



More Than an Invitation: Tips for Ensuring Parents are Partners in Developing and Implementing the IEP

Amy Peterson: This session is More Than an Invitation: Tips for Ensuring Parents are Partners in Developing and Implementing the IEP.

This webinar is co-hosted by the PROGRESS Center, the Center on PBIS, and the PEAK Parent Center, and we're excited to have our presenters here to really share a lot of tips, resources, information, and suggestions for what you can do to really create that partnership, that team of the IEP team, really putting the team into action.

So we have some questions that came in in advance, we'll try and get to questions at the end, but we have a very full, packed webinar today so we might not be able to get to everything and would love to hear your feedback and additional questions and anything else in the evaluation at the end of the session as well.

So with that, I'm going to turn it over to Alex, and she's going to introduce herself from the PROGRESS Center and then we'll turn it over to the rest of the presenters as well to introduce themselves.

Alex Marken: Hi, everyone. My name is Alex Marken, and I am a technical assistance provider with the PROGRESS Center.

The PROGRESS Center provides information, resources, tools, and technical assistance services to support local educators in developing and implementing high quality educational programs that enable children with disabilities to make progress and meet challenging goals.

The Center was developed in response to the supreme court decision that states the individualized program or the IEP, must be reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress in light of the child's circumstances.

Laura Kern: Hi, everyone. I'm Laura Kern, I'm an assistant professor at the University of South Florida. I started as a lawyer, but when my son was diagnosed with some disabilities, I ended up going back into school and got a PhD in special education, so I kind of wear two hats.

Today I am presenting for the Center on PBIS, and our center framework, we support students' behavioral, academic, social, emotional and mental health, and we find that when it's implemented with fidelity, we have outcomes, great outcomes, with social and emotional competence, academic success, and really great school climate. And we are funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, OSEP, and the Office of Elementary and Secondary Ed at the Department of Education. So next we turn it over to our great parent partners.

Missy Sieders: Thank you very much. My name is Missy Sieders, I am a parent advisor with PEAK Parent Center, and for those of you familiar with IDEA, one of the requirements is that every state must have at least one parent training and information center. We are the parent and training information center for

the state of Colorado. So we provide free parent advising and training to families and educators, anyone involved with students with disabilities across the state of Colorado.

I have been at PEAK about eight years, and I am the mom of two children, a 22-year-old at the University of New Mexico, and a 17-year-old who experiences an intellectual disability, who is a junior in high school.

And PEAK also is fortunate to be funded by OSEP, as well as we have a couple of other grants where we support other region D parent centers as a technical assistance center, and we have a couple of really amazing projects around transition, both helping families and youth aged 15 and older build their own personal networks for transition so they can be successful after their K-12 experience. And we are also a technical assistance center helping other PTIs build up their transition programs. And with that, I will turn it over to our executive director, Michele.

Michele Williers: Thank you, Missy. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Michele Williers. I am the executive director of PEAK Parent Center. Proud to be here with all of you today.

A little bit about me: I'm about two and a half years into my role as the executive director of PEAK Parent Center. Before that, I worked initially on the juvenile justice side of things, so for the first- and second-time juvenile offenders, and then moved to the Big Brothers, Big Sisters network, where I spent 22 years of my career.

During that journey, I became a mom of a young man who is now 19 years old; he was an identical twin at birth. They came extremely prematurely at 23 weeks' gestation. We lost one; we have one, he was 15 ounces. He's now 19 years old, fully included in his high school here in Colorado, and teaches me everything I know each and every day.

So when the opportunity came for me to switch my career from a Big Brothers, Big Sisters, staying in the nonprofit and social justice and kind of servant leadership kind of mission, but yet shifting to aligning my personal and professional career opportunity; I couldn't think of anything better that I wanted in my life. And as Missy highlighted, at PEAK we really pride ourselves on the power of inclusion and the possibilities that it really ignites.

When we talk about how we could include anyone from all kinds of disabilities into not just their education systems but into the communities and into the world as well. So thank you all for joining, and I'm going to turn it back over to Missy for a poll.

Missy Sieders: Yes, so you learned a little bit about us. Now we'd like to get a little bit of understanding of who's joining the webinar today. It looks like we have 70 or so people on. So if you see a role or a position on the poll that calls to you, make it what you think is a single choice. Some of us may have one role but pick the one that is the top one that brought you to the session today.

I know that as Michele said, I am really very thankful and grateful that all of you are here today. It looks like we have over 70 participants, and I know that whenever I am surrounded by such great and engaged communities, I'm always learning something, so it's never just a one-way street. I'm always taking information back in. So it looks like we have lots of people telling us in the chat. Give ourselves a couple more minutes to finish the poll. Okay.

