

# 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.

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### 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.

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## Slide 4: The 4 A's

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

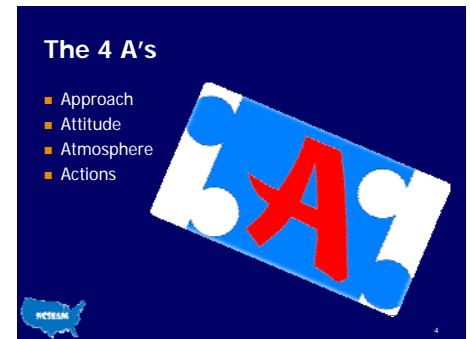
- For flourishing family-school partnerships to occur, certain condition should be met.
  - These include:
    - An *approach* that invites and expects family involvement
    - Positive *attitudes* educators hold regarding family involvement
    - A welcoming *atmosphere* created by educators.
    -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

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## 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

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### Slide 6:

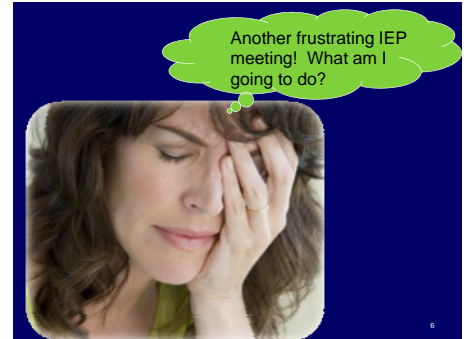
- Talk about how parents can many times leave meetings feeling frustrated.
- The purpose of this presentation today is to talk about strategies we can put in place to hopefully change the parent's emotional outcome after future meetings

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### Slide 7:

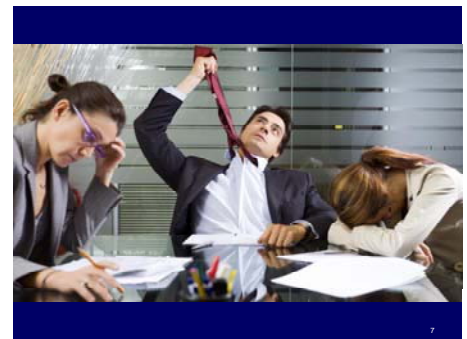
- Our goal should be to not have any more IEP meeting where everyone is feeling like this!

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## Slide 8:

Things to consider prior to the IEP meeting with the parents

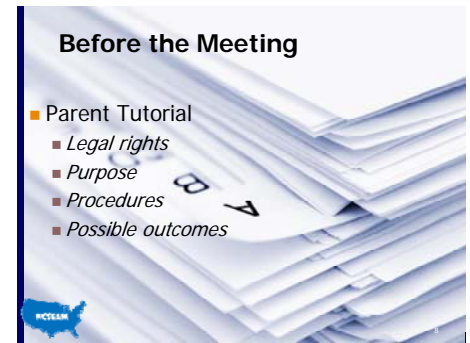
- Role-play with parents if possible.
- Allow parents to directly observe an IEP meeting or watch a video of a meeting. Good resource for online IEP videos-([www.alaskamentorproject.org](http://www.alaskamentorproject.org))
- Minimize educational jargon during the meetings to enhance parents' understanding. 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

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## Slide 8: Continued

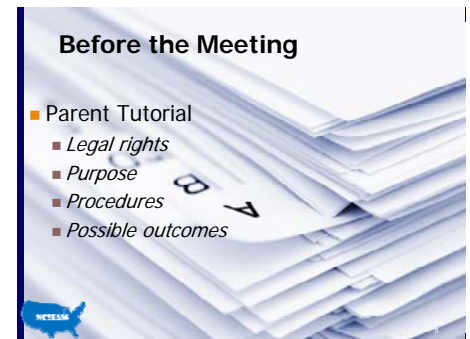
- Tell parents about the purpose, procedures, and possible outcomes of the meeting.
- Legal Rights: Highlight some of the important legal considerations parents may not be aware of & develop a “Quick Facts Sheet” for them:
  1. They are permitted to bring anyone to the meeting – they don’t have to come 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

