

Fostering Parent and Professional Collaboration

Research Brief



Over the past 60 years, many changes have occurred in the ways parents and professionals have learned to work together to improve outcomes for children with disabilities. Perhaps the most notable change has been a shift from services based solely on professional expertise to services that incorporate the knowledge of parents as part of coordinated planning on behalf of children.



Initially, professionals were considered the true experts on the needs of children with disabilities, and parents played a secondary role. As parents began to participate more actively in planning their children's education and care, collaborative working relationships built on mutual respect and shared knowledge began to emerge. A large body of research has confirmed the positive benefits of parent-professional collaboration on the education of children with disabilities (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

This article summarizes historical trends in parent-professional collaboration; explains the research behind such collaboration; describes potential barriers to effective partnerships; and provides strategies for successful collaborations.

The strategies listed are useful for various types of parent-professional collaboration. Some reference the relationships that emerge between a parent and teacher or other member of an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) planning team. Others relate to systems-wide collaboration, such as that which occurs on state or district-level policymaking committees or school committees.

A Brief History of Parent-Professional Collaboration

1950s-1960s

In the 1950s to 1960s, the predominant model of parent-professional collaboration was that of the counseling or psychotherapy relationship with a family (Turnbull et al., 2000). Under this model, the family, especially the mother, was engaged in therapy to help cope with having a child with a disability. Doctors or therapists would diagnose a child's disability and prescribe treatment, generally with little if any input from the child's parents. Services primarily addressed medical needs, and many children were placed in institutional care. The presumption for many such placements was that parents did not have the knowledge or skills to take care of their child with a disability at home.

1960s-1970s

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the counseling or psychotherapy model was slowly replaced by a focus on training parents to care for their child (Jordan, 2004). During this time, professionals maintained their status as experts who had knowledge that parents needed in order to raise a child with a disability. Professionals taught parents how to carry out interventions in the family home (physical therapy exercises, speech and language activities, etc.) as a way of increasing learning opportunities for the child. Under this model, parents often faced conflicting roles - their role as a parent and their new role as the person responsible for carrying out the instructions of professionals.

In 1975, with the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA – then known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act), a revolution occurred in parent involvement. This new federal law provided broad rights and responsibilities

for parents to be actively involved in their children's special education planning (Espe-Sherwindt, 2001). Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) developed in the late 1970s in response to the need to assist parents to understand their new rights and to participate effectively in IEP planning for their child. New models for parent involvement soon developed that required both parents and professionals to learn new skills in order to work together effectively. Special education programs at universities and colleges increasingly included parents as presenters in teacher preparation and social work programs to help professionals to understand what families wanted and needed.

1980s

During the 1980s, the focus in services across agencies shifted to a family-centered model of parent-professional collaboration (Jordan, 2004). Professionals transitioned from their roles as experts into new roles as partners. The strengths and capacities of families began to be recognized and utilized in making decisions about their children's care and education. Parents began to exercise more influence by expressing their own priorities, needs, and preferences. PTIs were written into IDEA in 1984, and many other family networks developed in the 1980s to support parents in this new approach to planning services.

During the 1980s, the expertise of families became more widely accepted. Parents contributed knowledge and expertise to the pool of information used to make decisions about a child. Services were often developed and delivered across disciplines (Allen & Petr, 1996).

1990s-Today

During the 1990s and continuing today, many parent-professional partnerships emerged that exemplify true collaboration. Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs) under IDEA, self-advocacy networks, and family support groups now provide

parents with the knowledge, skills and resources to become active participants in making decisions about their child's services (Adams et al., 2000).

Today there is an expectation that parents and professionals will work together to use available resources to improve outcomes for children with disabilities. This includes honoring the family's values and priorities. Effective collaborations are relationship-based and acknowledge the combined expertise of parents and professionals in helping children with disabilities to meet their goals. Parents strive for full participation not only in planning for their individual child but in systems change issues as well. These changes have profoundly affected how parents view their roles as advocates for their children, and have also affected virtually all agencies that provide services to children and families.

Private foundations and federal agencies have recognized and contributed to this shift in social policy by increasingly requiring that education and other agency staff form meaningful partnerships with families at local, state, and national levels (Adams et al., 2000).