It looks like 28% of us special educators, 2% general educators, 16% administrators, no self-advocates today, probably they're in school, I suppose. And 54% that shared your role in the chat, and I see a lot of transition project directors, assistant professors of classes, nice, success library, some more assistant



professors, transition coordinators, state compliance officer, nice to have you on board, too, like to see us sharing our experience with the states. Thanks so much.

As I said, we really appreciate that all of you are here, and we expect to learn just as much from you as you do from us, so feel free to translate your experience to us in the chat and we will use that as we go forward. Okay. So let's quickly overview what we're going to be doing in today's session. So today we are going to be sharing resources to support parents' active roles within individualized education program meetings.

Alex Marken: We're going to share how resources can be used by schools to support parent collaboration, and we're going to share some strategies for making information more accessible to parents. First, before we go ahead and get started, we want to begin by discussing the term "parent". In this presentation, we use the term parent to align with IDEA. As you can see from the definition of parent within IDEA, it is in fact encompassing of multiple ways to view parents and families, including biological parents, adoptive parents, foster parents and more.

And so we also — we know that parents and families, the way they're defined can vary, and so we just want to acknowledge that at the very beginning, that the term parent includes many different ways to talk about families. We also want to start by thinking about how — what we mean by an effective team and how to support family engagement within IEP meetings.

So I want to take a second to think about what we mean when we're talking about being on an effective team. We're going to do something called a chatterfall, and in the chat, I want you to think about some characteristics on an effective team that you've been on, and you can go ahead and start typing those in, but before you press enter, I'm going to count to three and we'll all press enter at the same time so that we get a flood of everybody's answers.

So I'll give you a couple seconds. Think of your responses, and then when I press go, you can go ahead and enter your responses. I'll give you about five more seconds. Ready? One, two, three, go. Always fun to see all of these responses come flooding in.

I'm seeing the word collaborate quite a few times coming in. Respecting, caring about everybody's perspectives, listening to others. Evaluating diversity in thought and collaboration. Being open-minded. Lots of communication, collaboration, being respectful. Having a sense of trust within the group. Humility. They're all really great responses.

So some other things that we were thinking about when we were reflecting on elements of an effective team, and I think you all have touched on these, valuing every member's expertise, making sure that we can work together, that's collaboration so that we're all successful. Sometimes we may need to bring other people from — who are not typically on the team into a meeting when we need their particular expertise. Thanks so much for doing the chatterfall.

And when we're on a team, we also want to think about how we can make sure that everyone gets that sense of belongingness, and I think that was reflected in everyone's responses, you know, that element of being collaborative, having trust, and valuing people's perspectives, and so the PROGRESS Center has been doing a lot of work with the IRIS Center and Dr. Erik Carter from Vanderbilt University around the idea of belonging for students. We want to think about it within our team as well.

On the slide, there's 10 dimensions that are defined for student belonging. And we can think about shifting these within the context of the IEP team. Some of these are maybe a little bit of a stretch but if

you look at a couple of them, we can see that these same dimensions are going to be important for the IEP teams. So having a sense of people feeling supported and they're receiving the assistance they need to participate fully. People feeling heard and that their perspectives are being sought out, listened to, and respected.

And feeling known, that they're being treated as unique individuals and recognized for their strengths and feeling appreciated. We also wanted to talk about and dig into a little bit more about who is on the IEP team. So IDEA outlines team members of an IEP team, including the parent, general education teacher, special education teacher, an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results.

In addition to these required members, others such as the child and individuals with knowledge or special expertise regarding the child can also be included on the IEP team. So it's important to know that while the student is not a required member of the team until they turn 16, or earlier in some states, there are many positive benefits when students are able to attend their IEP meeting.

In fact, many of you may be aware or working — doing work related to student-led IEP meetings. To help parents and other team members get to know who is going to be on the IEP team and their roles, the PROGRESS Center has developed a tip sheet that focuses on these team members, and we'll make sure that we'll be adding a link to the chat.

Laura Kern: One of the things when you looked at that list that I think is really interesting is the amount of professional experts, right? So we have our speech and we have somebody who can look at **psycho-ed** evaluation and we have parents, and what we want you to come away from this webinar with, is thinking of parents as being experts on that team but experts regarding their child, not to say that they don't have other careers and jobs and everything else that they also can bring in, but really that they really know their child best.

So they can provide information that you might not be aware of in school, such as unique characteristics, something that's really special about their child that they can share with you. They can share weaknesses and also strengths. Parents are really good for asking, like, what is the child doing really well? If you want to know, ask a parent and they can help you fill out that part of the IEP. What's happening at home and does that reflect what's happening at school? Parents might have strategies that they're doing at home that translate so well to school, and if we don't ask, we won't know that.

