


How To Develop and Maintain Trust in School-Family Partnerships

Special Education Mediation Services



Michigan Alliance for Families
information, support, and education




SPECIAL EDUCATION MEDIATION SERVICES
LEARNING MODULE

How To Develop and Maintain Trust in School-Family Partnerships

Today's Training Team

- **Bern Dempsey**
Mediator/Facilitator Training Specialist
- **Beth Kohler**
Outreach Representative
- **Cheryl Levine**
Project Coordinator



3

Special Education Mediation Services

Grant-Funded

A Grant-Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education (OSE).

Free

Offer FREE mediation, IEP facilitation and collaborative communication training to schools and parents across Michigan.

Federally Mandated

Enables the OSE to meet its obligation under the IDEA to provide statewide mediation services at no-cost to schools and parents to resolve special education disputes.



4

What We Do



We support students who receive special education supports and services (IFSP/IEP) birth to age 26 by fostering cooperation and effective teamwork among those who plan their education. The overall goal is to help students, parents and educators make decisions that improve education outcomes.

5

How We Do It



Free • Effective • Fast

Mediation

A FREE neutral mediator leads families and schools through a process to resolve conflict and come to a mutual agreement on a plan to benefit the student and improve outcomes.

Facilitation


We help families and schools navigate complex meetings, stay on task, and make sure all points of view are heard by providing a FREE neutral meeting facilitator.





6


How To Request FREE Service

(Did we mention they're free?)


 Call
 833-KIDS-1ST
 Mikids1st.org


 Participate in
 Intake Process


 We contact parties,
 arrange schedules
 and process
 paperwork.


 Parties Meet

Call or complete online request. SEMS will gather information about the student and your concerns and provide information on how our services may help in your situation. Then we contact the other party for agreement to participate. SEMS will coordinate the services needed and parties meet.

7

The National Movement Towards "Genuine" Family Engagement

- There is a national movement, now being funded by the federal government, to increase "genuine" family engagement
- In the past ten years, studies have firmly established the benefit of family engagement **and** genuine collaboration in student outcomes.
- Genuine collaboration builds on the traditional family engagement model but includes extensive two-way communication, home-school coordination and joint problem solving.

8

Michigan Family Engagement Framework





9

Language Matters!

★

What language would you use when describing the goal for family engagement? Choose one.

Strong Relationship

School as Extended Family

Strong Partnership

Teamwork

Collaboration

Establishing Trust

Learning Heroes Parents 2021 | Going Beyond the Headlines - Survey findings on parent & educator perspectives. | February '22

Survey Says!

Which of the following terms or phrases best represent the language you use when describing your goal for family engagement?
Top terms shaded for each

	Parents	Principals	Teachers
Teamwork	49%	35%	54%
Collaboration	32%	41%	51%
Trust	56%	42%	41%
Partnership	26%	31%	31%
Strong relationship	32%	42%	28%
Strong school community	30%	25%	20%
Like extended family	13%	32%	17%
Strengthening the community	--	23%	6%

Learning Heroes Parents 2021 | Going Beyond the Headlines - Survey findings on parent & educator perspectives. | February '22



All About Trust

- Importance
- Define
- Build
- Nurture
- Repair

Learning Heroes Parents 2021 | Going Beyond the Headlines - Survey findings on parent & educator perspectives. | February '22



Importance of Trust

“A deep sense of love and belonging is an **IRREDUCIBLE NEED** of all people. We are biologically, cognitively, physically and spiritually wired to love, be loved and to belong. When those needs are not met, we don’t function as we were meant to. We break. We fall apart. We numb. We ache. We hurt others. We get sick.”

- Brené Brown



13



The Goal or Ideal

Trusting family-professional partnerships are characterized by an alliance in which families and professionals confidently build in each other’s word, judgement, and wise actions to increase educational benefits for students and themselves.

-Turnbull et al., 2021, p. 9



14



- What is trust?
- How do you demonstrate trust?



15




Open

- Vulnerable
- Flexible
- Willing to share - nicely
- Consider other's positions
- Listen




16




Benevolent

- The kindness and the goodwill of the interdependence within a relationship.




17




Building and Nurturing Trust

- Coffee with the principal at start of school year.
- Principal commitment to staff training.




18



Reliable

- When you keep your word and follow through on what you say you will do.


19



Competent

- Families can be assured the professionals are knowledgeable, skilled, and able to perform the expected duties.
- Professionals can be assured that there is shared responsibility.

20



Honest

- Merriam-Webster uses words like genuine, real, truthful, reputable, and integrity to define honesty.
- How you are honest with someone matters.

21

Building and Nurturing Trust



- Teacher meet and greet (coffee helps)
- Taking action on concerns of parent

22

Building Trusting Relationships



- Mastering the unique dynamics of Special Education requires establishing reservoirs of trust.
- Once trust exists, doors are opened, and essential, creative collaboration is possible.
- Due to the unique dynamics in special education, establishing trust requires even more hard work and ongoing effort.

23

The Importance of Building and Maintaining Trust in Special Education



- Federal law (the IDEA) requires that schools and families collaborate.
- Ongoing and consistent communication between Parents and schools is especially essential to monitoring and ensuring a student's progress and success.

