



Special Connections

A newsletter connecting our Special Kids, Families and Schools

PARENT AND SCHOOL COLLABORATION IN ARD MEETINGS: POSITIVE EFFECTS FOR KIDS

By Dr. Sally Earnest Thrash

One of the key concepts and intentions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 is that parents are an equal member of the IEP team (in Texas, the ARD team) to develop, review, and revise the IEP. Parents are expected to take an active role with school personnel in the ARD meeting by providing critical information regarding their child's strengths and concerns, participating in discussions and decisions regarding the need for specific settings and services and their child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum and in state and district-wide assessments.

How can members of ARD teams—the school staff of administrators, general and special education teachers, evaluation personnel, support personnel, with the parents—truly become interactive and collaborate as team members to focus on the student without getting embroiled in thoughts and emotions concerning professional v. parent competitive issues and hidden agendas, such as “I know my child better” or “You don't see your child and know how he/she acts at school”. Dr. Dorothy Rich in her book, *Megaskills: How Families Can Help Children Succeed in School and Beyond*, states, “it takes more than a good school to educate children. And it takes more than a good home. It takes these two major educational institutions working together.” (p.240).

Generally school personnel and parents want to be partners in the child's education, but sometimes lack the skills or fail to take the steps to fully function as an collaborative team. There are **four keys** to improve teamwork in ARD meetings. Those keys are sharing, mutual respect, dialogue, and mutual commitment. **The first key is sharing.** The opposite of sharing is surprises and no one likes surprises in a meeting. Prior to an ARD meeting, school personnel, to achieve the goal of partnership, should provide the parent with more than the required notice of ARD meeting. Documents, such as evaluation and test results, progress reports, draft

goals and objectives, and the proposed agenda help the parent in being informed.

The second key is mutual respect. Team members should agree to be honest with one another, to act trustworthy, to be open to and consider each other's suggestions, to not make promises that are unable to be kept, to maintain dignity and refrain from inappropriate or insensitive comments to one another.

The third key is dialogue. How can team members discuss and come to informed decisions for the student without talking with one another? Dialogue requires willful listening, inquiry, and commitment to openly communicate as team members. The skillful use of dialogue by team members is a critical tool for team success. A simple way to think of dialogue is the visual memory of a shoelace. When a shoelace is used effectively, it functions as two parts that work together to unite, support, and eventually complete the fitting of the shoe to the wearer's foot. Team members are the “laces” and the wearer is the “student.” LACE stands for listen, acknowledge, clarify, and extend. For example, one team member speaks and the other team member listens, the listener acknowledges the speaker's comments without agreeing, disagreeing or being defensive. Acknowledgement ensures that the speaker has been heard. The listener then asks the speaker to clarify; the speaker clarifies and extends the dialogue into the next thought or comment, and the dialogue progresses following the same loops until it is completed. If these steps are followed, the general result is clearer communication, shared input, a higher degree of listening, and common and clear understandings.

The fourth key is mutual commitment. Parents and school staff must commit to the child. This involves putting aside personal thoughts and feelings in order to achieve consensus based on the needs of the child and the data about the child's talents, skills, and challenges. Mutual commitment also means that each partner will be reliable in following through and implementing team decisions for the child's success.

In summary, collaboration and teamwork involve creating and maintaining trust among participants, being respectful of each other's thoughts and concerns, utilizing dialogue to implement collaboration, and most of all, believing in student results for a common team goal.

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Dr. Thrash is also a former president of the Texas Council of Administrators of Special Education (TCASE).

PARENT PERSPECTIVE

It is true "Parents believe in possibilities and educators believe in probabilities." As we appreciate this difference in perspective we can communicate openly and honestly in a more respectful manner. Becoming fully informed allows us to participate more positively and proactively in collaborative meetings focused on our children without feeling defensive or undervalued. Communicating our vision of our student's future, acknowledging their talents and interests, and enumerating the accommodations and the modifications that have worked / not worked in the past allows us to become collaborative team members focused on our child's "possible" potential."

IDEA REAUTHORIZATION UPDATE

According to the *National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities*, formerly the *National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities* (NICHCY), it appears that the "wheels have slowed" on the Reauthorization for IDEA. "There is still no word on when S. 1248, the Senate bill for the reauthorization of IDEA, will be brought to the Senate floor." The bill was originally scheduled to have been completed by the end of 2003.

NEW PUBLICATION FOR FAMILIES & EDUCATORS

Identifying and Treating ADHD: A Resource for School and Home (2003) is a new publication from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs. The resource guide for families and educators provides information on the latest research on causes of ADHD, how it is identified and treated, and includes sections on legal requirements, treatment options and helpful hints on how to improve the quality of life at home and at school for a child identified with ADHD. The report is in the public domain and may be downloaded by going to the OSEP website at www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP. Or to order copies, fax a request to (301) 470-1244. The guide is also available in other communication options.

The ARD Process

The ARD (Admission, Review and Dismissal) process provides an opportunity for a family of a student receiving special education services and school staff members to walk in partnership to plan the most appropriate program and services for the student. The ARD agenda below is a blueprint for successful collaboration between families and school staff.

- **Introductions**
 - Purpose
 - Is an interpreter needed?
 - Have you been notified 5 days in advance? If not, a waiver is needed to continue.
 - Introduce the members of the ARD
- **Review of Assessment Data**
 - Review student information that addresses present level of performance; review of the IEPs and BIPs; current modifications; current classes; current related services; Parents share information with ARD committee
 - Teachers, administrators, counselors, psychologists, related service providers will present data on the student's areas of competencies and needs if not previously presented.
 - If additional assessment is needed then a reevaluation plan is completed
- **Eligibility is established**
- **If there are behavioral concerns that have been discussed, the committee will develop/revise the Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP).**
 - Use the Functional Behavioral Assessment to develop the goals and objectives for the BIP.
 - Teachers/related service providers, parents, administrators, counselors, or psychologists may assist in developing the BIP. Parent input is critical.
- **The committee will develop/revise the goals and objectives for your child.**
- **The tracking teacher or a Speech Language Pathologist will present this information during discussion of the IEP Transition Supplement page.**
- **The committee develops a schedule and determines what services, including related services, and modifications your child needs to be successful.**

Upcoming Features

Dr. Keith Turner, Associate Professor of Special Ed, Univ. of Texas at Austin was unable to contribute to this issue due to a personal conflict but will provide a feature article for another issue. The next issue will have an article entitled: "The effects of a listening environment on language and learning."

- **The committee uses data to determine participation on the TAKS, SDAA, or LDAA.**
- **The chairperson summarizes services, programming, and placement.**
- **A discussion will occur concerning justification of off-campus placements.**
- **Dates of Services are established.**
- **ESY will be discussed.**
- **Graduation options will be discussed.**
- **Review the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).**
 - Whether the student is being educated with students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate.
 - Benefits and disadvantages of LRE.
 - Whether the student has the same opportunities to participate in all nonacademic and extra-curricular activities.
- **The chairperson reviews the assurances with the parents/family/adult student.**
- **Deliberations/minutes are read before committee members sign.**
- **ARD committee members sign and check agree or disagree.**
- **The chairperson discusses if mutual consent has been reached.**
- **If the parents sign in disagreement, a 10-day recess is offered (except on discipline) and another ARD is scheduled.**