Collaboration: Partnerships and Procedures

Objectives

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- List and describe six major steps involved in effective interpersonal communication.
- Describe the general education prereferral process, including establishing timelines, intervention strategies, and consultation.
- Identify the key components comprising the case conference committee and IEP program, including educational evaluation or assessment steps.
- Gain understanding of the importance of establishing partnerships between special and general educators.
- Identify the benefits of co-teaching, potential barriers to successful co-teaching, and describe strategies for facilitating collaboration among educators.
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, and the importance of communicating effectively with paraprofessionals.
- Describe the importance of positive communication and collaboration with parents and families.
IDEA provides the legal rights for individuals with disabilities to receive free, appropriate public education. However, for the law to be effective, collaboration and constructive partnerships must be established among parents, teachers, school specialists, school administrators, and community agencies. The school and parents must accept certain basic responsibilities for the system to work effectively. Table 2.1 lists some of these responsibilities. To meet these responsibilities, parents and school personnel must engage in problem-solving strategies, working together to devise procedures necessary for identification, referral, assessment, and placement processes to accommodate students with exceptionalities and other at-risk students.

Collaboration—involving cooperation, effective communication, shared problem solving, planning, and finding solutions—is the process for ensuring that all students receive the free, appropriate public education mandated by IDEA. The establishment of excellent working partnerships among all involved in working with students with disabilities is essential for constructive collaboration.

Classroom Scenario

Debbie

Debbie is a tenth-grader with physical disabilities and communication difficulties who has been experiencing problems completing her work within a typical school day. This morning, six of Debbie’s teachers—her math teacher, Ms. Juarez; her English teacher, Mr. Mantizi; her science teacher, Mr. Stubbs; her history teacher, Ms. Blackman; her speech and language therapist, Ms. Ramirez; and her special education teacher, Mr. Graetz—are meeting with Ms. Meyer, Debbie’s paraprofessional, in the small conference room near the front office. They are trying to determine what they can do to help Debbie be more successful in high school. Everyone at the meeting is sincere in their desire to brainstorm ways to arrange the school day so Debbie can learn successfully.

Mr. Graetz, the special education teacher, began the conversation by saying, “Thanks for agreeing to meet this morning to look at what’s been happening with Debbie and try to come up with some solutions together. Recently, Debbie appears to be having a hard time keeping up with all of her work. Her grades have started slipping. Maybe if we share some ideas we might be able to help her.”

Ms. Blackman, the history teacher, says, “I know that Debbie is interested in the topics we are studying because her eyes become animated during class. I’m unsure how I can tap into that enthusiasm. Maybe if I could get her to participate more actively she would feel better about school.”

The speech therapist, Ms. Ramirez, suggests, “Have you tried allowing Debbie to type out responses to questions on her notebook computer and then asking Ms. Meyer to read her answers to the class?”

“Hey, that’s a good idea. I have time to do that while students are completing their lab work in science class,” says the science teacher, Mr. Stubbs.

Ms. Juarez, the math teacher, adds, “I sometimes stop the discussion and allow extra time for Debbie to type her responses, and have found that this provides additional thinking time for everyone in my math class . . . .”

And so the discussion continues. These teachers are collaborating by sharing suggestions in instructional modifications with the intention of trying something that will promote school success for Debbie.

Questions for Reflection

1. How could any disagreements that arise be handled in this meeting?
2. If you were Mr. Graetz, how could you determine that the suggestions made in this meeting would be carried out?
3. What do you think would be some of the challenges in arranging a meeting such as this?
Collaboration to Establish Need

Collaboration to decide how to best meet students’ needs can occur among teachers and other school specialists during informal meetings, co-teaching, and formal meetings of professionals to recommend interventions or consider the appropriateness of special education services. Collaboration also takes place with parents, siblings, guardians, and families—during parent conferences as well as during day-to-day communication with parents regarding the progress of their children.