Continuing Barriers to Parent and Professional Collaboration

Despite the expectation for collaboration between parents and professionals, many barriers remain that inhibit the equal status required for this partnership to function optimally. Attitudinal, communication, socioeconomic, and cultural factors can potentially be barriers to effective parent-professional collaboration (Geenan et al., 2006).

Attitudinal Barriers

While there has been much progress in building collaboration, a real or perceived knowledge imbalance

between parents and professionals still hinders progress. At times, both parents and professionals may not believe in the equality of the partnership. Thus, professionals often maintain control in the relationship even when it is not their intent (Blue-Banning, 2004). When professionals do not want or know how to engage parents in order to include them in conversations or are unwilling to take the time to build the partnership, collaboration cannot occur (Wang, 2004). Similarly, parents need to understand their rights to equality in these partnerships and the importance of their role.

Without equality or trust, it is difficult to implement a truly collaborative relationship.

The problem is often most acute when parents are new to this country, when language differences present barriers to communication, or when parents come from a background of poverty or low socioeconomic status. Some families may also come from cultures in which the need to preserve relationships is more highly valued than the individual rights provided by IDEA (Alliance, 2006).

If parents and professionals enter a collaborative relationship with different expectations, understandings, and assumptions, true collaboration will not be effective (Adams et al., 2000). Professionals may not have received training on how to work effectively with parents, or may not be aware of how differences in language or cultural expectations create barriers to understanding (Coleman et al., 2006; Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Parents and professionals alike often lack the skills needed to work collaboratively (Feinburg et al., 2002).

Socioeconomic and Cultural Barriers

Parents are the same all over the world in the hopes and dreams they carry for their child's future. This is true whether or not parents are raising a child with a disability, or whether the parent comes from a background of poverty. It is important to remember that race matters, and efforts to ignore it place unnecessary strains on developing relationships. Recognizing and

honoring cultural and racial variations is a key aspect of engaging diverse families (Alliance, 2006). In addressing these variations, it is critical not to make generalizations about diverse parents. In reality, the same barriers that affect relationships between parents and professionals from the same culture simply become more evident in relationships that include parents from diverse cultures (Coleman et al., 2006).

It is at the service level that parents and professionals from different walks of life with different belief systems must find common ground. It is not wise to pretend that people are all the same or even that everyone has the same vision of education, the roles of parents and professionals, or desired outcomes. Parent-professional collaboration is most effective when one is willing to withhold judgment in order to understand the other. It is not possible to memorize cultural features because cultures are dynamic and changing. It is, however, very possible to give explicit permission to a parent to describe how they view their child's education and their desired outcomes for education. It is also very possible to incorporate different wishes and needs into the special education planning process. The impact of socioeconomic and cultural barriers diminishes in importance when personal relationships emerge from a shared concern, appropriately expressed and acted on, for the needs of a child.

Professionals will benefit from spending time with family members to learn about their culture, or may build relationships with leaders in diverse communities who can help explain differences that may get in the way of a productive relationship (Alliance, 2002). These "cultural guides" are people within a specific culture who are comfortable explaining differences in perspective or practices between their culture and the larger American culture. It may be helpful for parents and professionals to discuss values that are significant when planning educational services for the child (Boethel, 2003). Parent Centers and professionals that work with new immigrant families can help

them to understand the basics of how schools operate and what teachers and other professionals expect of students and their families (Alliance, 2006).

Communication Barriers

Communication can be a major barrier to parent-professional collaboration. Not only do many families not understand the jargon associated with special education, those who use a different language often are faced with inadequate translations or words that do not even exist within their language framework.

Nonverbal communication as well as preferences for direct or indirect communication are also different across families and can negatively affect the relationship when they are not understood (Geenan et al., 2006; Alliance, 2006).

Parents who prefer indirect communication, (e.g., "Mrs. Jones, can you help me to understand how behavior problems within the home are handled?") may feel offended if the question is asked as, "Mrs. Jones, how do you punish your children when they misbehave?"

Many communication differences, such as eye contact, physical proximity, and overt respect (voice tone, deference, agreeability) are not immediately evident but can seriously affect communication when not understood. For instance, some parents will defer to a professional's opinion, even when they are privately in vehement disagreement. Parents who do not feel equal may not speak up even when encouraged to do so, unless the relationship is secure and the parent feels equal.

Fears

Families and professional both experience fears that limit their ability to participate effectively in collaborative relationships.

