



School-Family Partnerships



“No family is ever really prepared for the birth of a child with a disability. When such a child does come into the world, families often need strong support from their faith community. That support must remain firm with the passage of years. The path to independence can be difficult. Family members need to know that others stand with them, at least in spirit, as they help their children along this path. The central importance of family members in the lives of all people with disabilities, regardless of age, must never be underestimated. They lovingly foster the spiritual, mental and physical development of the disabled person and are the primary teachers of religion and morality. Ministers working in the apostolate with persons with disabilities should treat them as a uniquely valuable resource for understanding the various needs of those they serve.” (Pastoral Statement of U.S. Catholic Bishops on People with Disabilities)

“Research consistently shows that the participation of parents in their child’s education is one of the most significant variables related to students’ educational success.”

School personnel recognize that parents of students with disabilities have a lifelong commitment to their children, while school personnel “come and go.” Therefore, the first step in the IPP process is asking parents to identify their own values, hopes, and dreams for their child’s future, and their immediate educational and social goals. These parental goals form the foundation of the student’s IPP and of other educational goals that are valued by school personnel and are addressed within the breadth of the general education curriculum. Parents are enabled to take a leadership role in IPP meetings and in future planning efforts for their children.

Family Involvement is a Cornerstone to Educational Planning

COACH 3: Choosing Outcomes and Accommodations for Children: A Guide to Educational Planning for Children with Disabilities, Michael F. Giangreco, Chigee J. Cloninger & Virginia S. Iverson, p 15-17

- Families know certain aspects of their children better than anyone else. Nonschool times provide key information that has educational implications, such as the nature of the student’s interests, motivation, habits, fears, routines, pressures, needs and health.
- Families have the greatest vested interest in seeing their children learn. It can be dangerous to make assumptions about a parent’s intentions based on certain behaviours. Parents may withdraw from the educational process for any number of reasons.
- The family is likely to be the only group of adults involved with a child’s educational program throughout his or her entire school career. Professionals are encouraged to build on an ever-evolving, family-centered vision for the student, rather than reinventing a student’s educational program each year as team membership changes. Throughout the student’s school career, the family is most likely to be the only human constant.
- Families have the ability to positively influence the quality of educational services provided in the community. Active parent groups and advocacy groups that include many families continue to be influential in improving education for students with disabilities. Undoubtedly, families will continue to play a vital role in improving educational services for all children.

- Families must live with the outcomes of decisions made by educational teams, ***all day, every day!*** People should be involved in making decisions that will affect their lives. When families do not do what professionals have prescribed, this might indicate that family was inadequately involved in the decision making process. As professionals, when we make decisions we must constantly remind ourselves they are likely to affect other people besides the child and have an effect outside of school.

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Families and schools are encouraged in partnership to create quality inclusive educational experiences for students with disabilities. Families are connected to resources for developing their own leadership and advocacy skills. For example, "The Learning Team: A Handbook for Parents of Children with Special Needs" (<http://www.education.alberta.ca/admin/special/resources/learningteam.aspx>).