School-Parent Partnerships to Promote Positive Outcomes for Students With Disabilities

Overview for Facilitators

The CEEDAR Center is pleased to provide this learning module on building relationships with parents and families to secure a positive, productive support system for students with disabilities. The materials are designed for a pre-service course or professional development (PD). Consistent with the tenets of IDEA and current research, this resource is designed to support school leaders' skills in developing school-parent partnerships to increase successful outcomes for students with disabilities.

Speaker Notes

You may paraphrase or use verbatim the speaker notes to explain each slide and accompanying activities. Information for the facilitator to read, such as directions and notes, is italicized.

Handout 1: This handout includes discussion questions for the video *Trusting Family Partnerships* (relevant to Slide 11). This video is available as a free download at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0G_PpDYbdis/

Handout 2: This handout includes brief scenarios designed to improve school-parent partnerships (Slide 31).

Objectives

1. Identify benefits of school-family partnerships.
2. Consider the impact of IDEA on parental rights.
3. Identify indicators of positive school-family partnerships.
4. Identify ways parents support student learning.

Outline of Session With Activities and Approximate Time

The session is designed to last for approximately 3 hours.

Topic	Slides	Activity	Time in Minutes
Introduction to CEM	1-3	Introductory slides	5
Diversity in family structures and backgrounds	4		5
Objectives	5		5
Benefits of school-family partnerships	6-7		5

IDEA 2004 and protections	8-10		15
Video — *Trusting Family Partnerships*	11	Handout 1 — Discussion and debriefing	15
Determining factor in parent involvement and how parents support student outcomes	12-13		15
BREAK			10
Dimensions of family and professional partnerships (Blue-Banning et al., 2004)	14-28		25
Case Study — Best practices in partnering	30	Handout 2 — Graphic organizer, discussion, and debriefing	15
A Model for Action	31		10
Resources and Conclusion	32-33	Responses to closing questions on partnering with parents	10

Suggested Follow-Up Professional Learning Opportunities
Students will individually read or collaboratively discuss one or more of the following options.

Articles, Books, & Book Chapters:
1. Blue-Banning, M., Summers, J. A., Frankland, H. C., Nelson, L., & Beegle, G. (2004). Dimensions of family and professional partnerships: Constructive guidelines for collaboration. *Exceptional Children*, *70*(2), 167-184.
   Assign prior to class if possible

2. Burke, M. M. (2013). Improving parental involvement: Training special education advocates. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 23*(4), 225-234.

3. Byrd, E. S. (2011). Educating and involving parents in the response to intervention process: The school's important role. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, *43*(3), 32-39.

4. Hanson, M. J., & Lynch, E. W. (2013). *Understanding families: Supportive approaches to diversity, disability, and risk*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

5. Kalyanpur, M., & Harry, B. (2012). *Cultural reciprocity in special education: Building family-professional relationships*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

6. Lamb, M. (2010). My voice: The Four-R approach. In A. Turnbull, R. Turnbull, & M. L. Wehmeyer (Eds.), *Exceptional lives: Special education in today's schools* (6th ed., pp. 78-79). Columbus, OH and Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Pearson.

7. Complete the parent IRIS module.

8. Turnbull, A., Turnbull, R., Erwin, E. J., Soodak, L. C., & Shogren, K. A. (2105). *Families, professional, and exceptionality: Positive outcomes through partnerships and trust.* Columbus, OH and Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

9. Salazar, M. J. (2012). Home-school collaboration for embedding individualized goals in daily routines. *Young Exceptional Children, 15*(3), 20-30.

10. Zhang, D., Hsu, H. Y., Kwok, O. H., Benz, M., & Bowman-Perrott, L. (2011). The impact of basic level parent engagements on student achievement: Patterns associated with race/ethnicity and socio-economic status (SES). *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 22*(1), 28-39.

