

Family/School Engagement and Collaboration

We know from experience and research that parent/guardian engagement is a strong indicator of a student's success at school. You are your child's advocate and the constant member of your child's educational team. In order to be an effective member of the team, here are a few suggestions for building positive and collaborative partnerships:

Acknowledge mutual goals: Your team shares the important goal of ensuring that your child receives an appropriate educational program. It's important to work together toward this goal.

Be prepared: Review the resources in this guide to organize your thoughts and input, prepare for special education meetings, and know your rights and responsibilities. Share information. Provide copies of relevant private reports or examples of your child's skills, strengths and weaknesses to help inform the team of your child's educational needs. Feel comfortable seeking advice or ideas from the Parent Resource Center (PRC), your child's school team, and other parents.

Communicate Effectively: Collaborative teams are developed when, motivated by shared goals, teammates respect and value one another, acknowledge each team member's contributions, and accept different perspectives and opinions. Team members are encouraged to utilize active listening skills, ask questions and seek clarification when needed, and communicate openly and directly. Here are some examples of "bridges" to communication:

- That's an interesting idea. Can you tell me more about it?
- So, it sounds to me as if...
- I'm interested in your thoughts on...
- Can you walk me through what this would look like at school?
- I don't clearly understand. Could you explain this idea further?
- If I'm understanding you correctly, your position is...
- I'd like to try and explain our family's thoughts on...
- What might some alternatives be?
- It would help our family to have time to reflect on what we've discussed about our child today.
- I'd love to hear from...
- If we are unsure about this decision right now, what would next steps be?
- Thank you for your willingness to discuss this further.

Express Appreciation: Acknowledge the contributions of your teammates, and reflect on what is working well. Send unprompted notes to ensure staff are aware of your observations of growth in your child.

Keep the Focus on the Student: In working together, it is important to be mindful of the team's shared mutual goal... positive outcomes for your child. Keeping the conversation focused and targeted toward the child will lead to productive meetings and outcomes. Be solution-oriented. If your team cannot reach consensus, agree to respectfully disagree, and inquire about next steps. You can contact the PRC for information, and VDOE has a guide to support teams in resolving disagreements at: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/resolving_disputes/

Celebrate Accomplishments: Your child's success is gratifying to all team members. Although it is important to focus on where your child may need continuing support, be sure to reflect on and note growth, development and new accomplishments during team meetings.

