

# Effective Partnership in Special Education Advocating in Harmony



Effective Partnership 10-07

1

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

Thank you for attending EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP IN SPECIAL EDUCATION, Advocating in Harmony. It's great to see that parents want to learn to be better advocates for their children and to do so in partnership with the school system.

**Title:** Effective Partnership in Special Education – Advocating in Harmony

**Audience:** The primary audience for this training module are parents and families of children with disabilities. Professionals, school staff and other community members who support children with disabilities and their families would also benefit from attending this training.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this training module is for participants to develop essential understandings related to effective partnerships within the special education process. This training will be presented in local jurisdictions by local Family Support Services Coordinators/ Educators (Family Support Network, Preschool Partners, Partners for Success) and/or by Parents' Place of Maryland staff. All presenters will have attended a Train-the-Trainer workshop presented jointly by the statewide Family Support Services Coordinator and Parents' Place of Maryland before conducting the training in their local jurisdictions.

### **Outcomes:**

Participants will:

understand the importance of partnership and advocacy within the special education process.

understand the steps to effective partnership which include:

communication,

organization and preparation, and

participation in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process.

gain sufficient knowledge for enhanced participation as a partner in the special education process.

**Evaluation:** Participants will be asked to complete an evaluation at the end of this training module.

**This training module is aligned with the Maryland Teacher Professional Development Standards.**

**This training was developed in partnership with the  
Maryland State Department of Education  
Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services  
and the Parents' Place of Maryland**

With contribution by the Partners for Success Resource Center,  
Anne Arundel County Public Schools



## **Participant Outcomes**

Participants will understand the importance of partnership and advocacy.

Participants will understand the steps to effective partnership which include:

- Effective communication;
- Effective organization and preparation; and
- Effective participation in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process.

Effective Partnership 10-07

2

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

### **Speaker introduces self and explains role.**

During this workshop you will understand the importance of advocacy and partnership, steps to effective partnership to include communication, organization and preparation and effective participation in the IEP process. This workshop is also appropriate for families who have Individual Family Service Plans for early intervention services through the infants and toddlers program.

### **Let's get to know each other with a brief introduction activity.**

#### **GROUP ACTIVITY:**

Here are some suggestions for Icebreaker activities that will allow participants to get to know each other a bit, as well as get everyone involved and participating!

**ICEBREAKER 1-** Ask participants to find a partner they don't know, and share their first name, a favorite hobby or pastime, and why they decided to attend this workshop and then have the partners introduce one another to the group.

**ICEBREAKER 2-** Ask each participant to introduce themselves telling their name, why they decided to attend and one interesting fact about themselves. (BEST ONE FOR SMALL GROUPS)

**ICEBREAKER 3-** Have the first person introduce themselves by giving their name along with an adjective that starts with the same letter (Ex. Vivacious Valerie) and the next person repeats (Vivacious Valerie) and then does the same with their own name (Ex; Pretty Pam) and so on. This is a light, somewhat fun icebreaker that gets the group laughing and puts folks at ease.

# Partnership

Two or more individuals in a relationship working towards a common goal



Effective Partnership 10-07

3

## SPEAKER NOTES:

**Partnership** is a relationship between two people in which each has **equal** status and certain **independence** but also some **obligation** to each other.

**Equal** in value and status. Partnerships require sharing knowledge for the good of the child.

**Independence** in regard to each partner's bringing viewpoints and contributions for cooperative decision making.

**Obligation** or responsibility to work together for the child's education.

# Advocacy

Webster's definition:

1. To plead another's cause
2. To be in support of something
3. To speak or write in support of



Effective Partnership 10-07

4

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

Advocacy simply means to be in support of something. **No where does it say that advocacy is adversarial . . .**

- Parents are natural advocates for their children. Who is your child's first teacher? You are. Who is your child's most important role model? You are. Who is responsible for your child's welfare? You are. Who has your child's best interests at heart? You do.
- You know your child better than anyone else. The school is involved with your child for a few years. You are involved with your child for life. You should play an active role in planning your child's education.
- The law gives you the power to participate in making educational decisions for your child. Do not be afraid to use your power. Use it wisely. A good education is the most important gift you can give to your child.

**As the parent of a child with a disability, you have at least two goals:**

- To ensure that the school provides your child with a "free appropriate public education" that includes "specially designed instruction . . . to meet the [child's] unique needs . . ." (20 U.S.C. §1401)
- To build a healthy working relationship with the school.