24

The Challenges to Building and Maintaining Trust in Special Education



- There is a great disparity between school district staff and families in numbers, perceived status and knowledge of special education terminology and law.
- Parents of children with disabilities often deal with very powerful emotions and concerns.
- School staff also deal with significant stresses and limitations beyond their control.

25

The Keys to Building Trust During the Special Education Process



- Acknowledge the importance of all team members' critical impact on the success of the student.
- Recognize that there are inevitable disagreements and frustrations that will arise, but that the student's success depends upon everyone working together in the future.
- Communicate honestly and regularly and with kindness.
- Ask lots of nonjudgmental questions to demonstrate your willingness to listen and collaborate, and pitch your ideas without assuming you know better.
- Show your willingness to collaborate with the other team members by preparing, sharing in advance of and following up on all meetings.
- Choose your battles wisely. Remember that the student's success will depend upon maintaining healthy relationships to withstand the inevitable ups and downs.


26

Conflict Can Shatter Trust



- Conflict raises doubts and confirms suspicions.
- Conflict challenges our inferences.

27




Trust Meter

Make Deposits of Trust


- Kind rather than judgmental
- Helpful
- Reliable
- Curious
- Calm, safe, welcoming, friendly

Keep an Eye on the Reservoir

- When low, go slow and carefully




28




Front Some Trust

- Assume some trust
- Small doses
- Trust the process




29




Good Enough Trust

- Commit
- Preliminary trust
- Empathy, authenticity, logic



30



Building and Nurturing Trust

- Teacher meet and greet (coffee helps)
- Taking action on concerns of parent

31

Building Trust Through Effective Communication

Listening to Build Trust

- Being listened to is the clearest way to meet the fundamental human desire for respect and relevancy.
- When people are listened to, they feel understood and are more trusting of you.
- Effective listening is a skill that requires nurturing and needs development.
- Getting to a deeper level of understanding, rather than coming up with an immediate answer, is one key to building trust.

32

Building Trust Through Effective Communication

Asking Non-Judgmental Questions

- Ask “open minded” questions to understand, gain knowledge. Be open to learning.
- Acknowledge ideas and/or indicate that everyone’s ideas have value.
- This shows that you have good intentions and are open to collaborating.

33

Examples of Non-Judgmental Questions

- Why is that important to you?
- What would that solution accomplish?
- How would that affect the student?
- What if that did happen?
- How would the student experience that?
- What would that mean to the student?



34

Building and Nurturing Trust



- All staff family as part of the team.
- Acknowledge and act on what's important to the student.



35

Building Trust Through Effective Communication

Choose your words wisely

1. Use "yes..and", rather than "yes...but."
2. Make suggestions for positive changes rather than just identifying problems.
3. Strive for five positives for every negative.



36



Teamwork and Trust is Two-Way

- Not every relationship connects the same.
- The pieces necessary to succeed don't rest solely in one person.
- Ongoing effort as teams change. Be cognizant of new personalities and dynamics.



37



Building and Nurturing Trust

- Coffee with principal (notice a pattern?)
- Principal observations leading to increased independence.



38




Repairing Broken Trust

- Listen and acknowledge their frustration.
- Accept a share of the responsibility.
- Demonstrate a commitment to improving communication.
- Demonstrate a commitment to being open and honest.
- Take baby steps to rebuild and give time to see results.




39



Culmination of Building and Nurturing

- Emails, letters to principals, administration and School Board.
- Request to speak before School Board.


40



What to do with the most challenging personalities!

- Despite your best efforts at building and nurturing trust, you will occasionally run into a team member who doesn't seem willing to work together.
- The solution in that case is to call SEMS and request a free facilitator or mediator to help you **set some reasonable guidelines, boundaries and expectations.**


41



A Mediator/Facilitator's Advantage

- A facilitator or mediator is viewed as a neutral and can sometimes motivate participants to be on their best behavior.
- A facilitator or mediator can help focus and guide the conversation in a positive direction.
- A mediator can talk privately (caucus) with participants to de-escalate their frustrations and convince them to explore options.
- A mediator can help write up any agreed solutions and can come back in the future whenever needed.

42



- "We notice trust as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted."
- Do we reinforce trust?
- Do we really notice trust when it happens?
- Do we challenge it?
- Do we expect it?
- Do we demand it?
- Do we question it?
- When we do have trust, do we celebrate and really acknowledge it and understand what that looks like? Or, do we wait until there's some kind of fire or conflict, and then we realize "uh-oh, trust has been broken."

Thank You

Bern Dempsey, Training Specialist
 Beth Kohler, Outreach Representative
 Diane Kullis, Intake Specialist
 Cheryl Levine, Project Coordinator
 Cindy Van Neste, Outreach Representative
 Laura Zangara, Intake Coordinator




We are here to support you!

-  @MichiganAllianceForFamilies
-  @mialliance
-  @michiganallianceforfamilies
-  /MichiganAlliance

For more information visit:
<https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org>

Call: 800-552-4821
 En Español 313-217-1060
 Statewide Email: info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org




Michigan Alliance for Families

Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Michigan's federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org
1-800-552-4821
info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org