Families may fear that professionals will not be accessible to them when they have a concern about their child's educational plan or progress (Lord Nelson et al., 2004). They may fear having disagreements with professionals (Jordan, 2000). Families that are new

to more intensive parent-professional collaborations such as participating on a local or state committee may fear feeling exploited or vulnerable as the parent representative. They may worry that they will not be effective or able to make a positive impact for other families (Adams et al., 2000). Or they may believe that their presence is simply a token gesture of partnership.

Professionals may fear that there will not be enough resources to provide the services requested or that parents will view them as incompetent when they do not agree. Professionals sometimes fear being thought of simply as a gateway to resources rather than being valued as an individual committed to helping children and their families to be successful (Adams et al., 2000).

Parents are advocates for the needs of their children, and professionals often control funding. These two very real facts of life affect relationships and can become damaging to the relationship when there is no collaboration between parents and professionals. This speaks to a very real need to let go of the fears in order to build effective parent and professional relationships. In a true collaboration, the different responsibilities can actually become the catalyst for creative planning, and relationships can flourish despite differences.

Parent-Professional Collaboration Models

There are a number of different models in use today that demonstrate effective and positive parent-professional collaboration. Each model serves a specific function, and each has the potential to engage parents and professionals in meaningful and effective relationships.

1. Policy groups.

State and local policy or advisory groups often have representation from both professionals and parents who work together to solve common issues.

2. Parent-faculty partnership programs.

University classes that train future special education teachers may be co-taught by instructors and parents of children with disabilities.

3. Co-training.

Special education professionals and parents can participate in school or district-based co-training activities to provide training on special education, communication, collaboration, positive behavioral interventions, or other topics to both parents and school staff.

4. Materials review.

Parents may review training materials developed by professionals to ensure that the materials meet the needs of parents who attend such training. Additionally, professionals may review materials developed by parent groups.

5. Parents as trainers.

Parents may train school staff on effective parent engagement, outreach, and diversity inclusion strategies to help build an effective parent presence.

6. Professionals as trainers.

Professionals may speak to parent groups about effective ways that parents can be involved in the education of their children and support achievement.

7. Parent Training and Information Centers/Community Parent Resource Centers model.

Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers provide information and training through a parents-helping-parents approach. Benefits to parents are the opportunity to identify with other parents and, for professionals, the opportunity to learn how parents feel about services and what they would like from professionals.

Each of these models, explained more thoroughly in the following paragraphs, meets different needs and builds communication and support for effective collaboration.

Policy Groups

Policy or advisory committees exist in every state at local, district, and state levels. They range from school-based parent involvement committees in Title I schools to state special education advisory committees. Groups may be permanent with specific term limits for members, or they may be formed on a temporary basis to complete a specific task. Every state has a special education advisory committee (SEAC), and many exist at district levels. It is important that parents who are recruited to serve on policy or advisory committees understand their specific roles, have the training and/or skills to look at the needs of children with disabilities as a whole rather than their individual child and the child's needs, and have the flexibility and support to feel like a valuable contributor. Many resources are available to assist parents in their role on these committees. Parents can contact their State Department of Education, school district, or visit www.mnseacinfo.org for ideas.

Policy groups that are most effective in including parents and professionals have defined goals and agreements outlining expectations of all members and the group as a whole (FFCMH, 2001).

Collaborative policy groups help prioritize resources, develop innovative ideas, and improve trust in the system through the involvement of all stakeholders (Feinburg et al., 2002). Once a parent or family member has committed to serving on a committee, it is important that they have sufficient background information to fulfill their membership role effectively, such as the purpose of the committee and any timelines for completing goals (Anderson, 2006).

There is a variety of ways that parents can be recruited to participate on these committees. Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers are excellent sources for finding parent leaders who are interested in this type of collaboration. Parents may also be recruited from

disability associations, existing state and local agencies, support groups, or public forums and conferences (FFCMH, 2001) or through recommendations from special education staff (PACER, *Increasing*, 2004). Ads in school newsletters and Web sites are also helpful, although often a personal phone call is most effective.

Parent-Faculty Partnership Program

Another current model of parent-professional collaboration occurs in "family as faculty" education programs. In this type of program, parents of children with disabilities partner with instructors to teach education, social work or psychology students about special education and having a child with a disability.