Speaker Notes
Slide 1—CEEDAR SLIDE

Slide 2—School Leadership for Students With Disabilities
In this sixth CEM presentation, we provide an introduction about school-family partnerships. As you can see from this slide, we are on the last part of the school leadership CEM. In the last module, you will have an opportunity to look at the importance of school-family partnerships in addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

Slide 3—Key Goal of School-Family Partnerships: Ensuring Successful Student Outcomes
A key goal in developing school-family partnership is ensuring successful outcomes for students with disabilities. Leaders, teachers, and other school staff build positive relationships with parents and families to secure a positive, productive support system for students. School staff view parents as experts on their child as they know their child's strengths and needs and what motivates them. Strong school-family partnerships are established to encourage positive student outcomes in all students, including those from diverse family and cultural backgrounds.

Slide 4—Diversity in Family Structures and Backgrounds

Before we discuss developing school-family partnerships, considering what family means in our society is important. The two-parent family with a husband and wife still exists, but many other variations on family structures also exist. Students in the United States live in households with single parents, grandparents or foster families, two parents of the same gender, and families who are homeless, among others.

In addition to a range of family structures, increased diversity among students and their families exists as schools serve students from varied cultural backgrounds, families who speak English as a second language, and families from different socioeconomic levels, among others.

Leaders should welcome all families and encourage them to become involved in the school and their child's activities. School staff must learn about families and take time to understand families by listening to what they say and understanding their perspectives. Some school districts have family partnership coordinators or advocates who play support roles as they foster communication and respect between families and educators (Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone, 2007). Leaders may also need interpreters to interact with parents who do not speak English as a first language.

Slide 5—Objectives

In this session, we have four objectives:

- *Identify benefits of school-family partnerships.*
  Numerous benefits of school-family partnerships exist, and we will explore the ways in which families, students, and schools benefit by working closely and productively together. Identifying the payoffs for students, families, and schools reinforces the importance of fostering and maintaining strong school-family partnerships.
- *Consider the impact of IDEA on parental rights.*
  Parents have had a key role in shaping disability rights policy for decades. Throughout United States history, parents have advocated for and gained specific rights for themselves and their children. School leaders must understand IDEA (2004) and parents' rights.
- *Identify dimensions of positive family-school partnerships.*
  We will explore six dimensions and corresponding indicators central to successful school-family partnerships. These dimensions are important for school leaders to consider as they collaborate with parents and navigate challenging situations.
- *Identify the ways parents support student learning.*
  We will explore ways that parents can proactively support their children's learning in school and at home. Building and extending opportunities for parental engagement and presence in schools is central to ensuring students' success.

Slide 6—Benefits of School-Family Partnerships

Several benefits for strong school family partnerships exist. School-family partnerships increase the likelihood that children will have *positive school experiences and better life outcomes*. In school-family partnerships, ongoing sharing about students' needs and parent and teacher expertise in addressing these needs occur. Family well-being may improve when students are learning because stress and anxiety decrease when family members see their child learning and making progress. Strong school-family partnerships also provide parents with opportunities to see leaders and teachers advocate for their child, which is likely to strengthen their view of leaders and teachers. Strong school-family partnerships allow parents to have a voice in their child's learning so they can advocate for their child across school levels and help plan the transition to post-secondary education or work. Finally, costly conflicts decrease with strong school-family partnerships, allowing for a focus on student learning rather than hearings and litigation.

Slide 7—Benefits for Students With Disabilities

Research reflects the importance of families' involvement in their children's schools (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2015). Turnbull and colleagues outline specific ways that school-family partnerships benefit students. These benefits include improving students' skills, increasing student motivation, improving student attendance and retention in school, completing homework, promoting positive behavior, and increasing quality of relationships. In productive school-family partnerships, parents can advocate for their child, sharing their expert knowledge over time and providing feedback about how they see their child's progress and needs. In productive partnerships, parents will also be more receptive to hearing school viewpoints because of enhanced two-way communication.

