



FAMILY ENGAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

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Improving Your Knowledge of Special Education Can Help You Communicate More Effectively with Your Child's School

By Wendy Overturf

Do you feel knowledgeable and confident when advocating for your child? Are you able to communicate your child's needs and concerns at IEP team meetings? Are you able to ask clarifying questions or speak up if you disagree with what the school is proposing? The use of educational terminology, the complexities of the law, and detailed state regulations can make it difficult for parents to navigate and understand special education and the IEP process. The importance of parent and student participation in developing a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) cannot be overstated. In fact, [The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#) was passed with the intention of full and meaningful partnership with families. Parents are equal members of the IEP team. Despite their importance in educational decision-making, parents sometimes feel overwhelmed by the [IEP team process](#) and may feel that they cannot effectively communicate and collaborate with the IEP team.

[The Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training and Support \(WI FACETS\)](#) can help.

The primary goal of WI FACETS is to empower Wisconsin families, so they feel knowledgeable, skilled, and confident to advocate for their children with disabilities. The services are offered at no cost and are open to families as well as the professionals who support children with disabilities. It needs to be noted that WI FACETS is not a legal services agency and cannot provide legal advice or legal representation. Currently, WI FACETS provides the following range of services to families in Wisconsin.

UPCOMING WI FACETS EVENTS

(If you missed a training date, you can still get a recording of the webinar by registering.)

All webinars are scheduled from 12pm to 1pm CST, unless otherwise indicated.

[IEP 9: Revisions & Extended School Year \(ESY\)](#)

Presenter: Ann Zielke, WI FACETS

Date: December 5, 2023

[College and Career Ready IEP Process & What Families Need to Know](#)

Presenter: Cheri Sylla, WSPEI Statewide Coordinator

Date: December 6, 2023

[Lista de verificación del IEP de transición](#)

Presenter: Nathaly Silva, WI FACETS

Date: December 7, 2023

[IEP Mini-Series #10: Parent Rights](#)

Presenter: Ann Zielke, WI FACETS

Date: December 12, 2023, 12pm-12:45pm

[Medical and Clinical Information and the IEP](#)

Presenter: Eva Kubinski, WI DPI

Date: December 13, 2023

[IEP Mini-Series #11: IEP Resources](#)

Presenter: Ann Zielke, WI FACETS

Date: December 19, 2023, 12pm-12:45pm

HOME LEARNING



[Children's Activity Calendar: December 2023](#)

This month's calendar is full of engaging children's programming ideas for activities, craft projects, and book suggestions that will boost kids' cultural awareness and help them practice valuable skills.

[9 Winter Holidays Around the World](#)

No matter which winter holiday your family celebrates, this is a magical season of creating family memories and special activities. It's easy to get so consumed by our own family's holiday though that we forget about the opportunities to learn about other winter traditions and holidays. This website has a brief description of such holidays.

Mental Math Skills

Check out these [mental math games](#). Practicing mental math can help children improve other math skills. That is why developing the skill of mental math for kids through playing simple, but fun, math games is a fantastic way to not only stimulate your child's mental

math abilities but also an ideal way of improving number facts.

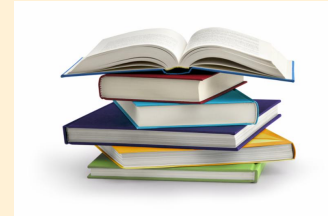
[Winter Crossword Puzzles](#)

The free printable crossword puzzles are fun and educational. They're an easy print-and-go activity to give the kids during the cold and snowy days of winter. There are 3 winter crossword puzzles with varying levels of difficult: easy, medium, and hard. They are perfect for kids around third grade all the way to middle school.



Make Holiday Greeting Cards and Gifts

Have your kids write holiday cards or letters to family and friends. It is a great opportunity for children to practice their handwriting, as well as their grammar, spelling and creative writing skills. Also, making gifts at home is a way to encourage creativity. Check [ideas for these handmade picture frames](#). You need only basic craft supplies to make them and they make thoughtful gifts for the winter holidays.



December 21, 2023-First Day of Winter

Read aloud stories are great resources for building language and vocabulary skills. Here are a few suggestions.