The goal of these programs is to demonstrate collaboration, promote family-centered practices, and include the family perspective in the course curriculum.

As in all types of parent-professional partnerships, the instructor and family member must work together before the course begins to define the relationship and the specific roles of each throughout the course. (Espe-Sherwindt, 2001).

A study of this type of parent-faculty partnership program revealed that it had many positive benefits for the college students (Espe-Sherwindt, 2001). The students learned about the parent perspective and the expertise parents are able to provide. Education students who attended one parent-faculty partnership program stated that they would make changes in how they behaved as professionals based on what they learned in the course.

Another option in parent-faculty partnerships is the guest parent lecturer, who may present once or twice to a class. Diverse parents who have a child with a disability can be especially helpful to college students, as they may speak about the feelings associated with having a child with a disability as well as about how culture can potentially impact the parent-professional relationship. When building a parent-faculty partnership, it is important that parent speakers be compensated in the same manner as any guest lecturer.

Co-Training

In this collaborative model, parents and professionals participate jointly in a train-the-trainer session, and then partner to train other parents and professionals. Training might address rights, emotions, diversity, communication or other aspects of the special education systems. In a co-training model, it is especially important to ensure that some of the parent co-trainers represent the diversity of the district or community.

A study of the co-training model showed that the co-training method was beneficial to both the trainers and the trainees (Whitbread et al., 2007).

Another study on joint training of parents and professionals on collaborative decision-making revealed that participants demonstrated an improved ability to work collaboratively (Feinburg et al., 2002). One direct benefit of co-training is the opportunity for parents and professionals to begin to learn how the other perceives services and their roles.

Materials Review

One of the real advantages in asking a variety of parents to review professionally developed materials is to ensure the language is respectful, family-friendly, and sensitive to parents from diverse backgrounds. Professionals can also share their expertise by reviewing materials developed by parent groups. Having parents and professionals review and comment critically on materials will not only improve the quality of the materials, but will also build partnerships between professionals and the parents that are founded on mutual respect for shared knowledge.

Parents as Trainers

The idea of using parents as trainers is not new. For many years, Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers have provided training to a variety of audiences, and across the U.S. about a third of those attending workshops have been professionals (Alliance, 2008). Parents have

a wealth of information from raising children with disabilities that can be useful to professionals. Parents may present at school in-service days or may provide approved training to other parents in the district.

Professionals as Trainers

Professionals may offer to address informal or formal parent groups with trainings on specific strategies to promote school success, access services or resolve differences. When using this professional training model, it is important to be deliberate about content, using parent reviewed materials with the goal of building parent-professional collaboration. The professional should be presented not simply as the expert, but also as a learner about the needs and wishes of families across diversities, disabilities, and the socioeconomic spectrum (Jordan, 2004).

Parent Training and Information Centers/ Community Parent Resource Centers model

Parent trainers, themselves parents of children with disabilities, provide training to parents and professionals through a parents helping parents model. About two thirds of people attending PTI/CPRC trainings are parents, and a third is professionals. PTIs and CPRCs provide training to parents, to professionals, and to mixed audiences on a variety of topics related to implementing special education. Parent Centers also provide individual assistance to both professionals and parents.

Strategies for Developing Parent-Professional Collaborations

No matter what parent-professional model one uses, there are many proactive steps that schools, professionals, Parent Centers, and parents can take to create an environment that supports positive and

effective collaboration. Research has documented the positive impact parent involvement has on student achievement. In *A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family, and Community Connections on Student Achievement* (2002), Henderson and Mapp conclude that family involvement is one of the most important factors in ensuring a child's success in school. Collaborative relationships between school personnel, families, and community members improve student outcomes (Boethel, 2003).

According to Henderson (2007), in order for parent-professional collaborations to occur, several conditions must be present:

1. Families need to feel welcome in their child's school and that they are appreciated for whatever level or type of parent involvement they are able to provide.
2. Parents need to feel a connection with the school, staff, and other parents.
3. Some parents may not become engaged until they receive specific invitations with clear instructions on how to be involved in school and at home to assist in their child's learning.

