evaluations and possible therapies</td>
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<td>✓ clinically recommended or evidence-based practices</td>
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Common Challenges

Areas of “SDI”
- Transition Plan
- Placement
- Bullying/Harassment

Behavior & Discipline
- Accommodations
- Lack of Progress
First Steps for Families: Communication is a process
Preparation: School Meetings Like a Pro

Successful working relationships are built on mutual respect and clear communication.

Make each meeting count:
• Organize your thoughts and questions in advance;
• Consider how to best share information from private providers;
• Share and request written updates in advance;
• Document discussions and pending requests in writing;
• Ask for a summary or meeting minutes;
• Discuss action steps and timelines—what’s next?
What Does Parent/Family Participation Look Like?

Your perspective is invaluable and unique

Three Tips

• Request to see the same documents as other members of your team in advance of meetings (IEP or 504)
• Share your concerns, observations, and hopes for your child: what you see, hear, hope
• Ask questions
Goal: What Special Education Should Look Like

Individualized

Specially Designed Instruction

Team Approach

Least Restrictive Environment

Parent and Student Participation

Free Appropriate Public Education
Ongoing Process: IEP Development, Review, Revision

IEP Team Responsibilities

- Meet at least once a year and more often as needed
- Determine Annual Measurable Goals (based on Present Levels of Performance)
- Track Progress on Goals
- Decide Accommodations, Supports, Related Services
- Decide Areas, Amounts of Specially Designed Instruction (Based on information from Evaluation)
- Determine Placement
- Develop Transition Plan (as age-appropriate)
Evaluation Review & IEP meetings: Might need to be separate meetings

It may be helpful to separate out reviewing evaluation results and IEP meetings

Evaluations
✓ Need to occur every 3 years, may be needed more frequently
✓ as a member of the team, a parent can request or waive specific testing

IEP meetings
✓ Need to occur yearly
✓ Should include providers who track the student’s progress, a general education teacher and school administrator
Conflict Happens
Are there ways to avoid it or navigate it? Conflict=human

We all want a positive meeting:

• Listen & share in equal parts (facilitation when that is not happening)
• Acknowledge concerns (including pausing)
• Keep the discussion on track and explore options
• Look for opportunities to learn more/fill gaps and provide that help to others
• Try to identify the WHY
• Consider how to share outside medical and specialist perspectives
Add in the Emotions and Attitudes about Disability

Emotional responses are natural. As they come up:

• Keep coming back to center on the student’s experience;

• Express how you are feeling about the conflict, and where your concerns are coming from;

• Share your hopes and needs for the relationship.
Communicating in Difficult Situations
Moving toward Understanding & Agreement

Self-Awareness
What am I feeling? What am I expecting from this meeting?

Listening to Understand
Maybe I still won’t agree, but I can try to understand.

Interests over Positions
Ultimately I want ___. I think the right way to get there is ___. but I’m open to other options.
Understanding the Structure of School Districts

Focus on Lowest Level of Resolution

- School Board & Superintendent
- District Special Education and 504 Coordinators
- Principal
- IEP/504 Team -- Teacher
What if Focusing on the Lowest Level Hasn’t Helped?

Next Steps

• Get the decision (or document the disagreement) in writing: use of PWN
• If it’s an IEP: ask the team to reconsider or postpone a change until there is more info/discussion
• Work out a plan to take more data; review reasonable time period
• Seek help; seek an outside perspective
If We Try and We Still Don’t Agree…

**Mediation/Facilitation:** If we had time and help from a mediator, could we work through our disagreements to reach an outcome we could all live with? What if we tried a facilitated IEP process?

**Written Complaint:** Is there part of this disagreement that could be resolved through a written complaint, investigation and decision?

**Due Process Hearing:** Are we at an impasse? Do we need a neutral hearing officer to consider the facts and make a decision?
Finding Community Supports During Your Journey
Family, Advocacy, and Social Supports

Nonprofits
The Arc of WA and local chapters throughout the state (See their Parent-to-Parent, P2P program)
Neighborhood House (including family engagement materials)
Open Doors for Multicultural Families
PAVE
TeamChild
Washington Autism Alliance and Advocacy
Washington State Parents and Teachers Association (PTA)
Washington State Special Education Coalition (WSSEC)
Local and State Agency Supports and Information

Other Places to Try for Information or Conflict Resolution Help

**Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI):**
- OSPI Special Education Parent Liaison
- OSPI Equity and Civil Rights

**Sound Options Mediation and Training Group**
Special education-related mediation services. Toll-Free: 800-692-2540

**Seattle Public Schools Special Education Ombudsperson** 206-252-0794
**Highline Public Schools District Ombudsman** 206-631-3104
Contact Us

We are here to help!

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