Building Relationships

Between School Personnel & Parents in Special Education

People are basically the same the world over. Everybody wants the same things - to be happy, to be healthy, to be at least reasonably prosperous, and to be secure.
They want friends, peace of mind, good family relationships, and hope that tomorrow is going to be even better than today.

– Zig Ziglar

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- What do school personnel want?
- To be welcoming, friendly and supportive.
- To function as a team, with school personnel and parents working together to meet each child's individual needs.
- To help our students meet the high educational standards set for them.
- To be helpful.
- To be flexible whenever possible.
- To communicate honestly.
- To provide timely and accurate information.
- To prepare our students for their lives beyond high school.
- To do our jobs well.

Building Relationships Between School

- So, what gets in the way?
- We get distracted by the clock, competing schedules, meeting deadlines and just getting things done, so it seems like we can't spare any time to talk.
- In the interest of time, we may prepare drafts of IEPs and other documents in advance, which can shorten meeting time, but also quell discussion.
- We get caught up in what seems like minutia – focusing on paperwork issues during meetings, for example – so there's less time for give and take.
- We forget that parents know their children best and focus too much on what we think is best, given our own knowledge and experience.
- We use special education "jargon," forgetting that parents aren't as familiar with that as we are.

Personnel & Parents in Special Education

- We say or do the "wrong thing" and seem clueless, negative, insensitive or unprofessional.
- Many of us don't know or understand what it's like to be the parent of a child with a disability.
- We need to share upsetting information sometimes. We don't like being the bearers of "bad news" and may not be good at handling that role.
- When we perceive criticism or feel attacked, we get defensive and have trouble getting over our hurt feelings. That can impact our communication skills over the long term.

- We get frustrated because we can't find a good way to address a tough problem. When we're focused on one or more frustrating issues, we can fixate on them and forget about the improvements we also ought to mention.
- We get behind, and we don't meet expectations and/or deadlines.
- We just make mistakes.

Building Relationships Between School

We know that school personnel need to take action to improve relationships with parents. What kind of things can parents do to build or improve relationships with school personnel?

- First, remember what school personnel really WANT to do, listed on page 3. Although we may fall short, we have big goals.
- Help us set the tone for our relationship. Tell us what your expectations are, what's most important to you and your child, how you'd like to communicate with school personnel and anything else you think we need to know.
- Give us insight into your child's life away from school. That may increase our understanding of your child, his or her interests, what you're doing for your child at home and his or her important role in your family.

Personnel & Parents in Special Education

- Tell us the good (and difficult) news about your child and family. We don't need all the details, particularly about difficult situations. But current information may help us understand what's important to your child and your family and what's impacting your child's life.
- Spend time at school, if possible, as a volunteer in another area or enjoying a school activity. That may increase your understanding of the services, programs and activities your school has to offer.
- When you ask for something, please share supporting information so we can understand and respond to your request.
- Understand that schools have limited resources, which affects all students. Schools will not refuse to provide a needed service or item for a child with a disability because of cost, but we must make decisions based upon student need.
- Understand that schools are trying to adjust to and implement new mandates imposed by the state and federal governments. We have many of the same questions and concerns that you do.
- If you think we've messed up, tell us your concerns. Give us a reasonable chance to address them and make the situation better. The district's Director of Special Services is a good person to approach.
- Contact the **Oklahoma Special Education Resolution Center (SERC)** for assistance with special education issues, at **(888) 267-0028**. SERC offers free resources and services that can help improve relationships between parents and school personnel.

Developed by these Oklahoma Programs and Institutions

Special Education Resolution Center

OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

A dvocating for Children with Disabilities to Build a Better Future

Oklahoma Parents Center
Statewide Parent Training and Information

OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Oklahoma Special Education Resolution Center
(888) 267-0028 | (918) 270-1849