Slide 8—A Historical Perspective of Families & IDEA

Many Americans, including educators, may not be aware of the large role that families have played in the United States to secure rights for their children's access to a free and appropriate education. This visual shows the progression of IDEA over time with parents advocating for their child's rights, a major force in creating federal law that protects students with disabilities. Since the 1975 enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), the legal rights of students with disabilities and their parents have been focal points for educators and school leaders. These rights have evolved since 1975 and are now provided through IDEA 2004. For decades, federal legislation has focused on protecting the legal rights of students and their parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Legal compliance is a first step in the process of involving parents, but engaging parents as partners in their child's education should be the aim rather than simply complying.

Slide 9—Parents Have Special Rights Protected by IDEA 2004
Parents have the right to consent or object to a school's decision to pursue certain actions regarding their child. They may give or deny consent for school's actions. Examples of such actions include pursing a formal evaluation of their child and participating in determining whether their child has a disability. Parents may disagree with school decisions and request mediation or a due process hearing. School leaders and faculty must also take measures to safeguard students' and parents' privacy. Confidentiality is not just best practice, but also a right guaranteed to parents and students by federal law. Parents also have the right to access their children's education records, receive written notice of meetings and changes to their child's program, and attend all formal meetings that involve decisions about their child's education and disability-related needs. Parents should make every effort to encourage meaningful parent participation in eligibility and IEP meetings.

Slide 10—Supporting School-Family Partnerships Extends Beyond Compliance
Of course, supporting student achievement and development means more than meeting legal compliance requirements (Bryan, 2012). Welcoming parents and creating spaces for them within the school, as well as providing meaningful opportunities to include them in decision-making processes, are important to supporting students' success in learning. In this next activity, we will consider the varied ways that schools and families work together.

Slide 11—Video & Activity
Please refer to Handout 1 for this activity. You will watch a 60-second video that showcases many ways that parents can actively and meaningfully participate in their child's school community. SWIFT (2015) created this film. Swift is a national K-8 center that provides academic and behavioral support to promote the engagement and academic achievement of all students, including those with disabilities and extensive needs. The film's focus is on building trust in school-family partnerships and shows how parents participate in important school decision-making teams and leadership roles.

Video link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0G_PpDYbdis/
(you may need to cut and paste link)
(see specific directions on Handout 1)

Slide 12—What Is the Single Largest Determining Factor of Parental Involvement in Schools?
Accessibility is key. Parents are most likely to be involved in their children's school experiences when schools are effective in helping parents feel welcome and connected (McLaughlin, 2012).

Advanced degrees and high paying jobs are not what qualify parents as experts about their children. The emotional investment and care that parents exert in securing their children's well-being are what make them the most important stakeholders in student success. School leaders and teachers are responsible for extending opportunities to parents to become actively involved in schools. Research reflects that students whose parents consistently support their learning at home and in school have better attendance rates, socialization, self-determination, and overall achievement. In the second half of this module, we will discuss ways to build productive partnerships with families.

Slide 13—Parents Support Positive School Outcomes in a Myriad of Ways
Parents support their child's learning and positive learning experiences in a number of ways. First, parents collaborate with those who provide their child with an education and share their expertise about their child. In some cases, this may involve agencies outside the school that support the child and family (e.g., mental health services). Additionally, mothers and fathers are capable of shifting educators' paradigms and practices by challenging deep-seated, limiting beliefs about disability (Diliberto & Brewer, 2012) as they share their child's strengths and needs. Parents share their expertise about their child, helping schools understand the child's strengths, needs, and learning preferences. Parents can also make concrete recommendations for accommodations, help develop IEPs, and reinforce skills at home. Educators assist in encouraging parent contributions by scheduling meetings at times when they can attend and in sincerely inviting their participation.