Academic and social history, especially if it's an IEP team that's getting together once a year, what happened in prior years. What's happened at maybe at the high school level, what happened at the junior high level, parents can fill in that detail, data from additional assessments.

I know that personally we have done a bunch of work with therapy, et cetera, and have gotten assessments from home that we can share with the school if they ask, but if they don't ask, I sometimes forget to give it to the IEP team.

Other outside influences, like community involvement, like we do things with a church, we have got boy scouts, we have other opportunities where my son is with peers that offer opportunities to practice some of those skills that are in school. So without having this conversation with our parents, we wouldn't have that information, and we also wouldn't think about what's appropriate for that child. Next slide.

So I'm sure you guys have all heard this phrase, especially with IDEA, FAPE, free appropriate public education.

And the free public education, we often kind of understand what that is without defining it, but what we've found is where we get hung up is that the term "appropriate," and we've had Supreme Court cases that have looked at it and kind of defined it a little bit better, but when we think about engaging parents in the process, we're suggesting that that would really kind of help identify what's appropriate.

So we want to meet the requirements of the act, right? We know we have to invite families, we want to make sure they're aware of what's going on, but also what is progress that's appropriate in light of their circumstances, which is the Endrew F. standard, and how can we make that individualized and personalized. When we have a full team, which includes the family, we're really starting to dig in deeper into that appropriate — to meet the standards of what we need to meet. Next slide.

And the way that we set up this webinar is, we have set up before the meeting, during the meeting, and then after the meeting. So first we're going to talk about before the meeting, kind of setting up the climate for success.

We want to help the parents prepare for the meeting and set up that success because we all know those meetings, when we go in and we're kind of — it's awkward and we're all kind of sitting around and there's not as much conversation, we want to have a more positive climate before that meeting starts. Next slide.

One of the key ways that we can do that is thinking about scheduling the meeting. I have a personal situation where — this was a couple years ago, and either I got a notice or I forgot, something happened, and I got a call from my son's special ed teacher, we're having the IEP meeting, where are you, are you coming? And I was like, oh, my gosh, I don't remember getting notice, I don't remember, it didn't get on my calendar, et cetera. And so then they're like, is it okay if we have the meeting without you?

And I said no, no, you can't have the meeting without me, we need to — you guys have to stop, I'm so sorry, we're going to have to reorganize the meeting. And I think about when I'm working with teams in schools, how can we kind of prevent that from happening? So one of the ways is to make sure — when we're scheduling the meetings, that we include parents to see their availability, and that might include a little bit of flexibility as much as we can.

We also have to be aware that sometimes parents have to change work schedules, they have to get time off or if they can't come, they might lose their job, so we have to be a little bit reflective of the meetings during school times, it's difficult, we might have to zoom in a family or find different ways to make that meeting happen. We want to have clear notifications and invite the parents directly.

You know, if my special ed teacher had sent me an email the day before and said, hey, just make sure we're all on track for the meeting, that would have helped because I would have been like, oh, my gosh, either I forgot or I didn't receive notice, we could have had that less awkward response of me not being at the meeting.

And then also think about, are there needs for the parents, can they access the information that might include the language barriers, or it might be that they need to see things in writing ahead of time. So those are some of the things we think about when we're scheduling those meetings. Next slide.

And we have some information that we wanted to share, so prior to the meeting, we think that if perhaps you have a teacher that you — maybe it's a special ed teacher, case manager, somebody to reach out to the parents, designate that ahead of time to provide an overview of the meeting structure, and we also have some resources, if you want to put them all in, I'll tell the — this one is the one from the Center

on PBIS, helping your family prepare, so it has a bunch of things that parents can —that you can provide to your parent that has things to think about before the meeting.

And then we also have resources from others, so I will let them explain those.

Missy Sieders: Next, there's a couple things here from the Center for Parent Information and Resources, as well as PEAK Parent Center.

You've noticed already today on the call, on the webinar, how many times we've said IDEA or IEP or some other acronym, like special language of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

So one of the things we just find out is, as educators or service providers, many of you have been through lots of IEP meetings but particularly when you start with families who have young kids, they haven't been to any perhaps if it's their first one or early on, they've only been to a couple and you've been to a lot and they forget how things are supposed to work or they never knew how things were supposed to work.

So taking the extra step to reach out to say, hey, here's what you can expect and here's what might be good for you to bring in in advance, and here are some acronyms you might hear us throwing around, great way to build a relationship before the meeting even starts.

Alex Marken: And then from the PROGRESS Center, we have a few different tip sheets and other guides, so we have the, all the way on the left-hand side, an IEP tip sheet that provides an overview of the IEP that's broken down into each of the elements of an IEP and provides additional information on what that element should entail.

We also have the IEP tip sheet that defines the IEP team and what their roles and responsibilities are as we talked about earlier.