## Why Partnership and Advocacy Are So Important

Parent involvement is more important to student success, *at every grade level*, than family income or education.

IDEA promotes and is based upon the concept that “teams” make decisions for the student, and that parents are partners on the team.



Effective Partnership 10-07

5

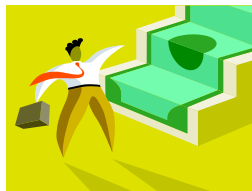
### SPEAKER NOTES:

In study after study, researchers discover how important it is for parents to be actively involved in their child's education. Here are some of the findings of major research into parental involvement:

- When parents are involved, children do better in school, they go farther in school, and the schools they go to are better.
- When children and parents talk regularly about school, children perform better academically.
- The earlier that parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects.
- Positive results of parental involvement include improved student achievement, reduced absenteeism, improved behavior, and restored confidence among parents in their children's schooling.

## **The Steps To Effective Partnership Advocating in Harmony**

1. Effective Communication
2. Effective Organization and Preparation
3. Effective Participation in the IEP Process



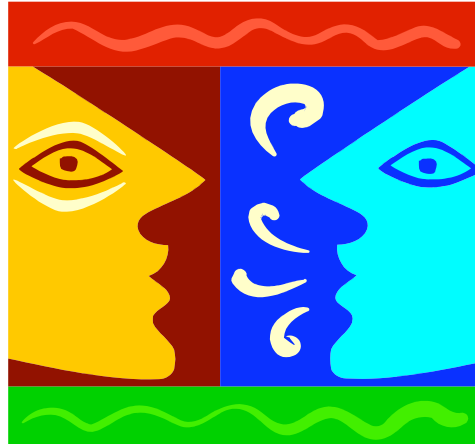
Effective Partnership 10-07

6

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

Review steps and let participants know that the remainder of the training will focus on understanding these three steps to effective partnership.

# Effective Communication



Effective Partnership 10-07

7

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

Effective communication is the foundation for all successful partnerships.

## **GROUP ACTIVITY:**

Ask the group to suggest components of effective communication and after a brief interactive discussion, use as a segue into the next slide.

Suggested components to begin the dialogue:

- Listening
- Speaking clearly
- Being able to express ideas, thoughts, concerns

# Components of Effective Communication



Expressing your thoughts and feelings

Tuning into body language — non-verbal messages

Listening for the words and feelings

Understanding the role and perspective of the other members

Using assertive communication techniques without being adversarial

Being able to clarify the message or intent of communication

Effective Partnership 10-07

8

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- Effective communication is important for you as well as the other team members.
- Because we communicate in many ways, be mindful of your body language and facial expressions as well as the body language/facial expressions of others.
- Be culturally sensitive with regard to communication differences.
- If you don't understand or feel confused or overwhelmed, ask for clarification or assistance in understanding, and by the same token if you feel other team members aren't understanding you, ask for clarification.
- Let's talk more about effective communication techniques that work.



# Assertiveness is...

- A positive way of communicating your needs and feelings
- Identifying what you think your child needs, communicating those needs to the team, with information or observations to support your decision
- The recognition that each individual has rights
- Not being intimidated
- Not aggressiveness
- At the heart of effective advocacy



Effective Partnership 10-07

9

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- An effective communication technique is assertiveness.
- Note that not all families feel comfortable with the word “assertiveness.”
- Assertiveness is also enhancing communication and being supportive in relationships. It is recognizing that each individual has rights, and that you communicate in a positive way.

## Characteristics of an Assertive Person



- Willing to disagree in order to express his/her point of view
- Feels free to make choices
- Takes responsibility for getting his/ her needs met
- Asks questions without fear
- Uses direct eye contact
- Wants to be heard... and is willing to listen
- Able to ask for help without feeling dependent
- Communicates a positive self-image
- Does not allow status to intimidate him/ her
- Maintains a strong sense of self-worth and self-respect

Effective Partnership 10-07

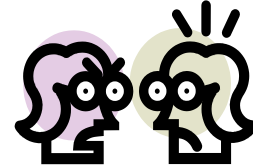
10

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- All being assertive really means is that you convey, with confidence, your thoughts, ideas and concerns.