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## Slide 8-Continued

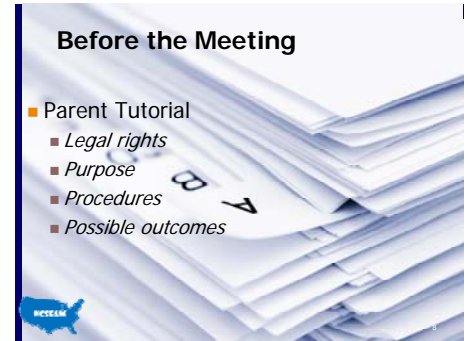
- Procedures that will take place:
  - Introductions
  - Evaluation results of formal testing will be shared
  - Information will be offered from the classroom teacher regarding academic performance & behavior
  - Placement decisions made
  - Signatures obtained – signature for being present at the meeting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

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## 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.

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## 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.

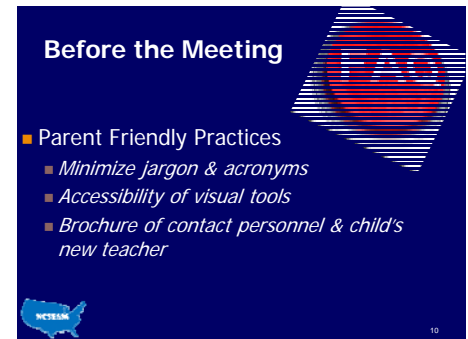
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### Slide 11:

- 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

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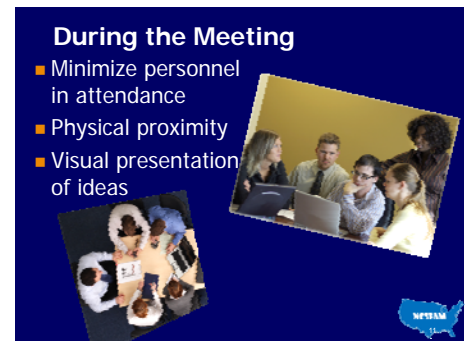
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### Slide 12:

- 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.

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### 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!"

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### During the Meeting

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




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### Slide 14:

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

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### During the Meeting

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





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## Slide 15:

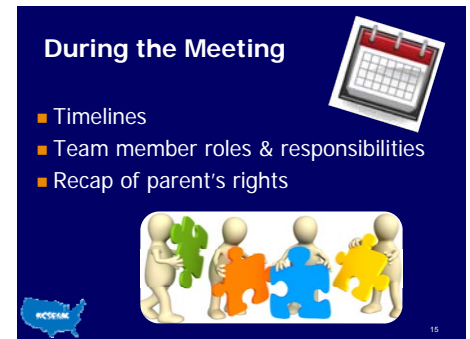
- Timelines
  - IEP is valid for 1 year
  - Quarterly progress updates
  - When can parents expect to receive these (e.g. during report card conferences/distribution)
- Team member roles & responsibilities
  - Who will be responsible for delivering each service
  - Who will be responsible for monitoring 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)

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## 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.

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## Slide 19

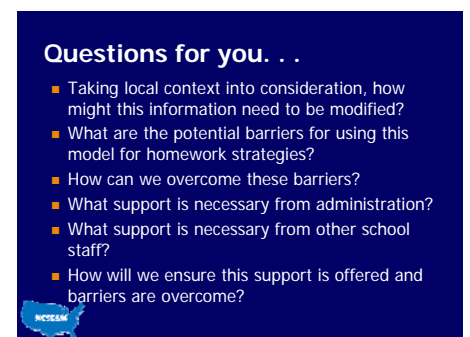
- Discussion Points for you and your staff

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## *The 4 A's:* Creating Conditions for Family-School Partnerships

### The Future of School Psychology Task Force on Family-School Partnerships

Susan Sheridan, Jenny Burt, Ashley Taylor, Andy Garbacz, Katie Black, Katie Magee, Laura Mullaney, Katie Hraban, Kelly Rasmussen

Nebraska Center for Research on Children, Youth, Families and Schools  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

## The Four A's

- Certain attitudes and beliefs need to be in place before any family-school intervention can be effective
- Four A's (Approach, Attitudes, Atmosphere, and Actions) define the conditions that are necessary for effective family-school partnerships