And then we have this IEP team meeting guide that provides information for parents to consider before, during and after the IEP meeting, and we'll talk more about that particular resource in a couple of slides.

Michele Williers: Great. So also prior to the meeting, one of the areas we would like to highlight is reminding parents, but also again educators or any professional that might be in our audience today, about the opportunity to invite other team members, if relevant.

Individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child. There is really no wrong person, right?

If they're embedded or part of the child's circle of support or different avenues in life, where they couldn't be part of the process — you think about also, I could tell you my son, we're going through transition as he's a senior in high school, and we're having his meeting actually in a couple of weeks and I invited four additional people, and, again, it's not controversial, it's actually all in the spirit of collaboration and partnership around his transition plan.

So we invited, for example, one of his transition community connectors, a program that he goes in after school, really just starting to get him acclimated to some of the day treatment programs, you know, he may be part of as also part of his post-secondary education process. Speech therapists. Some people might have private speech therapists or private behavioral specialists that they're working with. They know the child as well. And I think we really want to aim for consistent plans, right? We know that if we break consistency, we're not doing right by our children or young adults.

I think having people all together allows for this continuity of care and continuum of care that really brings the child whole and really able to continue to thrive. So the participants can join at your request or



the district's request. I always say inform, you just don't want to show up at a meeting and have an entourage of people.

I sent this email a month ago and they're asking for names and titles and wanting to make the different additional members of the team part of the agenda. And that's what true collaboration can look like. Remember, the role these team members —it may be varying depends on the child's needs. Some may not say anything. They just can be part and also understand the goals so that they're also executing on the goals when they're working with the child off school hours or, you know, from any therapy standpoint or after school programming, right?

Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers, Big Sisters, YMCA, all of our children, especially in the spirit of inclusion, should be part of these community programs. These additional team members are invited because they can add information and support and development of the IEP and goals. Some of them may have seen things the child has done that school has not seen, right? And that allows for the interesting dialogue and where the opportunities can really create themselves.

Alex Marken: Another thing we can do before the start of meeting is ask for parent and student input. This is something that is often missing and is becoming an increasingly important part of our messaging in OSEP, to focus on the big picture or the future for the child.

So every conversation should begin with a clarification about what we want for the child and should continue until —should continue to the IEP until there's some consensus. Otherwise, the team focuses primarily on the parts of the IEP and the process and not the child.

So OSEP will be announcing their initiative in January, and it focuses on thinking about transition to post school life from the beginning, or what do we want for the child not just now but also in the future. And so the PROGRESS Center has developed a resource, there's a student form which you see on the slide here, and there's also a parent form, and it is designed to be sent to parents and students ahead of time in order to gather their input, their perspectives, and to be incorporated into the IEP meeting.

And then in addition to student and parent input, there's other information and documents that can be reviewed in advance of the meeting. These types of documents may include the child's past IEP, their progress towards their current IEP goals, any samples of schoolwork draft portions of the IEP, such as draft present level statements, or additional data sources. These are all things that can be sent and reviewed in advance so that parents and students have an opportunity to ask questions and the team can be better prepared for the IEP meeting.

Missy Sieders: So I would have called this maybe one of my bandwagons, for any of you that have ever been involved with real estate, they always talk about location, location, location. To me, one of the successes of an IEP team is communicate, communicate, communicate, probably more than you think you should. It helps build that relationship and trust. It helps parents feel like they understand their current progress and services, what's happening at the school.

I mean, particularly if you have kids that are low verbal or nonverbal, parents really feel a little bit lost sometimes at what's happening day to day in their students' lives. And it also helps the educators and people at the school understand what's going on in the other part of that child's life that can influence how they're behaving and interacting and contributing in the day. So we really want the team to be effective and efficient when they meet.



And I would say, you know, the IEP meeting should not be the only time you are communicating. If that's what's happening, you're probably likely experiencing miscommunication as opposed to some effective communication. And I think the one thing, one of the other things I wanted to add is, communicate when things are going right, not just when things are maybe challenging.

As I said, parents don't always have an insight into what's happening into their child's day because, like any student when their parents say, how was your day, all students usually say, oh fine, or nothing, or what did you learn? Nothing. Well, it is extra, too, for students with disabilities, it's harder for them to communicate about what's happening. Next slide, please.

And this is interesting. Don't forget to ask parents what format of communication is best for them. And I would say this is a two-way street.

I talk to a lot of families each week and one of the things that I say, if you want the relationship to go better, understand how your teachers need you to communicate with them, particularly as you move into that middle and high school level, where you're going to be dealing with multiple teachers, but is that a communication book, is it a text, is it an email, and particularly as you look at as the younger generation is moving up into parenthood, into having children, into being teachers, email isn't working so well for lots of families anymore.