Slide 14—Dimensions of Family-School Partnerships
Unfortunately, school-parent partnerships are often unsuccessful. Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle (2004) colleagues studied dimensions of interpersonal partnerships by conducting focus groups with service providers, leaders, and adult family members of children with and without disabilities. Roughly half of the family participants had a child with a disability. Twenty-eight percent of the study participants were service providers and administrators. Participants were recruited from diverse geographic regions and represented a wide range of demographic characteristics. They identified indicators of professional collaboration, grouping them into six themes: communication, commitment, equality, competency, trust, and respect. The researchers emphasized that these categories are interrelated. For example, they gave the example that communication helps build trust and respect and confers equality. Leaders should consider each of these not only in their interactions with families, but also with school professionals to help them engage with parents in productive ways. We will review each of these themes, providing examples of indicators for each. (*If possible, assign Blue-Banning et al., 2004, prior to class meeting).*

Slide 15—1. Communication
Quality communication includes these six indicators. They help ensure sufficient quantity of communication and quality of conversation (*describe each*). These behaviors enable family and parents to communicate and coordinate effectively, sharing information and resources and coordinating as needed. As the indicators in this slide suggest, high-quality communication includes two-way communication, in which one effectively communicates and listens. Please turn and talk (2 minutes), sharing an example of one of these behaviors that you would like to think about more as you communicate with parents. (*Ask students to share as time permits.*)

The above represent overall indicators of high-quality communication. Professionals will also need to consider that communication needs may vary for students with different needs. For example, in some instances, a daily parent-school log may help the parent and school frequently communicate and reinforce similar strategies with the student.

Slide 16—Perspectives on Communication
On the left-hand side of this slide, a family member shares the importance of professionals taking the time to listen (*read quote on slide*). On the right-hand side of the slide, a professional shares a perspective about how communication supports developing trusting relationships (*read quote on slide*).

Slide 17—2. Commitment
In addition to regular and positive communication, parents appreciate when professionals are committed to their children's well-being and learning. Blue-Banning et al. (2004) suggested that professionals practice commitment by demonstrating that their work is "more than a job"(p. 174) and being accessible, encouraging, consistent, and flexible. Parents hope that professionals will "go the extra mile" and "be like family" in their involvement (p. 180) whereas professionals sometimes expressed concern about going beyond what is reasonable.

Leaders also show commitment by connecting with the child as an individual and demonstrating commitment to the child as part of the school community. Professionals should also consider the extent to which they engage with and show commitment to all parents and students as establishing relationships with parents who are similar to them may be easier.

Slide 18—One Professional's Perspective on Commitment:
It's like I'm not in this field for the money. If you work for a nonprofit, you're not in it for the money . . . . So, often times, I'm working with a parent on the IEP, which certainly isn't in my job description. Or I'm giving them SSI information . . . . Sometimes, we need to take those

stringent hats off . . . . I've gone to IEP meetings. I've gone to people's homes when they couldn't get in to see me . . . .

<div align="right">-Blue-Banning et al., 2004, p. 176</div>

Read quote on slide. This is a compelling example of a professional who demonstrates commitment to families. Taking extra steps like meeting parents off campus and offering information about benefits demonstrates going the extra mile.

Slide 19—3. Equality

In this slide, Blue-Banning et al. (2004) define what equality in a partnership means (*read slide*). The authors emphasize that equality requires that professionals and parents are involved and empowered. Professionals can help empower families and make sure that they have opportunities to share as equals. In contrast, when professionals act as the experts, do not take time to listen, or do not encourage parents to participate, parents may feel powerless, defer to the experts, and retreat from further involvement.

Slide 20—Indicators of Equality

In this slide, Blue-Banning et al. (2004) provide indicators of equality (*read each on slide*). Equality is best achieved by sharing power and including parents in important decisions (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Exploring both school and parent options are important and demonstrate that everyone at the table has a voice.

Slide 21—Approachability Fosters a Sense of Equality

The sense of harmony that is communicated in this mother's quote helps facilitate equal relationships. She states . . . (*read quote on slide*).

Slide 22—4. Skills

Positive school-family partnerships will improve when parents see professionals as skilled individuals who are available to address their child's needs. In this slide, Blue-Banning et al. (2004) illustrate indicators that demonstrate skilled professional behavior (*read each item on slide and the corresponding example from the list below*).