## Approach

Approach: The framework for engaging in positive interactions with families

- Belief in *shared responsibility* is central to family-school partnerships
- Both families and educators are *essential* for children's growth and development
- Emphasis placed on *relationships* between family members and educators, rather than on separate roles that each assume

## Approach

- How To Engage in a Partnership Approach:
  - Request parental assistance – create opportunities for dialogue and empowering parents
  - Encourage a role for parents – share information and resources to solve concerns
  - Provide rationales and expectations for families and schools to work together
  - Structure interventions that require cooperation and communication (e.g., home-school notes, home reinforcement for school performance)
  - Increase responsibility for successful outcomes by including all participants (parents, teachers, and child when appropriate)

## Attitude

Attitude: The values and perceptions held about family-school relationships

*Includes attitudes that:*

- All families have strengths.
- Parents can help their children succeed in school -- they must be provided with the opportunity and necessary information and support.
- Parents have important information and perspectives that we need to help educate their children.
- Parents and educators each bring unique and important perspectives and expertise to the table as co-equals.

## Attitude

### ■ How To Adopt a Partnership Attitude:

- Attempt to take parents' perspectives whenever possible.
- Ask yourself:
  - Do I put myself in the parents' place and mentally reverse roles to consider how I would feel as the parent of the child about whom there are concerns?
  - Do I really believe that parents are equal to me as a professional and are experts on their child?
  - Do I consistently value the comments and insights of parents and make use of their reservoir of knowledge about the child's total needs and activities?
  - Do I listen to parents, communicating with words, eye-contact, and posture that I respect and value their insights?
  - If I had a child in this situation, what information would I want and how would I like to be treated?



## Atmosphere

Atmosphere: The climate in schools for families and educators to engage as partners.

- The affective climate in interactions among families and schools.
- The physical climate in schools that make them inviting and "family-friendly."
- All families must feel welcome!
  - Differences in parent backgrounds & experiences must be recognized.
  - Personal difficulties in school or previous conflicts may be prominent.
  - Ethnic, linguistic, religious, class differences can widen the gap.



## Atmosphere

### ■ How To Create an Inviting Atmosphere:

- Recognize and appreciate diverse family structures, circumstances, and responsibilities, and how they may impact roles
- Make your classroom welcoming and family-friendly
- Spend time getting to know families and developing on-going relationships
- Refrain from making assumptions and generalizations about families



## Actions

Actions: What schools do to build partnerships and shared responsibility for education with families through effective communication.

- There is no one-size fits all approach
- Examine your current practices for partnering with families, and your willingness to include families and ask for their input
- Effective communication and administrative support are *key*!



## Actions: Communication

### ■ How To Practice Effective Communication:

- Provide regular information to parents about their child's progress (e.g., make "good news" phone calls; use home-school notes; share information through e-mails, weekly folders, newsletters)
- Engage in effective conflict management strategies by using clarifying statements and problem-solving strategies
- Use words that convey a partnership (e.g., "we, us, and our" versus "you, I, yours, and mine")
- Share information about how families can help their child at home



## Actions: Communication

### ■ How To Practice Effective Communication:

- Use statements that express concern for the child
- Retain focus on the child's goals and how to achieve them together
- Elicit ideas, information, and perspectives from parents using open-ended questions (e.g., "How?" "When?" "Describe")
- Paraphrase and validate message from parents to check understanding (e.g., "I hear you saying..."; "You are concerned about...")



### Actions: Administrative Support

- Establish policies for partnering with all families
- Include policies for:
  - Requesting parental input throughout all phases of decision-making, not just when problems arise
  - Participation of parents who lack literacy skills or do not speak English
  - Professional development for teachers and staff to enhance their effectiveness with parents
  - Opportunities for parents to assist in the instructional process at school and at home



### Key Points to Remember

- The development of effective approach, attitude, atmosphere and actions takes time.
- The aforementioned strategies may not work equally for all students, families, and educators.
- Individual schools may want to discuss what type(s) of programs will best meet their needs and school communities.
- Committing the time and resources while developing and implementing effective strategies will allow the process and outcomes to be most effective.