- [Winter is Here](#)
- [Animals in Winter](#)
- [Sneezy the Snowman](#)



December 31, 2023-New Year's Eve

Are you looking for fun activities to do with your children on New Year's Eve? Then this website might give some suggestions-[50 ideas for celebrating New Year's Eve with kids](#)

You and your children may also enjoy these read alouds.

- [The Night Before New Year's](#)
- [Shanté Keys & the New Year's Peas \(+Auld Lang Syne\)](#)

Discover how many different cultures celebrate the New Year with food!

UPCOMING STATE EVENTS

[Building Hearts of Successful Schools Fall 2023 Conference](#)

Date: December 7, 2023 (pre-conference sessions on December 6, 2023)

Location: Glacier Canyon Lodge, WI Dells

Keynote speaker Derek Francis is an experienced licensed school counselor and the Executive Director of Equity and School Climate for Minneapolis Public Schools with a passion and focus for proactive and equity-based counseling. Derek is dedicated to showing educators that the work you do as an individual can create a welcoming and inclusive school for all.

Training for Home Language Interpreters: Supporting Families through the Special Education Process

For those seeking training for home language interpreters for families at IEP meetings, DPI has partnered with WI FACETS, LEAs, and other organizations to develop a one-day training for home language interpreters who interpret for families at IEP meetings. Language interpretation training is a requirement to meet the provisions outlined in DPI's [Providing Language Assistance to Parents guidance document](#). The training provides increased awareness of state and federal laws, regulations and policies related to the educational rights of students who receive special education through an IEP and who may also be English Language Learners. The training also provides increased knowledge of legal responsibilities and requirements related to translation and interpretation of special education terms and concepts, tools, and resources for interpreters. Finally, the training supports improved skills to handle common ethical considerations while interpreting IEP meetings. To register, please choose an option below.

Virtual Trainings:

- [February 9, 2024](#) (8am-2pm)
- [February 12, 2024](#) (8am-2pm)
- [February 16, 2024](#) (8am-2pm)

For more information contact Lori Karcher, lkarcher@wifacets.org

[Wisconsin Transition Conference - Diversity, Equity, Disability, and Inclusion!](#)

More information to follow.

Dates: February 15-16, 2024

Location: Kalahari Resort and Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, WI

[Promoting Early Childhood 2024 Conference: Play is Lifelong Learning-Save the Dates](#)

Dates: March 6-7, 2024

Location: Radisson Hotel and Conference Center, Fond du Lac, WI

Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin-Save the Dates

Dates: April 25-27, 2024

Location: Kalahari Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, WI

The purpose of the Autism Society of Greater Wisconsin's Annual Conference is to provide a wide range of information to those within the autism community. Their goal is to provide relevant information for attendees at all levels, including those who are new to autism and those who have years of experience.

Supporting Neurodiverse Students (SNS)

The Supporting Neurodiverse Students (SNS) Professional Learning System provides support for educators and families serving students with disability-related needs in the area of social and emotional learning (SEL). The SNS provides learning opportunities with a focus on regulation, social communication, flexibility, resilience, sensory processing, and executive functioning. This year the SNS is offering access to the information in a variety of ways, so no matter how you learn, you can participate. Check out our options:

- **In-Person Learning Events** - These events are held at your local CESA and are from 8:30-3:30-two of our Areas of Needs are covered in one day.
- **Virtual Learning Events** - These events are 2 hours long and are offered from 9am-11am OR 12:30-2:30 on various days throughout the year. Each event covers one of our Areas of Need.
- **SNS Year Long Cohort (NEW)** - These events happen virtually from 3:30-4:30 on a variety of days and subjects. They are meant to bring people together to chat about implementation of strategies, so come willing to talk or to listen to others.
- **Learning Events, Coaching and Technical Assistance:** Schools, districts, community organizations and individuals (educators, family members, or community members) can access virtual support with the SNS statewide coordinator. This can include requested learning events, coaching, and brainstorming

meetings, and can be provided up to 4 times a year.

To find subjects, dates and registration, please visit the [SNS Learning Events Registration webpage](#).