- **Taking action**. By garnering additional resources, such as iPads or literacy programs earmarked for students with disabilities, school leaders demonstrate taking action.
- **Having expectations for child's progress.** Setting up regularly scheduled meetings with teachers to discuss students' progress in the curriculum is an example of school leaders' expectation that all students will be successful.
- **Meeting individual special needs.** Ensuring that teachers and support staff fully implement every student's IEP accommodations is an important way that school leaders help ensure that students' individual needs are met.

- **Considering the whole child and family.** Identifying and developing rapport with community-based agencies that serve the needs of families and their children with disabilities demonstrate school leaders' consideration of the whole child and family.
- **Being willing to learn.** Participating in PD opportunities centered on teaching students with disabilities reflects school leaders' willingness to learn.

Slide 23—A Parent's Perspective . . .
Follow-through is important to parents. Naturally, professionals may not be able to answer all questions that parents ask them, but making a conscientious effort to find the best answer shows commitment and tenacity. *Read quote from father on slide*. This quote illustrates that being honest about not knowing the answer to a question instead of offering an inaccurate response makes parents feel that professionals care enough about them and their child to provide reliable information (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Can you think of a time when you did not have the answer to a parent's question but made a point to listen and seek out information that proved helpful to them?

Slide 24—5. Trust
Understandably, parents value professionals who consistently demonstrate trustworthiness. Blue-Banning et al. (2004) emphasize the importance of relatability, keeping children safe, and being discreet. Discretion involves being able to trust professionals to keep confidences. Parents also tend to more readily trust those who focus on the strengths, achievement, and goals of their children. One of parents' greatest desires is for their children to be treated as valued individuals who positively impact their schools and communities (Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2009). Parents and school professionals bring forth different experiences in developing school-family partnerships, and these experiences may influence or generalize to the current partnership. Taking these prior experiences into consideration is important to building trust (Angell et al., 2005; Blue-Banning et al., 2004).

Slide 25—A Professionals' Perspective on Trust . . .
Read quote on slide. Building trust with parents suggests a sense of rapport, an understanding that they can rely on the professional to at least listen and perhaps find the answers to their questions without judgment.

Slide 26—6. Respect
The final partnership theme is respect. In this slide, indicators of respect are outlined and include "valuing the child, being nonjudgmental, being courteous, exercising nondiscrimination, and avoiding intrusion" (Blue-Banning et al., 2004, p. 174). Valuing students with disabilities and avoiding deficit-laden language is particularly important.

Lack of respect causes considerable damage, ranging from loss of parents' sense of empowerment to a lack of willingness to use available services (Blue-Banning et al, 2004).

Slide 27—Value the Child as a Person, not a Diagnosis
Read quote on slide. Avoiding deficit-laden language deserves emphasis in special education. Many parents worry that schools will hold their children to a lower standard and that the children will fall into a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure because of low expectations. When educators and administrators view children as valuable members of the school community, they convey their investment in each student's success. One way that school leaders can communicate investment is to make sure that they consistently provide positive, objective, and skill-based descriptions of students rather than drawing reference to students' disabilities and deficits. The results are an increase in students' feelings of self-efficacy and parents' sense of hopefulness and positivity about their children's potential.

Slide 28—Modeling a Partnership Approach
Read quote on slide. The six principles each provide clear direction and outline specific actions to facilitate positive partnerships with parents of students with disabilities. School leaders set the tone for interactions with parents and families, and they serve as models for everyone in their schools. These principles for partnership can help assess current school practices and parents' perspectives to determine which areas represent areas of strength and how partnerships can improve.

Slide 29—Best Practices in Building School-Family Partnerships
<u>Think, Pair, & Share Activity:</u>
1. Refer to Handout 2.
2. Find a partner with whom to work.
3. Think about each scenario and the actions that lead to parents' distrust.
4. Brainstorm with your partner ways to develop parents' trust during collaboration.
5. Record your responses in the fourth column.
6. Spend a few minutes sharing your responses with the class.