## ***Barriers that Create Adversarial Communication***

- Using sarcasm
- Criticizing and finding fault
- Blaming and shaming others
- Bullying and patronizing team members
- Being unwilling to listen to the opinions expressed by others
- Not speaking up or participating in the meeting



Effective Partnership 10-07

11

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

Review the list of barriers.

### **GROUP ACTIVITY:**

Ask the participants for other potential barriers to effective communication. Some examples to start the conversation might be:

- anger,
- too emotional,
- interrupting others when they are speaking.

# Bridges to Communication

Communication bridges are positive exchanges between parents, teachers and everyone involved in the education process.



Effective Partnership 10-07

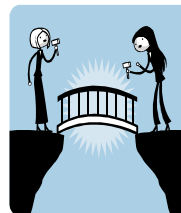
12

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

Now we will begin to discuss some strategies or bridges to effective communication.

## Bridges to Improve Communication

- Understanding each other's roles and responsibilities and who to communicate to
- Respecting each other's time and responsibilities
- Setting boundaries of how and when to exchange information, and maintain contact via phone, notes, emails and meetings
- Exchanging information in a positive way
- A mutual desire to inform, discuss, and solve problems - **all focused upon the student's growth and development**



Effective Partnership 10-07

13

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

These strategies embrace the idea of mutual respect, understanding not only your role but the roles of others, and setting expectations for the group which share the goal of supporting the students growth and development.

### **GROUP ACTIVITY:**

Ask participants to break into small groups. Speaker will then distribute negative comments on index cards and ask that each group “re-frame” the negative comment into something more positive.

#### **Suggested Negative Comments and Suggested Indices:**

- Negative Comment- Nobody ever really listens to what I'm saying so why should I bother participating?
- Suggested Reframing- I want to participate, but sometimes it seems I'm not being heard, let me know when I can have a chance to share my thoughts/concerns/ideas with the group.
- Negative Comment- It feels like I never get an honest reply to any question I ask!
- Suggested Reframing- The answers that are provided to me often don't make sense or seem confusing, is there some way I can get assistance in understanding this information?
- Negative Comment- I have asked repeatedly for an appointment with you and repeatedly I've been ignored.
- Suggested Reframing- I know you must be busy but I think it's really important we talk one on one, can we pin down a date right now to meet and discuss?
- Negative Comment- Nobody ever says anything positive about my child, all I hear is what's wrong.
- Suggested Reframing- I know it's important to discuss my child's challenges and disabilities, but could I request that we also discuss what my child's abilities and successes too?
- Negative Comment- No one ever bothers to explain what all these reports and evaluations actually mean, I have no idea what's going on!
- Suggested Reframing- I would really like to be able to comprehend these reports and evaluations and I realize it will take more time than is allowed here, is there some way I can get help with this?
- Negative Comment- It doesn't seem like my child is making any real progress and then I come to the IEP meeting and nothing seems to change on the IEP to encourage progress!
- Suggested Reframing- I'm concerned that I haven't seen any significant progress this year, could someone explain how my child has progressed and if he hasn't progressed, could we talk about what changes need to occur to support his success?

## **Barriers that Hinder Communication**

- Failure to understand the importance of open, honest communication
- Either parents or school personnel not fully understanding each other's perspective
- Different cultural expectations of parents and teachers
- Negative memories of their own school or less than perfect past experiences
- Defensiveness
- Hesitancy of team members to communicate too often



Effective Partnership 10-07

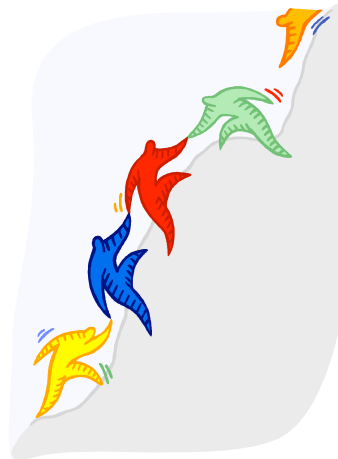
14

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- Do you know that when professionals have meetings with parents they feel “frustrated, angry, guilty, helpless”?
- And when parents have meetings with professionals, they feel “frustrated, angry, guilty and helpless?”
- Apprehension and anxiety exist on both sides of the table.**

## Supporting the Partnership through Effective Communication

- Bring a positive attitude
- Build mutual trust
- Realize your value
- Commit to the process



Effective Partnership 10-07

15

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- A positive attitude toward the partnership is the biggest key to success!
- Viewing the partnership as you would any relationship includes mutual trust. Trust is generally earned, however, some trust has to be offered in good faith to begin the relationship.
- Realizing that you have something valuable to offer and so do the other members.
- A willingness to listen, even when the information is contrary to what you believe.
- A commitment to the knowledge that a partnership is a process.