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

[Resources for Students with Medically Complex Needs](#)

In August 2023 ReSET released [a tool kit](#) featuring resources to help keep children with complex health needs healthy in schools. As this is the viral season, ReSet announced the addition of two more resources to the tool kit:

- A short video which gives an overview of the tool kit and shares ideas for supporting the health of children with complex health needs in schools

[Link to English Video](#)

[Link to Spanish Video](#)

- Updated versions of the family decision-making tool designed to help families make the best decisions for their child when respiratory illnesses circulate in the community. Both these, and all other resources in the ReSET tool kit, are available in both Spanish and English on [the ReSET website](#).
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ONLINE RESOURCES



[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 active participants in the IEP process.

[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. Be sure to check out the [Student Snapshot](#) and [Family Profile](#) documents. Both documents will help the school team learn more about the student and their family.

[CADRE's Steps to Success: Communication with Your Child's School](#)

CADRE is the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education. The document highlights some specific communication skills that can help parents be most successful in developing and maintaining a strong partnership with their child's school.

[Working Together Series](#)

The Working Together Series includes five interactive self-directed courses. These courses provide families and educators with a number of strategies for working together and through conflict. Anyone supporting children or youth with disabilities may benefit from this series, however, the setting in which collaborative problem solving and conflict resolution takes place within this series is typically the school or IEP meeting.

[Andrew F. Talking Points \(Worksheet for Parents\)](#)

The Supreme Court's [Andrew F. decision](#) (2017) redefined the meaning of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. In short, the Supreme Court ruled that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) must give students with disabilities more than a de minimis, or minimal, educational benefit. Parents may want to use these talking points at an IEP meeting to identify their concerns and to find ways to talk about them using Andrew F. language.

[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-Building Bridges Between Schools and Parents](#)

It truly does take a village to educate a child. Educators need the cooperation of families 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. Disagreements can be emotionally charged and if those disagreements are not resolved, parents and school staff can end up working in different directions. Often, it is the student who suffers. To further the goal of building bridges between families and teachers, this 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 parents can use the meeting to ask questions that will help their child. The content is available in both Spanish and English.

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

Parents have a key role in their child's education and parents can help bridge their child's transition from home to school and give them the best chance at success in learning and in life. This tool provides parents with a set of questions to ask, and important issues to consider, when approaching their child's teachers, principals, and counselors about their development.

Available in English and Spanish.

[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.

[Keeping Your Communications and Records Organized](#)

Check out this Communication Log as one way to keep written documentation of your communications with the school. [English Spanish](#). If you use a binder to keep track of all the documents related to your child, The [IEP Binder](#) is a way to keep track of important dates related to the IEP process as well as communication with the school.

PBIS-Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Notes about Positive Reinforcement

Verbal praise is the most effective tool for teaching and maintaining positive behavior.

Praise should be **specific and clearly linked to the behavior you are reinforcing.**

- Say: "I like how you are picking up your toys", instead of, "Great job."
- Say: "You must feel proud of your report card", instead of, "I am so proud of your report card."
- Say: "Thanks for being responsible and putting away your bike", instead of "I LOVE you when you pick up your bike."
- Say: "Great job following directions at the grocery store today." Don't add: "Why can't you do that every time?"

For more about PBIS check our [July 2023 newsletter](#).

RESEARCH

Parent Perspectives on Special Education Services: How Do Schools Implement Team Decisions?

Zagona, A., Miller, A., Kurth, J., & Love, H. (2019). Parent Perspectives on Special Education Services: How Do Schools Implement Team Decisions?

[Read Full Article](#)

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' perspectives and experiences of special education, including the degree to which decisions about their child's education were implemented as they had agreed upon with the school personnel. Additionally, a secondary purpose of this study was to understand how parents explain why school personnel do or do not implement elements of their child's Individualized Education Program (IEP). In this study, parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities described their experiences attempting to reach agreement with school personnel on decisions involving their child's educational placement and special education services. Parents expressed a desire to be involved in decisions, and they described a desire to obtain inclusive educational placements for their children. Parents described varied experiences with the implementation of special education services. They also described both successes and concerns related to the special education services their child was receiving at school. Implications for special education policy, practice, and research are discussed from the perspective of supporting family involvement in the special education process.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEW SLETTER

Upcoming Newsletter Topics:

January: Transition

February: Intellectual Disabilities

March: Early Childhood

To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources you may use the [Word document](#). Send submissions to [Wendy Overturf](#). 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 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.

This monthly update is provided by 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, please email WI FACETS.

The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter can be found online: www.servingongroups.org/newsletter



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