They don't have email and they don't answer their phone when it rings until they've listened to the voicemail. So is texting going to be a future option or is that parent, that paper communication book still going to work and what works for everybody. I think this is a great question at the end of an IEP meeting, okay, how are we best going to communicate about the student going forward.

And if you make that your closing comment, you're going to end in a closing discussion, you're going to end a lot of your IEP meetings in a very forward-looking, positive way.

Laura Kern: Now we're going to shift a little bit to during the meeting, although as Missy had said, some of the stuff like communication and collaboration, you're going to hear us stress over and over again, and I think that matches what we saw in that chatterfall of what goes into effective teaming. So I love to hear that and see that throughout. But during the meeting, we're thinking about how do we engage parents as partners? Next slide.

We came up with a couple of ideas for supporting proactive and collaborative engagement. So one of the number one things is to try to keep it positive. If we have that positive tone where families are comfortable sharing their ideas that's going to go a long way.

We might also remind, and this gets into before the meeting, too, but it's also throughout the process to remind parents to bring their documents and to remind them during that meeting that it's okay to ask questions and to ask who's involved, who — why are we here, it's all right for a parent to ask that as it goes through.

With that being said, we want to protect the time for all team members as much as possible, but it's a fine balance because I have been in meetings where I noted that, like, the team kept checking the clock, and that makes it a little intimidating for families when that happens because we kind of feel like, well, you know, this is our time.

I think if it's said beforehand as part of introduction to who we are, that we're going to be talking for the next hour, it makes the families feel more like, all right, this is why we're kind of keeping track of the time, but it doesn't mean that we can't meet again later on or anything like that.

With that, also, we think about having an agenda, and we actually had a discussion amongst ourselves, because I'm used to the agenda from the team —the team usually has an agenda when I get there but we are talking about why can't that agenda be done ahead of time and shared so that parents and families and the team can know how the meeting will flow.

Introduce, ask team members to introduce themselves and explain their role.

And I would add that perhaps if you pause and then ask at the end if the family has any questions about the role, because just saying that I'm a speech therapist doesn't necessarily describe what that is, a family might want to ask more about what does that mean and what do you do with my child.

Listen. Encourage all team members to listen to the updates and ideas from other team members and to try to be respectful when they're doing that. And finally sharing. Encourage all team members, and especially the parents, to share thoughts, ideas, and questions throughout.

And I would also encourage —at least at the IEP meetings that I've been part of, it often seems like a round robin where you have, here's our agenda, the speech person is going to talk, the general ed teacher is going to talk, now this school psychologist, and it goes around the room and then sometimes it gets to the parent at the end and then the parent shares.

I would suggest that maybe we can incorporate the parents perspective throughout because sometimes there are times when somebody will be talking about an assessment thing and it really reflects on what I'm seeing at home, and I'd love to be able to say, hey, this matches what I'm seeing at home to give a little bit more perspective.

If I don't get my chance to talk until the very end, then you're missing the opportunity for the family to engage with the actual team planning and add more information on some of those assessment pieces. Next slide.

So we do have resources with questions that parents can consider. From the PBIS Center we put together questions that go kind of like intensity, so we start with like if you're a little not sure, you're seeing some behavior with your child, what kind of questions can you ask, and then the gets to the point where it's like highly intense, like we might need an FBA, what kind of questions can we ask to kind of get that going.

So those are just a resource that we put together that we thought might help parents to be able to ask more about behavior of their child.

Alex Marken: And from the PROGRESS Center, we have the IEP team meeting guide for families, and this guide is intended to empower parents to share their thoughts, questions, and feedback during the IEP meeting.

So it helps family members note their thoughts before the meeting, that they want to share, it adds prompting questions that they may want to ask during the meeting to make sure that they're understanding what is being discussed, and it helps to bridge that complex education language, as Missy was talking about, there's a lot of abbreviations that parents hear, so it helps to clarify that.

And also provides a place for parents to take notes during the meeting on each component or portion of the meeting.

Laura Kern: The other thing that we wanted to stress, also, was that when we think about IEPs and special education, we often think about that academic component and we've been talking more and



more about the social competence and including those social emotional goals, but we wanted to make sure that we had a slide that really directly reflects this, that we're thinking about behavior, but we're also thinking about what is behavior. What is the student trying to do?

And if we start with the idea that it's communication, that there's something that the student is trying to say with their behavior, that that can kind of start the conversation a little bit easier, including in IEP meetings.

And also the IEPs might address behaviors, not just the ones that we would really like to control such as the physical, but also that support academic needs. So think more proactively about being on task, working with groups, think about as the kid gets older, they're going to need to work for collaboratively.

How do we set that up in the beginning through the IEP process, so they have those skills when they need it later? Completing homework.