Defining the Parent-Professional Collaborative Relationship

Respect, trust, open communication, and shared goals are all indicators of collaborative partnerships. Defining the relationship and recognizing what the other party brings to the table is the first step. People must know what is expected of them (Blue-Banning et al., 2004) and learn to appreciate the other's perspective and strengths (PACER, *Parent Keys*, 2004). Formalizing the relationship and acknowledging differences, while maintaining the

common goal of helping a child, will assist parents and professionals to collaborate rather than work in isolation (Adams et al., 2000).

Parents truly are the experts on their children and should be treated accordingly. Even when engagement is difficult, their wealth of knowledge is worth pursuing, and it can make a real difference in services (PACER, *Serving*, 2006). Families are emotionally invested in their child's outcomes and follow daily progress in a way that others generally do not. While professionals often see the child in only one setting, families are accustomed to dealing with multiple systems and knowing what has worked in different situations. Parents can also facilitate communication between school providers and other agencies.

Because of the different strengths parents and professionals bring to collaboration, there are different actions each can take to make the relationship more productive.

What Professionals Can Do

In general, research has shown that what families want most from professionals is respect and acceptance (Blue-Banning, 2004). Parents want professionals to see their children as individuals in the context of the family instead of just a client. Parents want professionals to listen to them and to acknowledge them as experts on their child.

Professionals can help engage families in collaboration by:

1. ***Keeping promises and ensuring confidentiality.*** Professionals can develop trust by telling the parents what information will be shared with others and what will be kept private, and by always asking permission to talk about their child with others. For new immigrants in particular, confidentiality for their child and themselves may be the critical element in building a collaborative relationship.

2. ***Being hopeful and honest about the child's abilities and potential.*** Professionals should not withhold information they presume might be painful and should be willing to admit if they do not have answers to a parent's question. Sometimes families will have issues that professionals do not know how to address, do not have the answers for, or have not encountered. When a professional does not have time to research an answer for a family, it is appropriate to connect the family with someone who may be helpful.
 3. ***Helping parents to identify their strengths.*** Some parents truly do not understand that what they do on a daily basis is as important as formal services. Professionals can regularly update parents on the child's progress and point out where family interventions have been effective.
 4. ***Helping parents to identify choices.*** School personnel can help families to identify the choices that are available to them, present options and solutions that might work, and encourage and support parents to make their own decisions.
 5. ***Demonstrating and modeling problem-solving skills.*** Professionals can demonstrate and model problem-solving skills and support parents to find creative solutions to their own problems. This kind of learning is not available to many families through other channels, and can be an invaluable life skill.
 6. ***Accepting parents as equal partners.*** Because professionals have traditionally held the power in the relationship, it is easier for them to bring parents into the system rather than the other way around (Geenan, 2006). Building the relationship may take more time for families from diverse cultures.
 7. ***Being flexible and considerate of the parents' points of view.*** Professionals must develop skills to shift their perspective from their specialty area to a broader perspective of the needs of the whole child and family (Blue-Banning et al., 2004).
 8. ***Considering the family's preferences in all aspects of planning.*** Professionals should utilize the family's strengths while keeping in mind their challenges and other responsibilities (Adams et al., 2000). Hope comes from knowing what to do; when parents know the steps they can take, they feel more hopeful.
 9. ***Supporting parents as their child's best advocate in making decisions.*** Many parents may need to be reminded at each meeting that they are decision-makers for their child, and that their input is valued.
 10. ***Taking care of the logistic details of a meeting or event.*** It is helpful when professionals are flexible in their time and location for meetings and services and when parents are assured that changes in time are possible.
 11. ***Planning for parent involvement in systems change.*** On a systems level, professionals can encourage parent-professional collaboration by requiring that parents be invited to participate on committees to develop policies and procedures that address education and other relevant areas. Government and other agencies may consider hiring parents of children with disabilities to be part of their staffs or involve them in staff development training (Adams et al., 2000).
- In general, it is always best to have at least two parents on these committees as novice members can feel isolated or ineffective, may feel that they are "token" representatives, or may feel uncomfortable contributing to the group without a support system in place. Parents who are interested in representing other parents on a committee or board should have the skills to set aside personal needs in order to make a difference for all parents.

Sometimes parents who are already members of the committee or have participated previously can mentor parents who are new to a policy committee. It is also helpful when parents receive an information packet about the committee before the first meeting that explains the schedule, process, participants, and purpose.

professionals, so parents should try to keep any conflict separate to keep their child's outlook positive.