# Effective Organization and Preparation



Effective Partnership 10-07

16

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

Being prepared and organized are a great way to ensure that you are able to advocate effectively for your child.



## It's All About Your Child

- Learn all you can about your child's special needs
- Remember your child's strengths
- Use the knowledge and skills you already have
- Keep current on state and federal laws



**Remember as a parent you know your child best and bring this knowledge to the team!!!**

Effective Partnership 10-07

17

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

#### **Learn all you can about your child's special needs**

- Talk with professionals and other parents.
- Read as much as you can so you become the expert.
- Try to have a complete understanding of your child's special education needs.

#### **Remember your child's strengths**

- Try to keep things on a positive level.
- The disability is just part of who your child is
- How can your child's strengths and interests be used to enhance his or her ability to learn?

#### **Use the knowledge and skills you already have**

- Learn about related issues, such as advocacy, effective communication and organizational skills, negotiations, and conflict resolution.

#### **Keep up-to-date on state and federal laws governing education and special education**

- Participate in a workshop to learn your rights and your child's rights.
- Become familiar with the basic terminology and acronyms used in education.

**SUGGESTED HANDOUT:** Technical Jargon – The Parents' Place of Maryland

- Be informed about the process of special education in your school system
- Talk to other parents or members of a support group
- Know your community resources and exchange information about the special education process
- **Get involved!**



Effective Partnership 10-07

18

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- Research the resources that are available to your child. Talk to the Partners for Success (PFS) centers to understand the organizational chart for the Office of Special Education and to look for resources that are available to the schools.

- Utilize services such as Parents' Place of Maryland or organizations such as the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education (MCIE).

- Give examples of how to get involved (i.e. local Interagency Coordinating Council, local Special Education Citizen's Advisory committee, local PTA's, Partners in Policymaking, Leaders in Disability Policy, etc.)

### **SUGGESTED HANDOUT:**

- Chain of command/organizational chart for your local school system

# Getting Organized



- Develop a file system
- Keep copies of papers
- Write down your child's accomplishments and keep copies of work samples
- Keep notes about your concerns, questions, and answers
- Keep notes on phone calls and visits
- Keep copies of all letters and records

Effective Partnership 10-07

19

## **SPEAKERS NOTES:**

So here are some strategies to help you get and remain organized. First, keeping everything that pertains to your child's education in one place is a great way to save time. This is the place to store all copies and documents you receive. Another great idea is to occasionally save an example of your child's work to document his or her accomplishments. Jot down questions or concerns that you want to ask at the next meeting or discuss with the teacher.

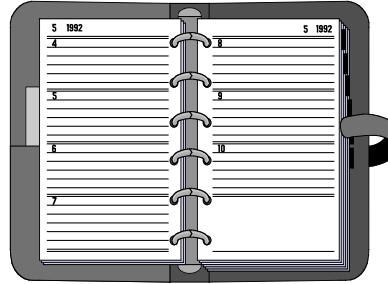
## **OPTIONAL HANDOUT:**

- Provide a handout to parents to assist them in getting organized (i.e., The Parents' Place of Maryland "Tool Kit.")
- You can get copies of the "Tool Kit" through Parent's Place or you can adapt this information for your jurisdiction.

# What records are important?

## *School records:*

- Letters
- Report cards
- Current and prior IEP
- Homework and classwork
- Attendance and discipline
- Therapy reports
- Evaluations
- Anecdotal records and observations



Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

[www.ed.gov/policy/gen/reg/ferpa/index](http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/reg/ferpa/index)

Effective Partnership 10-07

20

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

•If you need to review records, work with the school to set up a mutually agreed upon time. The school must respond to your request within 45 days.

•You can review records at the discretion of the school system, but frequently the school personnel will want to be present to help explain the information and to assist you. You can obtain copies but there may be a fee.

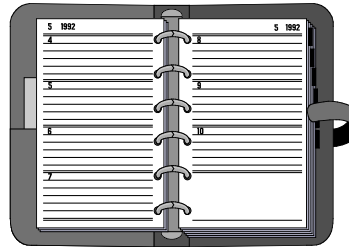
•There are many laws that regulate the privacy of records. Suggest that parents take the time to review the Parental Rights/Procedural Safeguards document for more information about confidentiality of information.