Think about when we have high rates of dropout for some kids with disabilities, maybe if we start some of the self-management in the beginning and setting that in the IEP, that that might help as they're doing their homework all the way through.

We might want to include goals that support behavior support plans and have to address more significant student needs that we don't just keep those isolated. And we have conversations with families about what those are and what those terms are. And finally, IEPs also have accommodations and modifications and we don't always think about how those reflect academics and behavior.

For example, if you have a student who has test anxiety, taking a test outside a classroom can help address those needs, the mental health needs, or if we have a student having difficulty focusing and paying attention, preferential seating might be an accommodation that would address those behavioral needs.

And I just wanted to point out, we have a resource from the center on strengthening family participation, addressing behavior in an IEP, and we really go into some of that FBA and BSP language and how to address behavior within that IEP process.

And Missy is going to share a little bit of where we also see behavior coming out.

Missy Sieders: Yeah. Thank you. So you'll see a little picture came up there, helping your family thrive.

One of the things research has really shown is some of the stuff around positive behaviors, interventions and supports, that started in the school environment, is really very, very effective in a family environment, not just for families who have students with disabilities, but all families.

And thinking about how do we look at preventing negative behaviors, how do we understand what the values are and what are important for families to execute both at home and at school.

And if you look at some of those things at the elementary school, things like pause or this is our motto, and that means something in terms of how we behave at school, how do we apply that at home and how do we work with a family to translate those concepts back and forth.

And there's some ideas in the book, helping your family thrive, it's one that i'm a coauthor of, we have one that focuses specifically on students with significant behavioral challenges.



But I think this is a good place to start if you want something that's very practical, easy language, how do we introduce these terms about positive behavior support and behavior and making things more proactive for the good reason of helping our families thrive in school and at home.

Alex Marken: We also want to remember that we may need to be flexibility and pivot if needed.

In the stories from the classroom video, Dr. David Bateman shares a story of an IEP meeting that serves as a reminder that the IEP is meant to address all of the student's individual needs and how important a family input is to the development and implementation of an IEP that meets the child's needs. It's a short video so we're going to go ahead and play that now for you all.

Donna Sacco (in video): Stories from the Classroom: Hearing Parents' Priorities.

David Bateman relays a story from an IEP meeting where the IEP team shifts focus based on parent input.

It serves as a reminder that the team's purpose is to address all of the individual needs of the child.

David Bateman (in video): I attended a meeting two years ago, in the old days, when we actually had face-to-face meetings, and develop a very good reading IEP for a child. I'd gone through, all the T's were crossed, all the I's were dotted, everything was good. It was about the third, fourth week into September. And we said, Parent, tell me about your child. It was a third-grade girl. I remember this very specifically, the parent says, 'I know we're here to talk about reading, but my daughter has no friends. No one sits with my daughter, no one interacts with my daughter. My daughter is nine years of age, and she doesn't want to go to school anymore.

So that changed the focus of the meeting. Luckily, we had the child's teacher there, we started more group activities, more peer groups, more shared activities kinds of things – what can we do to force all interactions? Not just one, but rotating throughout the classroom. We reconvened the IEP meeting three weeks later, we asked how things were going, the mother said, 'Things are much better, somebody sits with my daughter on the playground, somebody invited her to sit with her on the bus, someone plays with her at lunch, things like this, my daughter now wants to come to school. Let's talk about reading now.'

You have to pay attention to the needs of the child and pay attention to what parents are hearing, things like this. I understand there are times you have timelines, you have to get these things, but that was a very real need that we had to address. And you have to do these things, because you're not going to address reading if a kid's not coming to school. But it reminds me, we're there to talk about a child, we're not there to talk about a paperwork compliance document, we're there to talk about a child.

Donna Sacco (in video): David Bateman is a PROGRESS Center advisor who brings extensive expertise in special education law and working with schools and districts to support students with disabilities.

Alex Marken: We'd like to include that story from the classroom video because we see it serves as an important reminder that it's okay to take a break, or in the case of this particular video, to reconvene if needed, so that's something that we thought as we were talking about reconvening after they were able to put in some supports for that student to support the building of relationships, and then they were able to focus on their reading goals. And so it's okay to be able to take a, take a break and reconvene as needed.



Michele Williers: Yes, and I think that correlates so well with understanding there's a lot of information that is being tossed in any IEP meeting. And, really, thinking about, as human beings, how we need to process information, right? So it's fine and it's totally okay to say, I need to pause, as Alex was saying, and I need some time to process. And then to come back and ask for a follow-up meeting, and not to really proceed any further to allow you to take the time to process and think about the information you received.

And basically, you know, asking parents if they have any questions about anything that is unclear to them, when they're signing the IEP. I've been in this work, I've been a parent for the 19 years, and I'm sometimes still very confused and have a lot of questions. And it's okay to ask those questions. And it's okay for people on the other side to say, I need a minute to get you that answer. It's okay to not have all the answers, either, and to take time to research the answers.

