

CADRE and JAMS Foundation Present:
Voices from the Field
Interview Clip #1 Transcript – Tracy Gershwin Mueller

Marshall: You've done a lot of work around positive parent engagement. Are there strategies, advice that you would offer about how we can create and really sustain positive home – school relationships?

Tracy: Yeah, you know, I think the partnership between parents and district members is the heart of all of this issue and one of the biggest areas that I see of concern, is the IEP in general is viewed as the meeting itself and in reality we need to shift our entire focus and look at that partnership as ongoing. The IEP meeting is one piece of it, but prior to that IEP meeting, some of my research, some of the work that I've read, encourages building that partnership. I think some strategies that are really beneficial are parent education, parent engagement, working with parents, building trust, communication, listening. Really though it's just generally good collaborative skills that we know about but we don't always see really being practiced or emphasized and what I see is a lot of emphasis on the actual meeting and in reality we need to build all of that, help inform our parents of what the process is, what it looks like, what they bring to the table, and in reality when you have that IEP meeting it should be at this point we've already got a wonderful relationship, we're all here for the child, it's child focused. I mean this is why we're here and let's celebrate that child's strengths, let's talk about our growth over the year and now let's plan, let's strategize what we need to work on to help that child grow even more academically, behaviorally, and socially. But, building that partnership begins way before that actual meeting itself. So I think that's the biggest tool that I'm seeing is all of those skills. I think also one area that we're starting to see, that I'm starting to see in research that's very helpful, is parent to parent support as well so that, you know, even when we do build those partnerships, sometimes parents need other parents to talk to or other people that might be outside of that educational team, that they might have more comfort with in asking some of those questions like you know what is an IEP? What can I do for my child? To take off some of the edge that we sometimes feel with that daunting IEP process which parents do describe it that way. So I think there are a lot of strategies we're starting to see and I think that's where the spirit of IDEA is, when it comes to that parent partnership piece.