

Special Connections

A newsletter connecting our Special Kids, Families and Schools

Letters "A" and "L": Implications from Early Intervention to Special Education

by Keith D. Turner, Ph.D., University of Texas, Austin

This article on the importance of early intervention to special education highlights the two most visionary aspects of early intervention. First is the respect and professional partnership between special educators and parents in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the early intervention program. Second is educators' sensitivity to parents' cultural heritage, beliefs and value systems. Early intervention centers on parent-child interactions. It is difficult for educators to be in the home to promote parent-child interactions. However, through dynamic partnerships built between educators and parents in early intervention programs, and if sincerely continued as the child progresses from preschool to high school, parents and school personnel can build mutual respect and understanding that will positively impact the students' progress.

You, the reader, may be wondering the meaning and significance of the letters "A" and "L". In special education, "A" usually stands for "accountability" and, unfortunately, "L" many times stands for "litigation". However, in early intervention, the letters "A" and "L" have not been associated with the litigious adversity from due process hearings and federal litigation that often times polarizes parents' and educators' opinions of each other. For early interventionists, "A" stands for ensuring "agreement" with parents on their infant's/toddler's educational plan. Establishing parental agreement and involvement is a basic tenet of the program. The "L" in early intervention stands for "lifelong" goals. Most parents, upon learning that their child has a disability, want to know lifelong outcomes for their child. Parents are concerned with basic lifelong needs, such as: will my child be able to walk, talk, have a friend, read, get a job, and have meaningful relationships at adulthood? Educators must be aware of and focus on the meaning of the "lifespan process" for parents.

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In early intervention, parents come to the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) Meeting with a need for a great sense of involvement and agreement for their children. To parents, this first meeting with school personnel holds their child's whole future. In the IFSP, which is similar to the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP), objectives are written in a "parent friendly" manner. You see, for parents, the meaning of the IFSP, the IEP, and the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) are all one and the same. Thus, to promote partnerships and understandings, it is important that the meetings should be coordinated in addressing lifelong goals for the child.

I would like to suggest the use of a Family-Focused IEP process to assist parents and school districts in developing partnerships. The Family-Focused IEP model is an adaptation of the early intervention

IFSP format. The first step in the Family-Focused IEP Process is formulating ground rules where all discussions focus on child or student outcomes, not competencies or personalities of the professionals. In using this ground rule, it is explained to parents that personnel issues are to be addressed outside of the ARD meeting with the appropriate administrator. The second step is working with the parents and school team to identify an effective internal case manager or parent liaison, someone on the ARD team for which the parent has trust. The internal case manager's role is to ensure that the parents' issues have all been forwarded to appropriate personnel on the team prior to the ARD as well as sharing all school issues or concerns with the parent.

My experience with these two steps has resulted in over a 90% success rate in promoting a "spirit of belonging" for parents in the ARD process. It is quite common that even when parents' issues have not been resolved in the manner that the parents had originally wanted, parents still feel positive about the ARD process because their issues were heard and addressed. A third step is having an external case manager who works with the internal case manager in clarifying issues that are of educational significance and developing data-based systems to obtain the necessary facts to resolve the more complex issues. This could be an administrator, an educational diagnostician, a lead teacher, a special education administrator, a licensed specialist in school psychology, or an instructional specialist.

Developing and maintaining partnerships with families through the school years (internal case manager) and keeping continuity in

Keith Turner has a doctorate from the University of Washington in Special Education. His teaching experience began as a master demonstration teacher in early childhood special education in Seattle, Washington. Then, he moved to university education as an assistant professor in early childhood education at Temple University, and has spent 28 years as Associate Professor in Early Childhood Special Education at The University of Texas at Austin. Over the years he has received several federally funded, personnel training programs. He also works with parents, school districts, and state agencies in child-centered cases. He currently is an expert witness for the Pennsylvania Dept. of Education's full inclusion case.

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lifelong objectives (IFSP, IEP, and ITP) will maximize parental "agreement" and minimize potential "litigation". Keeping program continuity

(goals and strategies) based on a "lifelong" vision will promote greater accomplishments from infancy to adulthood ensuring program "accountability" and facilitating parent and school "agreements" from year to year.

Contact Information:

Should you have any questions regarding your child and/or special education services, you may contact the Diagnostician or High School Support Specialist at your child's campus.

There may be times when you need to contact the district's special education office.

The contact information is as follows:

Jane Flinn, Director of Special Education
10300 Jones Road, Houston TX 77065
Phone: 281-897-6416
Fax: 281-897-6403
Email: jane.flinn@cfisd.net -or-

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ChildFind

The Cy-Fair ISD provides support services for students with disabilities residing within the district. Through Child Find efforts, eligible children, birth to 21, may be identified for needed services. Anyone who has a child or knows of a child who may qualify for services should call the Special Education Department (281-897-6400) or the child's home campus for information.

Education Service Center

The state of Texas is divided into 20 regions served by Education Service Centers. Our Education Service Center is Region 4 and is located in Houston. Region 4 has staff trained in special education who may be a resource to parents. The telephone number of the special education department at Region 4 is 713-462-7708.

We hope that each of you has a safe and enjoyable summer. The next issue of *Special Connections* will arrive on Friday, September 3 with a new year of timely and interesting articles for you.

What Can I Do For My Child?

By Ginger Sewell

"What can I do for my child", is a question that is always on our minds as parents. As the summer break approaches we are aware that we will be spending more time with our children. Knowing that self-esteem is learned and can thus be taught, we can be reminded of how our actions impact children. We can show our acceptance through our facial expressions and other non-verbal behaviors such as smiling, eye contact, hugging and using pleasant voice tones. We can listen with appreciation by asking questions that show our interest. We can permit our children to see and experience the natural consequences for their behavior. We can make authority seem more impersonal by using "I want..." or "It is time....." rather than, "You need to...". We can praise all positive actions while limiting directions to those essential to the task at hand. We can remain courteous and friendly although allowing our children to learn that we mean what we say. As summer frequently offers new experiences we can prepare our children for what we expect in a given situation. Most of all, we can remember to say, "I love you!"

Ginger Sewell is the parent of a young adult with a disability and a former Director of Special Education. Currently an educational consultant, she is the recipient of both the Parent of the Year and Professional of the Year awards from the Learning Disabilities Association

Early Intervention in Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D.

The years from birth to five are a time of dynamic growth, change and learning. These are the years children develop the behaviors, traits, and learning characteristics that will affect them for the remainder of their lives as school-age learner to adults. It is also during this time that children develop the basic knowledge, understanding and interests that they will need to become successful learners.

When children with developmental delays lack the benefit of successful early intervention, they often fall behind their peers, or fail to bridge the learning gap. However, when these children experience success in responsive, high quality learning programs, there are positive long-term benefits to the individual learner as well as to society in general. Productive, successful, and participating learners and members of society are the result of early educational intervention.

The earlier a child is identified as having a developmental delay the greater the chance that the child will benefit from intervention strategies. Cypress-Fairbanks I.S.D. works with early childhood intervention programs to provide smooth transitioning of special education eligible three-year-olds into district early intervention programs. Services for children in PPCD include daily structured activities to develop language (expressive and receptive), cognitive, social/emotional, motor (fine and gross motor), and self-help skills. Additional services may include transportation, assistive technology, counseling, or occupational, physical, or speech therapy, if recommended by the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee.