



Family Engagement Newsletter

Family and School Partnerships for Students with IEPs

By Wendy Overturf

Joyce L. Epstein, Ph. D., Director of the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships, wrote:

“Strong partnerships can ensure that conflicts are successfully managed and resolved. “Good partnerships encourage questions and debates, and with-stand disagreements; provide structures and processes to solve problems; and are maintained—even strengthened—after conflicts and differences have been resolved”
(Epstein, 2011, p. 393). Epstein, J. L. (2011). *School, family, and community partnerships: Preparing educators and improving schools (2nd ed.)*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Parents of students with disabilities with an IEP and schools have a “built-in” partnership with the child as the focus. Families and educators must work together to form and maintain effective, sustainable family–school partnerships. Perhaps in an ideal world, these partnerships could exist free of conflict. But like in any relationship, conflict is sure to happen, and parents need information and resources to guide them in establishing and maintaining effective partnerships despite the presence of conflict.

What is the first thing a parent might consider doing if they have questions or concerns about their child’s IEP program?

Families are encouraged to first talk directly with the people involved as soon as possible. This may be the child’s special education teacher, or perhaps in some instances, the principal or director of special education. Use the link to this handy [chart](#) that can help parents keep key school personnel contacts in one spot.

Sometimes the parental concerns involve an issue that can only be resolved through holding an IEP team meeting. If parents still have concerns after they have talked to the appropriate school personnel, parents can request an IEP team meeting. Parents should make their request for an IEP team meeting as soon as possible and it is best practice to put the request in writing (email is an acceptable form of written request.)

If an IEP meeting is held and parents do not feel that their concerns were addressed, or parents feel a lack of trust with the district, or there appear to be communication problems, a facilitated IEP (FIEP) can be requested. (It should be noted that districts also have the right to request a FIEP. Additionally, a FIEP can be requested without having to have had an initial IEP prior). Participation in FIEPs is voluntary which means that both the parents and the school need to agree that they would like one to occur. Requests for a FIEP are handled through the [Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System \(WSEMS\)](#). If agreement is reached to have a FIEP, a facilitator is mutually selected. That process is also coordinated by WSEMS. The facilitator is not part of the IEP team. The role of the facilitator is only to help the group work together.

Some of the roles the facilitator may include:

- Guiding the discussion by keeping focus on the student.
- Modeling and helping maintain open, respectful conversation among team members.
- Helping the team develop and ask clarifying questions about issues raised in past IEP meetings.
- Helping keep the team members on task and within the time scheduled for the meeting.

If after the IEP meeting (or FIEP), parents and districts continue to have a dispute, either party can request mediation. Again, both parties need to agree to this process and it is also requested through [WSEMS](#). Mediation is a facilitated negotiation where parents and the district try to reach an agreement, with the help of a neutral third party. The mediator does not make decisions for the parties. The mediator helps the parties to identify issues, discuss viewpoints, generate options, and create solutions agreeable to all. Mediation encourages mutual respect, promotes communication, and often contributes to a more positive working relationship between parents and the school district. If a signed agreement is reached, it is a contract and legally binding.

The FIEP process and mediation are offered at no cost to parents or school districts. In addition to the [WSEMS website](#), [Special Education in Plain Language, pp 48-50](#), has more detailed information on each. WI FACETS also has an archived webinar on [FIEPs](#) as well as [mediation](#). WI FACETS Help Desk staff are also available for questions at 877-374-0511.

Statewide Events

[First Nations Studies 2021-2022](#)

[Webinar Lecture Series:](#)

[Changing the Narrative: Cultural Representation in the Classroom and Popular Culture](#)

Images of Native people are everywhere, from books, movies, and television to advertising, fashion, and popular culture. But what happens when those cultural representations are incorrect or based on stereotypes? In this talk, Professor Dr. Katrina Phillips (Red Cliff Ojibwe) examines the long history of Native cultural representation – and misrepresentation – and offers suggestions on how to more deeply engage with Native history and representation in the classroom. There are NO registration fees to participate in these webinars offered by the DPI American Indian Studies Program, which are funded through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA).

Date: December 8, 2021, 10am-12pm

[Family Engagement Community of Practice and Learning](#)

This event is for educators, families, caregivers, and others who want to see improvement in family engagement across the state of Wisconsin. Using the Dual Capacity-Building for Family-School Partnerships framework, learn from experts in the field, participate in book studies, and other professional learning opportunities designed for educators and parents, and families. This is a virtual event, to be held on the second Wednesday of the month through May 2022.

Date: December 8, 2021, 4pm-5pm

Save the Date!

[Training for Home Language](#)

[Interpreters:](#)

[Supporting Families Through the Special Education Process](#)

One-day virtual trainings offered in 2022: January 18th, 19th and 25th.



At Home Learning Strategies

[Early Literacy Activity Calendar: December 2021](#)

Parents and kids connect while practicing reading, math, science, and more. This month's activities include making a gingerbread house, creating original holiday songs, and building a snowman together.

December Bucket List and Kids' Holiday Calendar

December is full of so much fun and merry memory-making! This simple craft with [free printables](#) will help your kids keep track of all the fun events and traditions they are anticipating. Parents can print off a free December bucket list for more holiday family ideas. This [link](#) shows a video on how to make the countdown calendar and see this simple holiday craft in action.

National Cookie Day—December 4, 2021

Celebrate this day by making your favorite cookie. Preparing recipes is a great way to practice measuring skills while having fun! Watch this [cute video](#) that shows two children giving directions on how to make a batch of chocolate chip cookies.



National Poinsettia Day - December 12th

Learn all about poinsettias in this fun [video for kids](#). [Craft a beautiful Christmas poinsettia flower ornament](#) using a pipe cleaner and some paper or felt. Printable poinsettia patterns are included for easy crafting.

Crossword Puzzle Day—December 21, 2021

Crossword puzzles will help your child improve vocabulary and problem-solving skills. Check out [these online crossword puzzles](#) that are intended for older children.

First Day of Winter (Winter Solstice)



On December 21st, in the northern hemisphere, we experience the shortest day of the year and the day with the least amount of sunlight. This is called the winter solstice. After the winter solstice, we start to have more sunlight little by little until we make it to the summer solstice. To learn more about winter solstice check out this short [PBS video](#).

Celebrate the Winter Solstice by giving back to nature. One fun tradition is to decorate a tree outside with edible treats for wild animals. Here are some ideas:

- * Homemade popcorn and fresh cranberries garland
- * Sliced oranges, apples, pears, carrots, or parsnips hung on strings
- * [Cookie cutter bird seed feeders](#)
- * [Orange birdseed ornaments](#)
- * Pinecone bird feeder with [peanut butter](#) or [lard \(fat\)](#)



Nothing is better on a cold winter night than snuggling up in a blanket with a good book. Check out this [book list](#). Some might be available at your local library. Many libraries often also have a special book section set up to display holiday themed books.

National Thank You Note Day—December 26, 2021

This day encourages Americans to take a moment and write down their thoughts of gratitude for the presents they have received from their loved ones. While a verbal "thank you" can convey your feelings, thank you notes are a much more meaningful way to return the favor, especially considering the time and reflective thinking one needs to spend in writing such a letter. Plus, it is a great way for children to practice their writing skills. These [printable fill-in-the-blank thank you cards](#) are perfect for post-holiday gratitude and can help younger writers get started. These are a free download, but you need to scroll to the bottom of page and enter your email address.



Kwanzaa - December 26, 2021-January 1, 2022

[Watch and listen to the read aloud of Li'l Rabbit's Kwanzaa](#) by Donna Washington to bring this African American holiday to life. The holiday celebrates family, community, and culture over seven days.



New Year's Eve

New Year's Eve is a special time to reflect upon the past year and to celebrate all of the amazing goals and dreams one has for the upcoming year. If you are looking for ideas be sure to check this [website](#) for great activities for kids.

Online Resources: Communication

[Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\)](#)

The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) strongly supports the parents' right to be involved in the special education their child receives. As IDEA states: "Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by... strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families ... have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home." This website provides many resources for parents so that they can be an active participant in the IEP process.

[WI FACETS IEP Checklist](#)

The IEP checklist takes you through three steps - preparing for, participating in and following up after the IEP. Be ready for your next IEP meeting with our easy to follow checklist.

