

# Family Partnership in the IEP process

**Rebecca Muller, EdD**  
**Special Education Administrator**  
**Salem Public schools**

# Who am I?

- BA Colby College 2010, MEd Southeastern Louisiana University 2013, EdD Boston University 2024
- Started teaching in 2010 with Teach for America
- Starting working in Salem in 2023
- Taught K-8th grade inclusion and substantially separate, worked with grades 12- age 18-22
- Parent of a child with a learning disability on an IEP



**James, Mira and Jeremiah**

# What d

Remember: This is the bare minimum

603 CMR 28:07

- Parental consent before evaluation, right to revoke consent
- Right to observe programming
- Involvement in the IEP process as a member of the team
- Communication in primary language

---

# Historical background on family engagement

## **Civil Rights**

**act 1964:**

Family engagement cannot be discriminatory

## **IDEA 1975:**

Right of parents to be involved in decision making process for special education.

## **Hawkins-Stafford Amendments of 1988:**

Mandatory parental involvement in Title 1 programs

## **Every Student Succeeds Act 2015:**

Increased requirements of parental involvement

## **Elementary and Secondary Education Act**

**1965:** Maximum feasible participation

## **Reauthorization of ESEA 1981:**

Removal of PAC requirement

# What is true family partnership?

-Two-way, mutually respectful and beneficial communication in true service of the child.

-Common goal to ensure the child accesses their least restrictive environment and makes **meaningful** progress.

---

# So how do we achieve this?

----

- Build rapport
- Prepare for the IEP meeting
- Communicate concerns and advocate for wants and needs
- Review IEP in its entirety and immediately provide feedback if needed



**Transparency is key! All parties need to be fully committed to meeting the best interests of the child.**

# Teamwork starts before the meeting

---

- You are an expert on your child
- Be honest and transparent with your child's needs and wants
- Share information that is relevant and helpful with members of the child's team
- Advocate for your child! It may feel uncomfortable but change is not made unless it is asked for.



# Preparing for a team meeting

---



- Prepare your parent concerns
  - What is going well?
  - What is not going well?
  - What do you think should change or be added to the child's programming?
  - Are there any updates to the family structure or the child's medical needs that should be communicated?
- Prepare your vision
  - Where do you see your child in one year? Five years? After graduation?
  - Where does your child see themselves?
  - What must be true for your child to live an independent and fulfilling life?

# Insight into how I prepare for a meeting

---

- Review the previous IEP- what was the child working on, did they make progress?
- Connect with school-based team- is the child making progress? What needs to change?
- Review past parental concerns or any other concerns I am aware of as shared by the family- were these addressed over the IEP year?
- Unresolved rejections- is there anything that was rejected before that needs to be addressed in this meeting
- Go see the child!

# During the meeting

---



- All IEP meetings should be **child focused** and **asset based**
- Parent voices should be elevated and centered during the discussion
- All topics discussed should be explained in easy to digest language for families, wait time for translation as needed.
- Parent should be invited to provide input at each step of the meeting
- Meeting notes should be shared with the family after the meeting

# After the meeting

---

- Review the proposed IEP and notes
- Reach out with any questions or concerns
- Consult with other providers as needed
- Respond in writing to the IEP

# What happens when you disagree?



- S
- Y There is nothing wrong with rejecting the e of
- T IEP, I view rejections as an opportunity able
- t to get clearer. If you rejected something then we need to recalibrate.

# Family Engagement beyond the IEP

Special Education meetings  
should not be the only  
time families are  
involved!

---

**True family partnership is built slowly and intentionally over time.**

# Ideas to increase family engagement

---

- Invite families of children with disabilities to mentor other families that are new to the special education process.
- Create accommodations to family engagement activities to increase accessibility for families with children with disabilities.
- Publicize and invite families to join the SEPAC.
- Invite families to visit the classroom for student showcases.
- Offer visits with families outside of school
- Develop natural 2-way communication
- Offer resources to families.

**“Never forget that every student is someone’s child. Parents want to hear that you see the good in their child”  
-Mary Francis, Teacher**

**Questions?**