Slide 30—A Model for Action: School Partnering With Parents
Administrators can facilitate parents' involvement in their children's growth and learning success in a number of ways (Epstein et al., 2009). The points below are part of a model in general education but are applicable for partnering with parents of students with disabilities. What follows are examples of how they apply to students with disabilities:

1. **Decision-making** helps parents feel that they have an equal voice in their children's school community. In what ways does your school invite parents of students with disabilities to help in decision-making processes, including designing their child's IEP?

2. **Parents' skills in helping their child develop positive behavior** and feelings about school are supported when families and schools closely collaborate. Consider the approach your school takes in helping students with disabilities develop positive social and behavioral skills. How might you include parents in this effort?

3. **Parents more effectively promote their children's learning at home** when schools consistently include them in helping to plan their children's curriculum. Reflect on how parents of students with disabilities in your school are encouraged to extend learning opportunities at home. Do parents receive a chance to see the lessons and objectives their children's teachers use to engage them at school? Do parents receive ideas on how to bridge their children's learning to the home environment?

4. **Providing opportunities for parents to volunteer** in their children's school helps them feel welcome and gain accessibility to their children's learning environments. What types of volunteer activities are parents of students with disabilities invited to participate in at your school?

5. **Communicating with parents on a regularly scheduled basis** helps keep them informed of their children's progress at school and school programs that may be of benefit. Depending on parents' access to technology and their work schedules, schools may need to rely on a variety of modes for communicating with mothers and fathers. To effectively keep parents informed, a predetermined schedule or frequency of contact is helpful. Do you and your faculty find certain modes of communication more beneficial in keeping parents well informed?

6**. Collaboration with the community** helps parents connect with outside agencies and resources that may benefit their children in the present as well as long term. Initiating and fostering families' relationships with community resources lays the groundwork for parents' long-term advocacy of their children. In what ways do you actively connect the parents of students with disabilities at your school with community resources?

Slide 31—Resources for Families and School Professionals
Two important resources available to families of students with disabilities and school leaders are the Parent Training & Information Center (PTI) and the Protection & Advocacy (P&A) agency. Every state has one or more PTIs to educate and empower families to advocate for their children with disabilities and promote strong partnerships with schools. In addition to being an important resource for families, the PTI is also helpful to school professionals who desire to learn more about the parent perspective.

The second resource for families and school professionals is the Protection & Advocacy Agency (P&A). All state P&A agencies employ attorneys and other advocates to provide

legal services to families of children with disabilities. P&A agencies are especially helpful when conflict arises between families and schools. In addition to providing services to families, P&A agencies are also an excellent resource for school professionals.

Slide 32—Conclusion
This slide is not intended as a formal activity, but to encourage school leaders to continue thinking about ways to partner with parents of students with disabilities after this module.

As we close our discussion on school-family partnerships, consider how, as your school's leader, you support the following practices in your school:
Read each point and question, allowing participants to consider and share their responses, and then read the example provided.
1. Welcoming and connecting with all families and students.
How would you strategize to make your school a welcoming community for everyone?
A school leader can appoint parents of students with and without disabilities at each grade level to be part of a welcoming support network for new families and students.
2. Families as authentic partners in decisions.
Can you include parents in most school and district decision-making processes for students whose educational needs are different from those of typical children?
A school leader can include parents in decision-making processes by supporting their participation in formal and informal parents' organizations and the district's school board.
3. Parents supporting their child's learning.
To what extent should and can parents participate in their child's school and educational program?
School leaders can promote parents' involvement in their child's learning by providing access to the school, inviting them to open-houses and meetings, providing opportunities for parent leadership, and communicating frequently (e.g., newsletters, discussion forums).
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*Please note that the reference list for all citations contained in the Speaker Notes is located at the end of the PowerPoint Presentation for this module.

References

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