



# Special Education Mediation Services

***What Do/Did We Know About Effective Communication and Collaboration  
and How Has the Pandemic Changed Our Way of Building  
Family and School Relationships?***

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## Today's Training Team

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# Special Education Mediation Services

## Grant-Funded

A Grant-Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education (OSE).

## Free

Offer FREE mediation, IEP facilitation and collaborative communication training to schools and parents across Michigan.

## Federally Mandated

Enables the OSE to meet its obligation under the IDEA to provide statewide mediation services at no-cost to schools and parents to resolve special education disputes.



Failure is Not an  
Option!




# Today's Discussion

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- The importance of family engagement through collaboration and partnership and how the Covid 19 pandemic affected that engagement.
- Why communication and collaboration in Special Education is uniquely challenging but especially important.
- What we learned from the pandemic that can inform our learning environments moving forward.
- Why we now have a once in a lifetime opportunity to embark upon a new path to improved student success and the money to do it.





# The Pandemic Illuminated Three Very Important Things



Parental engagement is one of the most important factors in a student's success.

Building trust through effective communication and collaboration is essential to nurturing parental engagement.

The unique dynamics of Special Education makes effective communication and collaboration even more important.

# The Importance of Family Engagement



Studies consistently indicate the critical importance of family engagement in student success.

In the past ten years, a number of studies firmly established the benefit of family engagement **and** collaboration in student outcomes.

Collaboration builds on the traditional family engagement model and includes two-way communication, home-school coordination and joint problem solving.

# National Movement on Family Engagement and Collaboration



- As a result of an increasing consensus regarding the benefits of family engagement and collaboration, the last five years have seen a dramatic increase in these initiatives.
- Thirteen states were awarded a federal grant to establish statewide "family engagement centers," and numerous districts across the country have implemented innovative initiatives.
- There are now many national and local organizations/entities dedicated to increasing family engagement and collaboration.





# The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

Version 2



Mapp, K. L. & Bergman, E. (2019). Dual capacity-building framework for family-school partnerships (Version 2). Retrieved from: [www.dualcapacity.org](http://www.dualcapacity.org)

# What Makes Communication in Special Education Unique?



- Federal law requires that schools attempt to collaborate with the parent(s) of children with disabilities.
- Parents of children with disabilities deal with stresses and feelings that touch upon powerful emotions, and these emotions may spill over in meetings.
- School staff deal with many difficult stresses and limitations, and they may surface in meetings.

# What Makes Communication in Special Education Unique?



- Parents of children with disabilities may feel powerless in meetings due to the sheer disparity in numbers and previous negative experiences.
- Parents and School staff may have very different perceptions about a student's needs, based upon their observations and interactions in two different environments (school vs. at home).
- The three most important words in Special Education law ("appropriate" "reasonable" and "unique),” leave lots of room for differing interpretations and disagreement.



# Building Trusting Relationships



- Mastering the unique dynamics of Special Education requires establishing reservoirs of trust.
- Once trust exists, doors are opened, and essential, creative collaboration is possible.
- Due to the unique dynamics in special education, establishing trust requires even more hard work and ongoing effort.



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- What is trust?
- How do you demonstrate trust?



## What is a Partnership?

- One of the heavy timbers that strengthen a ship's deck to support a mast —usually used in plural.
- A relationship resembling a legal partnership and usually involving close cooperation between parties having specified and joint rights and responsibilities.



Definitely Not Like This!



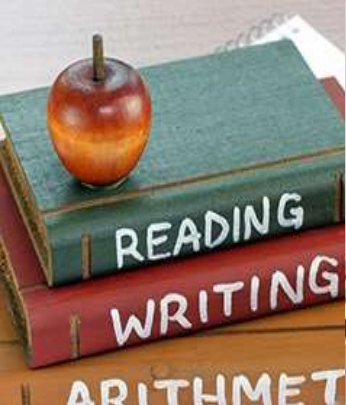
# What Happened During the Pandemic?



- Parents observed firsthand the inner workings of their children's education, became more involved and communicated more often with teachers.
- Many parents concluded that their children needed more individualized instruction and learning options.
- Technology and innovation, by necessity, became clear drivers of successful learning and communication.
- Schools that failed to meet families' needs and new expectations, especially in minority communities, lost students in large numbers.







# What The Pandemic Re-Taught Us About Effective Communication and Collaboration



- When treated as collaborative partners **and** provided the necessary tools, parents will increase their engagement in their children's education and student outcomes will improve.
- In schools that don't prioritize nurturing and welcoming collaborative engagement, especially in minority communities, many parents will give up and even walk away from their home school.
- Technology has become a critical tool for improving communication and increasing family engagement.

**Student Success = (Teacher + Student + Curriculum/ Material) + Family**

# Four Proven Strategies For Student Success



Ask questions to figure out how to most effectively engage with families.

Be creative and find flexible ways to meet families where they are.

Collaborate with coworkers to employ multiple approaches.

Make it a priority to work with and teach parents.

# Engaging and Collaborating with Families

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- Approach the relationship as a collaboration.
- Start by acknowledging the family's important role in the student's success.



# Engaging and Collaborating with Families

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- Convey high expectations based upon potential.
- Ask questions about the family's technology and preferred means of communication.



# Engaging and Collaborating with Families

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- Ask about the student's routines and request the parent(s)' input.
- Be creative, build a team to stay in close contact.
- Provide at least 5 positive comments before saying anything negative.





## Building a Team

- Not every relationship connects the same.
- The pieces necessary to succeed don't rest solely in one person.
- Diverse roles and effective delegation are important.
- Seek to collaborate with others to find the right combinations.





## Family Training For Better Collaboration



- Discuss ways with families to enhance and teach strategies for learning.
- Put them in the IEP as supports.
- Provide training on technology, assistive technology, curriculum or adaptations for learning.



## Family Training For Better Collaboration



- Real time video conference (for multiple parents, these sessions can be recorded and emailed or put on a website or hub).
- Provide brief written instructions.
- Provide time for video (Zoom, Google Hangouts) individualized coaching as families are working with students.



Square Peg  
Round Hole



## Will There Be a New Normal?

“We have a choice about this crisis. As educators, we can make our new normal better than the old, engaging parents as the partners they are. Or we can wait for parents to lose whatever faith in us remains. They cannot unsee what they have witnessed so vividly in their own living rooms.”

-- Sonja Brookins Santelises, CEO, Baltimore City Public Schools

“Parents Are Watching Like Never Before. ‘Trust Us’ Isn’t Enough,”  
Education Week (December 1, 2020)



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## Moving Forward



In summary, the Covid 19 Pandemic has taught us that from the unexpected we can:

- **Improve**...how we communicate, collaborate and problem solve in the delivery of special education supports and services in a variety of learning environments.
- **Engage**...in rich and productive partnerships with families and guardians.
- **Innovate**...to meet the individualized needs of students who receive special education supports and services to improve student learning and outcomes.



# Thank You!

Special Education Mediation Services

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