•Listed on the slide for your convenience is the website for the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the federal law regulating educational records.

# What records are important?

## *Parent's records:*

- Doctor reports/medical records
- Telephone calls
- Community information
- Private evaluations
- Private therapy reports
- Progress reports/ work samples



Effective Partnership 10-07

21

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- These are the types of records and documents that you should keep together in a centralized location.
- If using the “Toolkit” continue to review with participants.

## Preparing for Your Child's IEP Meeting

- Develop and refine your vision for your child
- Review your child's most recent evaluations and other relevant records
- Make a list of all your ideas, concerns, and what your child needs to do to achieve that vision
- Ask for a copy of the proposed IEP, if one has been drafted, to review provide feedback and input



Effective Partnership 10-07

22

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

#### **Define IEP if necessary for your audience.**

- The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the individualized plan that supports and directs your child's education through a team driven process.
- It is the document that outlines the "who" "what" "when" "why" "where" and "how" of instruction and related services that are provided for students with disabilities.

**HANDOUT:** If the participants are new to the special education process use the handout "**Building IEP's with Maryland Families: What a Great IDEA**" and "**Understanding the Evaluation, Eligibility, and Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process in Maryland**" in order to provide additional information about the IEP process.

#### **Make a list of all your ideas, concerns, and what your child needs to do to achieve your vision and goals.**

- What does your child absolutely need for him/her to have any chance of reaching the vision that you have both created?
- What services do you want the school to provide to help your child reach the goals on the list?
- Give a copy of your list and the requested services, in letter format, to your child's team leader before the IEP Team meeting.

#### **Ask for copies of the documents you will be discussing and REVIEW**

- Ask for summaries of assessments before the team meeting.
- Review documents (i.e. progress notes, assessments, etc.) before the team meeting.
- Read them carefully, make notes of the things you wish to discuss and your questions.
- It is your right under the law to ask for explanations in terms you understand.
- Determine if new – or – independent evaluations are needed before the meeting.
- Know what assessments will be done and who will do them and ask for other assessments if they are necessary.

#### **Ask for a copy of the proposed IEP if available. This practice varies across the state so please check with you local jurisdiction.**

- Review the copy before the IEP meeting. This will save time and help you be fully prepared, with your questions ready, to actively participate in your child's IEP.
- Draft IEP's are only for preparation. Decisions are not made until the IEP team has discussed each point at the IEP team meeting.

## Supporting the Partnership Through Effective Preparation

- Get up-to-date on laws, interpretation of laws, and new research developments that relate to your child's unique strengths and needs
- Come prepared to share your vision as well as your concerns for your child
- Be prepared to actively listen and to compromise if necessary



Effective Partnership 10-07

23

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- Suggest that parents prepare a list of issues and/or questions to discuss at the team meeting. In addition, parents might even want to prepare their own report of what they see as their child's strengths and needs to assist the team in understanding their child.
- Remember, the draft IEP is just a draft!
- Map out your strategies in advance - HOW to address each issue, TO WHOM to address each issue

### **Resources to Assist with Effective Preparation:**

Building the Legacy IDEA 2004 – [www.osepideasatwork.org](http://www.osepideasatwork.org)  
[www.nichcy.org/training/contents.asp](http://www.nichcy.org/training/contents.asp)

COMAR – [www.dsd.state.md.us](http://www.dsd.state.md.us)

# Effective Participation in the IEP Process



Effective Partnership 10-07

24

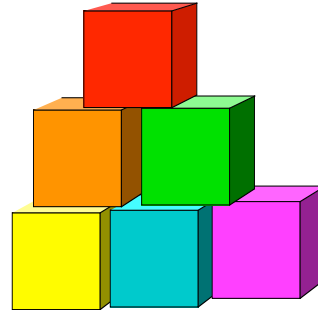
## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- Now we will discuss ways you can meaningfully participate in the IEP process.



# Building Blocks for Successful Meetings

- Be prepared
- Prioritize the most important issues
- Stay positive
- Refocus the discussion



Effective Partnership 10-07

25

## **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- As we've discussed, being prepared and organized gives you a good foundation.
- Additionally, prioritizing your concerns or ideas, and staying positive even when you feel perhaps others on the team are not, will help you with the third building block, to refocus the discussion.
- Refocusing the discussion back to your child can be very helpful if the discussion gets off track.

