

VIRTUAL ROUNDTABLE SUMMARY
10/2/2024
AUTHENTIC FAMILY SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

To ensure the voices of underserved and underrepresented families were heard, a virtual roundtable was conducted with providers serving a diverse range of families across the state. The roundtable was facilitated by Dr. Antoine L. Hickman, MSDE Assistant State Superintendent, and Rene Averitt-Sanzone, Executive Director of The Parents' Place of Maryland. It included 12 representatives from organizations that support families in every region of the state, catering to children with a wide range of disabilities. Several of these organizations also specifically serve culturally and linguistically diverse families and students.

DO THE FAMILIES YOU SUPPORT FEEL THEY ARE EQUAL MEMBERS OF THEIR CHILDRENS / STUDENTS TEAMS?

All participants reported that the families they serve do not feel that they are equal members for a variety of reasons:

- **Power imbalance** between school teams and the family with regards to information
 - Families being **unable to fully understand the decisions** being made with regards to their child's care (consequences, implications etc.)
 - Parents feel that they must blindly follow what the schools tell them (what the “experts” tell them)
 - Systemic and **language barriers** make families feel that they are not given the opportunity to be an equal member of the team
 - Families feel that they are **not valuable members of the team or seen as the expert** of their child
 - They don't know what steps to take to get what their child needs in their IEP
 - **Very little opportunity to communicate** with the school staff with regards to IEPs
 - **Not enough opportunities to view and understand children's progress** in school, time nor the opportunity to process all the information
 - Miscommunication and misunderstandings
 - Due to the lack of familiarity with the special education system and the complexity of the laws and procedures.
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WHAT IS WORKING WELL?

- Having **IEP teams and chairs that are well trained** and know how to work well with interpreters.
- Allowing families to **have an advocate** with them during IEP meetings
- Allowing for **Instructional Coordinator for Special Education to observe** students as much as possible and attend IEP meetings.
- Having **cultural brokers** in meetings who can help with any communication issues that come up during the meeting and after the meeting
- Having **partnerships with organizations** to facilitate IEP meetings in order to translate possible misunderstandings.
- Clear communication of goals in order to have a good understanding of the students through a **holistic approach**
- Allowing for a process prior to IEP meeting to find out what the parents want for their child
- The **training, support and resources** are offered to parents.
- Positive support and clear communication from caseworkers and teachers to parents
- The process of reaching out to families in need rather than them having to come to us also helps building good strong relationships
- When the **schools are willing to become partners and collaborate with organizations**

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST BARRIERS TO AUTHENTIC PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN FAMILIES AND SCHOOL TEAMS?

- Having **overwhelmed administrators, teachers and support staff**
- Quarterly “progress” report written in a formal language that is difficult for parents to understand
- Having **ineffective instruction, intervention and assessment**
- Withholding screening data and notification of reading struggles
- **Language and cultural barriers** between the families and the school teams
- Lack of flexibility with regards to **meeting times** for working families
- **IEPs not being translated** to family's native language prior to the meetings so that they may arrive at meeting informed
- Families **not having the right resources to support and make the informed decisions** on their children
- **Poorly trained /poorly equipped IEP teams**

- **Lack of time and resources provided to school staff** that are needed to assist families
- The school staff's **lack of openness and understanding** of families' input
- **Lack of quarterly progress reports** for parents to keep up with their children's goals and progress
- **Lack of funding for organizations** to continue to invest more time and resources into supporting families

WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS FOR SCHOOL TEAMS AND FAMILIES?

- A mandate for teachers to share a specific or main line of **communication** with parents (best time and means of communication from teachers to parents)
- Allowing **in-person interpreters** rather than over the phone interpreters -
- Build the capacity of **cultural connectors (brokers)** using trustworthy figures in the community to better support families
- Working to **teach/train parents about the IEP**, how to better support their children and how to advocate on behalf their children at school
- Having more structured partnership and communication across family-school-interpreting team
- Provide more mental health support/trauma informed training and supports in school.
- Having **well-trained full-time IEP facilitators** as well as continued education to go along with them in each district and school
- Provide **education about the preexisting dyslexia MSDE's technical assistance bulletin** as well as having the bulletin updated
- **Comprehensive training and materials** on math, reading, spelling, and writing instruction for educators and families at elementary, middle, and secondary levels
- Allowing for student assessment data to be easily accessible to the parents
- Allow parents access to feedback forum following IEP meetings to see where parents stand with planning and understanding
- Allow school teams support and training that allows them to **learn what our immigrant family's needs are** and how to support them
- Being more **flexible with meeting times** for families