

# STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE COLLABORATION WITH PARENTS



Research shows that trust is one of the most important factors in creating a positive, productive relationship between teachers and parents of children with special needs. Parents surveyed by Missouri Parents Act suggest the following strategies to help gain their trust.

## SHOW PARENTS THAT YOU VALUE THEIR CHILD AND THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION.

*Examples:*

- Encourage self-determination and the child's participation at IEP meetings.
- Show parents that you are focused on the child's abilities and strengths.
- Encourage the child's inclusion in the regular education environment.
- Encourage participation in school concerts, science fairs, sports and extra-curricular activities.
- Do not bring up budgets or school funding with parents.
- Be careful of statements that imply you know what their child wants (especially if you haven't spent very much time with the child).
- Think outside of the box when discussing their child's post-secondary future.
- Don't tell a parent that you only have "\_\_\_" time for the IEP meeting.
- Treat the child as an individual; avoid "all, most, and no kid" statements.

## SHOW PARENTS THAT YOU ARE PROTECTIVE OF THEIR CHILD

*Examples:*

- Show respect of a child's boundaries and privacy and demand that others do the same.
- Show parents that you will protect their child from vulnerable situations.
- Show a willingness to protect the child's best interests, as appropriate.
- Ask parents if they have any concerns about their child's physical and emotional safety; talk with them about those concerns.
- Protect the child from bullying, teasing, and harassment.

## SHOW PARENTS THAT YOU VALUE THEIR FEELINGS, OPINIONS, EXPERTISE, AND CONCERNS

*Examples:*

- Ask parents:
  - How does their child learn best?

- What is not an effective way for their child to learn?
- How does their child's disability affect their child's learning?
- If a child is non-verbal, ask parents about the communication language that they have created with their child.
- Avoid using acronyms at meetings and offer parents a glossary of terms.
- Share sensitive or difficult information one on one before the IEP.
- Make sure that parents are not sitting in little kid chairs and the teachers are in the big ones.
- Ask parents how much communication they need to receive regarding their child.

## **BE HONEST ABOUT WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW**

*Examples:*

- If you don't have a child with a disability, be honest that you don't know what that journey is like.
- If you don't know a lot about a child's disability, ask the parents for information or ask parents to sign a release of information so that you can speak with the medical experts that work with the child.
- If you don't understand how a parent's cultural background impacts how they cope with their child's disability, ask the parents to explain.
- If you are unsure of the law or school district policy, tell a parent that you will get back to them.

## **MOST IMPORTANTLY, LISTEN.**