## At the IEP Table

- Remember you have the right to invite anyone that can help provide insight or has knowledge about your child
- Be prompt
- If appropriate, have your child attend and invite professionals who know your child
- Be specific as possible about your child's abilities and needs
- Stick with the issues at hand and **REMEMBER** the purpose of the meeting is your child's education



Effective Partnership 10-07

26

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

#### **Bring a friend**

- Bring a family member or another parent for moral support.
- This person can take notes and discuss the meeting with you.

#### **Ensure that professionals who know your child well have been invited**

- For example – an evaluator, psychologist, or therapist
- If they can't come, ask them to contact the team chairperson and send a report or attempt to contact them by phone.

#### **Determine what is needed**

- Determine goals you believe your child should be working to achieve. Determine what special education services and related services are needed for your child to reach his/her educational goals.
- Ensure there is clear documentation in the IEP regarding the frequency and duration of the services, if the services will be provided in a group or individually, and the setting in which they will be provided.

#### **Stick with the issue at hand**

- Don't be sidetracked by irrelevant issues, such as your past experiences or the school's lack of funds. Get the focus back to your child.
- Remember you are discussing an individualized education program to meet your child's unique needs.

### **OPTIONAL HANDOUTS:**

Refer participants to "Building IEP's with Maryland Families" page 10 – **Parent Checklist for Before, During, and After the Meeting**

- Make sure there is enough time set aside for the meeting to address the issues
- Ask questions!!! Ask questions!!!
- Remain as friendly as possible, separate people from problems
- Request a second meeting if unable to address all areas of concern



Effective Partnership 10-07

27

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- Emphasize flexibility options for revising the IEP which are new with the authorization of IDEA 2004
  - Alternate ways of meeting may be used such as teleconferencing in order to ensure parent input.
  - Parents and local school systems may agree to change the IEP without a meeting by developing a written document.
- Parents can talk to the team about scheduling additional time for the meeting.
- Remember, multiple IEP meetings can be held and not everything needs to be decided at one meeting. If necessary, two meetings could be scheduled. The first to discuss evaluations and the second to develop the IEP.

## If the IEP is not being followed...

- If you feel the school is not following the IEP...speak up!
- First, start by talking to your child's teacher or the case manager, then the school administrator
- Contact the director of special education
- Request a Facilitated IEP (if available)
- Follow your parental rights/procedural safeguards regarding resolving disagreements



Effective Partnership 10-07

28

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- Have your local copy of Parental Rights/Procedural Safeguards available and provide participants with a copy if they need it.
- Have your local Family Support Services/Partners for Success contact information available.
- Refer participants to the "chain of command/organizational chart" handout (already given out)

### **If the IEP is not being followed or is not working**

1. Request another team meeting to discuss or rewrite the IEP.
2. Follow the chain of command in your local school system and put all of your requests and concerns in writing.
3. Request a Facilitated IEP meeting if this is an option in your jurisdiction. Optional handout - FAQ about IEP Facilitation.
4. Follow the procedures in your Parental Rights document with regard to Resolving Disagreements. FAQ's are available on the MSDE website regarding dispute resolution.
5. Contact your local Family Support Services/Partners for Success Center to assist you or contact Parents' Place of Maryland at 410-768-9100 or [info@ppmd.org](mailto:info@ppmd.org)
6. Contact Family Support Services at the Maryland State Department of Education/Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services at 1- 800-535-0182 or check for dispute resolution resources on the website at [marylandpublicschools.org](http://marylandpublicschools.org)

## Supporting the Partnership Advocating in Harmony



- **Effective Communication**
- **Effective Organization and Preparation**
- **Effective Participation in the IEP Process**

Effective Partnership 10-07

29

### **SPEAKER NOTES:**

- Summarize the components to Effective Partnership in Special Education – Advocating in Harmony.

### **OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITY:**

- If time, end with a group activity on negotiation strategies and effective listening.
- PPMD Activity of negotiation may be used where groups of 2 must find a common ground while problem solving.

The special education process can be a long partnership. You may be working with the IEP team for many years. Stay positive, focused and keep the lines of communication open.



Effective Partnership 10-07

30

**SPEAKER NOTES:**

- True partnership and advocacy is about improving the lives of children, and ensuring that they become independent, productive, taxpaying citizens who belong to the community in which they live.