[Wisconsin Statewide Parent-Educator Initiative \(WSPEI\)](#)

WSPEI is all about partnerships. Its goal is to help families and school districts find or create the resources that will help them build positive working relationships that lead to shared decision making and better outcomes for the student. It supports increased sharing of information among families, schools, projects, organizations, and agencies through networking meetings, conferences, person-to-person contact, and media.

[Communicating with ELL Families: 10 Strategies for Schools](#)

There are many ways that educators and administrators can connect with families of English language learners (ELLs) and keep that communication strong. This communication can be challenging to figure out, but in many cases, it can make a tremendous difference in students' learning. This website offers some tips for schools, many of which are based on lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[It Takes a Village to Teach a Child](#)

It truly does take a village to educate a child. Educators need the cooperation of parents as partners in the educational process. In an ideal world, all parents, teachers, and school administrators would always agree on the best practices for teaching children. However, disagreements happen. Those disagreements can be emotionally charged and if those disagreements are not resolved, parents and school staff can end up working in different directions. Then it is often the student that suffers. To further the goal of building bridges between parents and teachers, the website provides several resources related to home-school communication and conflict resolution strategies.

[Tips for Parents: Parent-Teacher Conferences](#)

Learn more about parent-teacher conferences and how you can use the meeting to ask questions that will help your child. The content is available in both Spanish and English.

[Key Questions to Ask at Your Child's School](#)

As a parent you have a key role in your child's education—you can help bridge your child's transition from home to school and give them the best chance at success in learning and in life. While your child's education begins at home, this tool provides you with a set of questions to ask, and important issues to consider when approaching your child's teachers, principals, and counselors about their development. As a parent or caregiver, it can be hard to know how to support your child's learning, but asking your child's educators the right questions is a good place to start.

[National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships](#)

The benefits of family-school-community partnerships are many: higher teacher morale, more parent involvement, and greater student success are only a few. This website outlines the standards developed by the National PTA for effective family-school partnerships. The website also has links to other resources related to building these partnerships.

[Building Parent-Teacher Relationships](#)

Effective communication is essential for building school-family partnerships. It constitutes the foundation for all other forms of family involvement in education. This website provides strategies that have been effective in improving parent-teacher communications.

Statewide Events



Supporting Neurodiverse Students

The Supporting Neurodiverse Students (SNS) Professional Learning System provides training to support educators and families serving students with disability-related needs in the area of social and emotional learning (SEL). The goal of the SNS is to support a skills-based approach to challenging behaviors that will improve a student's social understanding and self-management. The SNS System provides learning opportunities focusing on self-regulation, social communication, flexibility, resilience, sensory processing, and executive functioning. It supports learning about disability-related needs that often occur for students with differences in social and emotional skill sets (e.g., students with autism, students with emotional behavioral disabilities, and students with other disabilities that impact social and emotional learning competencies). These are both no-cost virtual events:

[Flexibility: It's a Skill](#)

Students who exhibit challenging behavior outputs often struggle with flexibility. When rigid patterns interfere with learning, flexibility skills become a support we can use to impact outcomes. This workshop will explore learning centers focused on how the brain works and the factors that impact the student's ability to access and use flexibility. Strategies for adult behavior change to support a student who shows up with deficits in flexibility will also be covered.

Date: 12/1/21, 1pm-3pm

[Body Processing - Regulation and Sensory](#)

This day will not only cover strategies and understanding but will help clarify the difference between regulation and sensory.

Date: 12/3/21, 8:30am-11:30am

WI FACETS



Event title links to information & registration for WI FACETS FREE workshops & webinars:

To register by phone: 877-374-0511

All webinars 12:00—1:00 PM
(unless otherwise noted)

[Assistive Technology \(AT\) Forward](#)

Presenters: Jennifer Schubring & Cassie Frost, Speech/Lang. Pathologists

Date: December 1, 2021

[WSEMS: Friendly & Productive IEPs](#)

Presenter Courtney Salzer, WI FACETS and Nissan Bar-Lev, CESA 7

Date: December 6, 2021

[Mindfulness for Students with Disabilities](#)

Presenter: Shannon Stuart, UW-Whitewater

Date: December 8, 2021

[Useful Resources in the IEP Process \(Spanish\)](#)

Date: December 9, 2021, 2021

Training in Spanish - To register, contact Nelsinia Ramos, nramos@wifacets.org

[IEP 10: Parent Rights in the IEP Process](#)