If parents are not ready to sign the IEP during the meeting or has concerns, make a follow-up appointment to review the concerns and meet again as needed to allow a mutually agreed upon IEP so that you can all walk away feeling positive, feeling good about the meaningful goals that are made, and progress for the student. And identify a contact person that the parent can follow up with after the meeting.

So, again, if there's a lot of people in there, who would be the one follow-up person so you can kind of ask your questions, is it your case manager, you know, is it the gen ed teacher that is seeing your child; who is the person that can help with the follow-up and questions? Very important.

Alex Marken: Now we're going to shift to talking about after the meeting. And so after the meeting, we're thinking about how to build that ongoing engagement and connection so that we're able to continue to develop those important relationships. And one aspect of -- to think about for after that IEP meeting is taking time to review.

So make sure that there's a final copy of the IEP and it's provided to parents after any changes are made, that as we were just talking about, that there is time to review, make sure everything's accurate and complete, and that if there are any changes that are needed, it's okay to ask for an immediate follow-up meeting and to reconvene.

Missy Sieders: Here's that favorite part of mine again, talking about communicating.

Just asking the parents if there's a need to share the IEP with other individuals who work with their child, do they need to get extra copies, either paper copies or do we need to make sure that you have an electronic copy that they can share with other therapists or people that work with their student, coaches; even thinking about in the case of schools where we get substitute teachers, other people working with your students here and there, should we make some kind of a summary of the IEP for subs or for particularly students in the middle and high school years where they have many gen ed teachers?

My daughter's IEP is 35 pages long. I'm not sure all her gen ed teachers read it every year. Do we have a summary of strengths, challenges, and accommodations and modifications that are easy for somebody to quickly look at.

Making sure if the child's involved, asking them, do they have questions about the process, the supports that they're going to get, how do they access the supports in terms of the -- after the meeting, so that they can start advocating for themselves as young as possible, how do I get ahold of somebody if I have a question about what I need, checking in with the parents to review progress.



I would say, you know, all – IDEA, the law requires as often as you do report cards. I hope that I know teachers are busy, they have a lot of students, can we check in more often and can we plan those check-ins and maybe that's makes it easier if it's built into our schedule and how do we do that?

It doesn't have to be a long meeting, it could be a quick phone call, it could be that, when we've talked about how we want to communicate with each other, makes those check-ins easier. Not just when things are going wrong, but when things are going right.

And helping to coordinate additional help for the parents about —from the school agencies, nonprofits, I would say particularly if you're in a state and your families don't know who their parent training and information center is, that would be a good first resource, because PTIs provide support for you as educators as well as for families. So, keep that, communicate, communicate, communicate idea in mind.

And one of the things I always like to talk about in terms of at the IEP meeting and in between is doing recognition, some celebration. It's hard work to write an IEP, it's hard work to execute an IEP. So let everybody know, the parents, the team members, the students, that we appreciate their time and work and, again, this goes both directions.

Celebrate the child's progress, and even have the child create some kind of a poster board thanking the people that have helped him, a video saying, here's the goals and I've accomplished this year and it's all because of things you've done with me, and remember that that IEP meeting can be convened at any time by any member for celebration and for maybe we need to make some adjustments because things haven't been working.

Michele Williers: And a key piece is to think about, when you're sharing information with parents, is really having a conversation around how to make things and information accessible. And when we're talking about accessibility -- next slide, please -- we're talking about defining our audience and we're talking about keeping it relevant.

Society when we define our audience, you know, who are the parents we're trying to reach, right? How do they consume information? Think about cultural competency. You also think about cultural competency from all areas of it, so it could be from an ethnic background, a certain religious background, certain cultural background. You can think about cultural competency.

And I went to a recent session that talked about cultural competency around how people learn or process information, extroverts, introverts. Eye contact, no eye contact. Communication techniques. Not everyone communicates in the same way or the same method or has the same voice, and really considering that, reading body language, reading the room, right? I notice you looked puzzled when I mentioned that, do you have a question about that? Taking that, really thinking about it.

How much content do you need to include when you are thinking about relevancy? Do you need to give everyone a dissertation, could you break things down into smaller buckets for people to process the information, and what types of formats do people prefer information in? Are they email people? Do they have technology at home? Maybe they don't.

You know, we know we have two bilingual parent advisors at PEAK, and they tell us that many of the parents that communicate with them, it's all texting. We had to make sure we shifted and made sure we were doing proper accommodations to be able to research families had, that that was their preference of communication.



What is the role of visuals? Multimedia and technology, thinking about not everyone is an avid reader, not everyone went on through—past high school education.

