

Voices from the Field

Outline and Bookmarks to Video

I. Introductions

- Christopher Tiffany, Executive Director Raising Special Kids (1:23)
- Kathy Gray-Mangerson, Education Systems Administrator, Raising Special Kids (1:36)
- Lori Bird, Chief of Dispute Resolution, Arizona Department of Education (1:42)

II. The Organizations and Programs (1:55)

- Raising Special Kids (2:07)
- Arizona Department of Education (3:13)

III. Describe the relationship between agencies (4:51)

- We have both formal and informal relationship between the agencies that has become stronger over last two years, particularly in era of Covid-19. (5:49)
- Partnerships benefit parents and educators
- A solid relationship between agencies helps all be better informed with accurate information. (9:04)
- Together act as a bridge between agencies and parents to share knowledge and perspectives. (9:56)
- Productive and strong communication between agencies better serves students.

IV. How did the relationship between agencies become stronger? (11:18)

- Our collaboration started with strong personal relationships.
- Formal collaboration agreements helped keep partnership during when there was turnover. (12:14)
- We have respect for one another's knowledge and we honor each other's perspectives. (13:12)
- Offered an example of collaborating with the task of problem-solving and helping families get needed services. (13:40)
- We come from a place of collaboration and assume positive intent from others. (16:37)

V. What are the values that you share? (17:49)

- We are all voices for students, even when we disagree. (18:10)
- We value the others' knowledge and try to have realistic assessments of situations. (19:45)
- Recognizing that difficulties may be related to lack of skills and offer opportunities to provide training. (19:57)
- Our collaboration helped us strengthen systems of care for positive student outcomes. (21:14)

VI. What are the benefits of your partnership brings to parents? (22:07)

- The state agency can't have their ear to the ground on what parents are experiencing, so we need the parent center to elevate the family voice.
- The relationship between us allows for us to be pro-active instead of reactive. (22:45)

- Important to partner on dissemination of accurate information. (24:08)
- Access allows for a valuable feedback loop between the state, educators, and families about what works and what doesn't work. (24:34)
- The collaboration between the agencies helps the SEA translate the complexities of special education to be more accessible and meaningful to parents (25:44)
 - Example: Graduation guidance (26:27)
 - Example: Compensatory services guidance (27:16)
 - Example: Parent training as a related service (28:01)
 - Example: Provider resources to help students with distance learning (28:14)
- Collaboration allows us to be nimble to meet emergent needs during COVID-19. (28:44)
- Collaboration allows for quick correction of misinformation. (29:43)

VII. What makes the collaboration possible? (31:41)

- If one of us has an idea to benefit our target group, nothing is off the table:
 - Example: Joint Training (32:17)
 - Example: Readily accept the idea of how to support parents together, although the details may need to be worked out (32:43)
- You have the right mindset to do this collaboration – the mutual respect for each other is there even when we disagree. (33:00)
- Relationships are built and have to start from a place of trust. (34:14)
- Communication needs to be intentional and continuous, and we have to be responsive to each other. (34:32)
- To create a more collaborative relationships, the importance of intentionality to include each other is very important, such as encouraging representation in activities and having standing meetings to share and learn about priorities. (35:29)
- A formalized contract exists between the PTI and the Department of AZ that lays out the scope of work and collaboration, including a training for *Engaging Parents in the IEP Process*, for districts, university classes, and other audiences. This has been very well-received to help foster relationships and building skills to working with parents. (38:00)

VIII. Any suggestions for maintaining these connections in the face of turnover? (41:30)

- Create a culture of transparency with staff. Meet regularly to share information and do your best to support with training, flexibility and resources.
- Making sure there is continuity of communication by maintaining a culture where values get passed on through the oral or written tradition, and where valuable alliances and relationships are expected to be carried on. (43:40)
- Create an expectation that is so embedded in the fabric of the two entities that it doesn't matter who steps into the role, and hire people who value the collaboration. (45:12)
- Annually, the entire PTI will meet with the entire AZ department to hear and see this collaboration at work. (45:37)
- For PTIs it is important to have regular training to learn and increase knowledge about special education information and emerging issues, like COVID-19. (46:13)

- From the SEA’s perspective, a key to developing trust with the parent center is that knowing that the PTI is sharing accurate information. A state doesn’t have the ability to be an advocate for parents, but with this trust, we can confidently recommend a parent seek additional information from the PTI (47:58)
- From the PTI’s view, the SEA helped create that foundation of knowledge.

IX. Any final advice to help other improve their collaboration? (51:02)

- One simple equation that we hold is that “Trust equals behavior over time.” (51:30)
 - The PTI focus on all employees holding to high standards of professional conduct.
 - In highly charged situations, it is important to follow a defined process and there is ample training. (52:37)
 - Our staff models healthy dispute resolution skills such as seeking to understand, assuming positive intent, and problem-solving in the best interest of the child. (52:52)
- Take advantage of training to learn more from different perspectives and encourage others from different roles to join in your trainings, as well. (53:18)
- Be honest (with parents and special education directors) regarding expectations and the realities of the situation, but don’t be afraid to think creatively. (55:49)

X. Final considerations

- Keep trying to build relationships and collaboration and don’t give up. Relationships take time. Keep providing input and say yes to join those committees. (58:03)
- Form those relationships where you can. It’s not always going to be a top-down situation and relationships may need to be built at different levels. (58:37)
- Be intentional in your relationship building solution building. (59:14)

SLIDE INCLUSION at 59:55 – Key takeaways, logos and OSEP stuff

Key Takeaways

- Collaboration and partnership benefits parents and educators, and ultimately students.
- Come from a place positive intent from others.
- Relationships and regular communication allow us to be pro-active instead of reactive, and nimble in meeting emergent needs.
- Welcome ideas where nothing is off the table.
- Promote mutual respect of perspectives, even when there is disagreement.
- Communication needs to be intentional, continuous, and responsive.
- Ensure a continuity of communication where values get passed on and alliances are expected to carry on.
- Trust equals behavior over time.
- Take advantage of training to learn more from different perspectives and encourage others from different roles to join in your trainings, as well.
- Keep trying to build relationships and collaboration and don't give up. Relationships take time and find opportunities to build connections wherever possible.