Presenter: Matthew Zellmer, WI FACETS

Date: December 14, 2021, 12-12:30pm

[Part C of IDEA: The Early Intervention Program for Infants & Toddlers with Disabilities in WI](#)

Presenter: Lori Wittemann, Dept. of Health Services

Date: December 15, 2021

[IEP 11: Useful Resources in the IEP Process](#)

Presenter: Bonnie Vander Meulen, WI FACETS

Date: December 21, 2021, 12-12:30pm

Learning
Opportunities



Rule Change for Identifying Emotional Behavioral Disability (EBD) Goes into Effect December 1, 2021

The rule change for the identification of an Emotional Behavioral Disability was filed by the DPI on October 15, 2021. All Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams must use the new criteria to identify an Emotional Behavioral Disability for referrals for special education dated on or after December 1, 2021. The updated Wisconsin Administrative Rule may be found at [Wisconsin Legislature CR 20-073 Rule Text](#). The language in the rule was revised and condensed for clarity and objectivity, as well as to make the rule less ambiguous and subjective. Thus, the rule revision:

- Reworded language throughout the rule to more closely align with the federal definition described in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).
- Added consideration of “sudden onset due to an emerging mental health condition” to allow for circumstances when there may be a high frequency or intensity of observable behaviors over a shorter period of time or multiple acute episodes.
- Made explicit that behaviors occur in BOTH academic and non-academic settings in school. Observable behaviors are still required to occur in school and in the home or the community.

The following documents are posted to the Wisconsin DPI [Emotional Behavioral Disability](#) and the [Professional Learning Event](#) webpage, and provide a summary in plain language of the key changes to Section 11.36 (7) of the Wisconsin Administrative Rule addressing the identification for Emotional Behavioral Disability.

[Revisions to Emotional Behavioral Disability Identification Comparison Chart - Side by Side](#)
[Revisions to Emotional Behavioral Disability Identification Comparison Chart - Alternate Format](#)
[Summary of Rule Change for Emotional Behavioral Disability](#)
[Summary of Rule Change for Emotional Behavioral Disability \(video playlist\)](#)
[Revised EBD Criteria Worksheet](#)

Research to Read

Listening to Parents' Narratives: The Value of Authentic Experiences with Children with Disabilities and Their Families

Collier, Margo; Keefe, Elizabeth B.; Hirrel, Laura A. *School Community Journal*, v25 n2 p221-242 2015

Article Link

A serious gap exists within special education preparation programs; many neglect to adequately prepare teacher candidates to engage with parents of children with disabilities to create effective family-school-community collaboration. This article describes the impact on the practices and dispositions of teacher candidates resulting from the implementation of a program called Families as Faculty (FAF), which was collaboratively designed and implemented by a university in the southwestern United States and the statewide Parent Training and Information Center. Teacher preparation programs providing students with authentic experiences to work collaboratively with parents can influence perceptions teacher candidates have toward parent involvement and collaboration. The present study was designed to examine the impact that the implementation of FAF in a graduate teacher preparation course had on teacher candidates' dispositions toward home-school collaboration. Data were collected during the course through teacher candidates' reflection papers and pre- and post-questionnaires. Additionally, the teacher candidates were administered a follow-up survey three years after they completed the course. Teacher candidates reported an increase in their understanding and appreciation of home-school collaboration following their experiences in FAF. Participants in the follow-up survey also indicated that these experiences continued to have long-lasting, positive impacts on their teaching practices and the school-family relationships they have formed with parents of children with disabilities.



[Two Jobs, No Breaks: Employed and Caregiving](#)

One in 5 Wisconsinites is a family caregiver, and more than 80% of all care provided in the U.S. is by families. This is a great new video, produced by BPDD, featuring Employment Stories from Caregivers.

This monthly update is provided by the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. *If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, contact: Wendy Overturf at woverturf@wifacets.org.*



Contributions to the Newsletter

Upcoming newsletter topics: January: Transition
February: Intellectual Disabilities
March: Early Childhood

To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources, you may use the attached word document. Send submissions to woverturf@wifacets.org. If you are unable to access the form, you may send the information in an email.

Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to sources of family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.

***The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter
can be found online at:***

[Newsletter | Serving Groups \(servingongroups.org\)](https://www.servingongroups.org)



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