5. ***Being flexible and considerate of the professional's point of view.*** It is important to remember that no one understands the needs of a child with a disability in the same way as parents do. Professionals cannot automatically know or understand what parents have learned from experience.
6. ***Being honest.*** It is important that parents speak up when they do not understand what a professional or team is saying to them. Parents sometimes fear losing face if they admit that they do not understand, while others fear that disagreement will lead to their child being punished. However, parents' right to disagree is meaningless if they do not understand the discussion. Allaying parents' fear of asking questions can do much to building a more collaborative relationship.
7. ***Following through with promises made.*** When a parent commits to an action, it becomes their responsibility to follow through. Collaboration is a two-way street, and trust flourishes when both parents and professionals follow through on agreements.
8. ***Committing to work to find solutions when disagreements arise.*** It is inevitable that there will be times when parents and professionals disagree. For instance, does the child need an assessment, new glasses, allergy testing, or shortened homework? Disagreements are honest differences of opinion, not personal attacks. Effective parent collaborators commit to working on solutions.
9. ***Remembering that life is full of compromises.*** Most parents fear what will happen if their child does not receive the right kind of services in the right amount and at the right time.

What Parents Can Do

Parents can also take steps to build and maintain collaborative relationships with professionals (PACER, *Parent Keys*, 2004). Parents can enter this new partnership beginning with an assumption that professionals are doing the best they can for the child and are on their side. Parents can contribute to the success of a collaborative relationship by:

1. ***Overtly recognizing the professional's commitment toward children with disabilities and their expertise as practitioners*** (Beach Center on Disability, 2008). It is important for parents to acknowledge the skills of their children's teachers and service providers and recognize their commitment to meeting their child's needs.
2. ***Thanking the professionals that have been helpful to them.*** It is not surprising that many times professionals go beyond the requirements of their job to help a family. It is important to recognize this effort when it occurs.
3. ***Considering that professionals are often limited by the systems in which they work.*** Professionals may wish they could provide more help or resources than they are able offer, but it is not always within their ability to do so (Adams et al., 2000). It is helpful for parents to understand who has the authority to make specific decisions.
4. ***Reinforcing at home what a child is learning in school.*** Children are aware of their parents' view of their school, teachers, and other

However, each person faces compromises every day, and IEP meetings are no exception. For instance, does a child need 40 minutes of direct speech or is indirect speech in the regular classroom more effective? Keeping the focus on outcomes will make compromises easier, systems accountable, and collaboration more effective.

Communication

The communication that occurs between parents and professionals can make a tremendous difference in the effectiveness of collaboration.

There are some general rules that work well for collaborative communication. Parents and professionals need to be good listeners and listen to everything the other has to say. This means truly listening, not starting to prepare a response while the other is still talking. Parents and professionals need to remember that nonverbal communication (posture, body language, tone of voice) conveys at least as much information as words. Important information should be in writing so that each party has a copy and is clear on the expectations of the other (Anderson, 2006).

When there is a disagreement, parents and professionals can help maintain the relationship by disagreeing “without being disagreeable.” Instead of making accusations, it can be useful to ask questions about the other person’s opinion. Parents and professionals should not involve a child in any disagreements that occur. (PACER, *Parent Keys*, 2004)

Parents have repeatedly stated that they prefer all information about their child to be given honestly, including any bad news. However, it is also important that parents hear positive comments about their children, not just negative ones (Blue-Banning et al., 2004). Professionals should avoid the use of jargon as much as possible, especially with new parents who have not

been involved in the system for a long time or parents whose first language is not English. Professionals should provide information to parents in their native language as much as possible.

Parents can initiate positive communication with professionals at the beginning of the school year at a back-to-school event. Parents may want to ask their child’s teachers and other service providers about the best time to reach them and what communication method they prefer (e-mail, phone, written notes, etc.). Parents may also tell professionals how and when to reach them with information or concerns. Both parents and professionals need to understand and respect time constraints and competing responsibilities.

Outcomes

Parent-professional partnerships are beneficial to everyone involved. Parents and professionals develop a more positive view of each other and better understanding of their concerns and responsibilities. Parents become more involved in their children’s education and students and schools perform better. Children with disabilities have more confidence, and perform at higher levels. Everyone benefits from the time and energy involved in building meaningful parent and professional collaboration.

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