Thinking about all that information, we have to be very mindful so that we're reaching our audiences and we're not using huge words if that's not something that they're going to process and really thinking that through as we're considering any IEP meeting follow-up or even the prep pieces. And considerations for making information accessible. So don't recreate the wheel. There are existing resources available that you can use.

And I know we've been highlighting throughout the presentation many links and resources, and I saw the chat being very fulfilled, but through our parent center network at a national level, we have the center for parent information and resources which has a hub, and we see the slide up here. There's a lot of existing resources there. You can do it even in a search engine, even in Google and get sent to it.

Engage parents in the review of the materials. Have them part of the process. We know when people are part of the process, they go far together. If you tell people what the process is going to be, you're not going to have as much investment and energy around it, or engagement. And this is a really critical piece of that school/parent partnership and family engagement piece.

Alex Marken: We like to provide an example of how the school has used some of these resources and tips to -- and support parent engagement. The elementary school is one of the partnership sites and it's located in Central Falls, Rhode Island. This past summer they received an early draft of our resources that we've been sharing throughout our presentation today in order to review them and provide feedback, make sure that they're clear and relevant.

And so, we got that, and then they also have been using those resources during recent parent/teacher conferences for when they had a conference with one of their parents of a student with disability, they were able to share these different resources, and then we're also talking about how they can utilize them during a parent workshop in order to educate parents on the IEP process. That's something as well that we will be embedding some of these resources in as well.

Laura Kern: Just to highlight, these are some of the resources we had mentioned before with helping your family prepare, questions to ask, and strengthening family participation. The one thing I did want to say is that there's a difference between, you know, a center's coming up with these resources and then just handing them to families.

We hope that you engage in conversations and maybe break the material up into components and use it kind of a little bit with coaching and working with families and not just handing it to them because as we talk about accessibility, some of these resources have a lot of information.

We wanted to make sure we had the information but we also want to say, please think about having those conversations as you hand them out and check in and see, you know, did you read it, was it helpful, and if it wasn't, again, having a conversation about what those resources are and how they can actually help support families.

Michele Williers: As we're wrapping up our webinar today and really grateful for the time that you spent with all of us, we really recognize that it takes time to really build effective relationships.

And we know that collaboration, partnership, all the things that come, trust, communication, all the key elements that build a relationship of any sort, take time and effort on each party's end mutually, right? But it pays off, in the positive experiences for members and outcomes for students.



And as we saw in that short video, it's all about the young adult, the youth, the child in that room, that we're all there for the same reason, right? And the same goal. And remembering that. But remembering that it does take time and energy and, honestly, the one thing that people don't have these days is time, right?

But really taking and putting the time in is going to give you a huge return on investment in the long run. Which leads us to saying that we really want to hear from you. What are your tips for making information accessible to parents?

So we really encourage —you're going to get a follow-up evaluation and survey to really share your thoughts with us. We really believe that this first webinar that we're doing together in collaboration will lead to future webinar opportunities.

We looked at the amount of slides today, and we had 41 slides, if you can believe it, we were like, are we going to get through that, and we did, with two minutes to spare, but realizing that the opportunities are endless, right, for follow-up discussion, and skill sets and information and support that we can have with one another to move the work forward. So with that, I don't think we have time for questions, but I'm not sure, Amy, if you want to maybe say a few words to close this out?

Amy Peterson: Thank you again to all our presenters, apologies for not having plenty of time for questions. I will put the link for the presentation in the chat one more time where you can find the slides that we shared today. We will also be posting the recording up there on the website as well.

This is all the information for the PROGRESS Center and staying connected with us on our Facebook, on our Twitter. If you aren't already on our mailing list, we'd love for you to join and spend some time connecting with the resources on the PROGRESS Center's website. There are these family centered resources. There are resources to build capacity for educators, for local leaders and others, to support students with disabilities to develop and implement high quality educational programming.

And on the next slide you can see the same information from the Center on PBIS and Laura shared a lot of great resources and information from the Center on PBIS, so follow them on Twitter and Facebook, as well. Visit their website.

Check out their resources to really help with some of those conversations around the behavior piece within the IEP and helping families understand the behavior piece as well, as well as many other resources, a wealth of resources, probably too many to count, around PBIS work that's been happening over the years.

And, finally, the last piece, connect with the PEAK Parent Center as well. You can find their information, their website, their Facebook, their twitter, their Instagram and all of the parent center hubs and the parent centers so you can explore that information further as well.

Hopefully you'll stay connected with us, share your ideas, your tips, your strategies, for engaging parents and families, for making information accessible in that survey, and have some follow-up conversations and connections after this event.

So once again, thank you so much for the time today. It looks like we hit right at 4:00. So we really appreciate you coming, being here, and engaging in this conversation. Thanks so much.