Shared Goals

Collaboration means working jointly with others; willingly cooperating with others; and sharing in goal setting, problem solving, and goal achievement. For example, a special education teacher might have Marilyn, who is classified as mildly mentally retarded, for three periods a day, while the general education seventh-grade content area teachers have her the remainder of the school day. General and special education teachers must collaborate effectively to implement the goals and objectives on Marilyn’s IEP. For example, Marilyn’s IEP specifies that general education teachers prioritize objectives, use positive reinforcement, adapt learning activities to reduce the amount of reading and writing required, adapt testing situations, and provide Marilyn with additional support as necessary. For these goals to be implemented consistently throughout the day for Marilyn, this team of teachers must work collaboratively and share ideas for best meeting Marilyn’s needs. For effective collaboration to happen, teachers must communicate effectively. This is most possible when collaborators hone their interpersonal skills and interject a positive attitude into the collaboration efforts.

Effective Communication

Interpersonal interactions revolve around communication. When communication is effective, several common elements are in place: active listening, depersonalizing situations, identifying common goals and solutions, and monitoring progress to achieve those goals (Gordon, 1987; see also Ginott, 1995).

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School’s Responsibilities</th>
<th>Parents’ Responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide free and appropriate education through age 21.</td>
<td>Provide consent for educational evaluation and placement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each</td>
<td>Participate in case conference committee, including development of IEP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student who requires special education and related services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assure testing, evaluation materials, procedures, and</td>
<td>Cooperate with school and teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interpretations are non-biased.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educate students with disabilities in the least-restrictive</td>
<td>Attend case reviews to ensure IEP remains appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>environment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assure confidentiality of records for individuals with</td>
<td>Reinforce procedures and policies (e.g., help with homework routines).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disabilities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct searches to identify and evaluate students with</td>
<td>Assist with any home-school behavioral contracting efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disabilities from birth through age 21.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide procedural due process rights for students and</td>
<td>Help maintain open communication with school and teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parents.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For more information on effective communication skills, see Kampwirth, 2003.
Active Listening

Active listening is demonstrated through both nonverbal and verbal actions. Nonverbally, you demonstrate active listening by maintaining direct eye contact, leaning toward the speaker, nodding your head in agreement or understanding, and demonstrating that you are devoting all of your attention to the speaker. Verbal components of active listening involve responding with affirmative words such as: “Yes,” “Yes, I see,” “I understand,” and, “Can you tell me more?” An active listener is able to restate or summarize the major points of the conversation, and may do this during the course of the conversation with statements such as, “So, what you are telling me is...” Teachers who use active listening techniques are more likely to maintain open communication and to avoid misunderstandings. Active listening is a way of informing the speaker that his or her views are important to you and can be helpful in keeping interactions positive.

Depersonalize Situations

Depersonalizing conversations avoids negative comments that may hurt an individual's character, and instead emphasizes a goal. For example, if a student, Lisa, has been remiss at turning in homework assignments, a “depersonalized” statement is, “Lisa, 7 out of the last 10 homework assignments are missing; what can we do to improve that?” A negative statement that might hinder finding a solution is, “Lisa, you obviously do not care enough about science to turn in your homework.”

Depersonalizing conversations are beneficial when communicating with everyone, including students, other teachers, school specialists, administrators, parents, and professionals from community organizations.

Find Common Goals

It is important to restate and summarize conversations to identify common goals. Once common goals are found, conversations can be more positive and productive. Questions such as “Lisa, what do you want to do in science?” and “What are the barriers currently preventing Lisa from turning in her homework?” can help direct the conversations toward the identification of common goals. A positive and productive common goal among all teachers, the parents, and Lisa could be the following:

We all want Lisa to succeed, and one way to help her succeed is to find ways to assist her in turning in her homework.

Once common goals are stated positively, it is easier to turn the entire conversation into productive problem solving toward goal attainment.

Brainstorm Possible Solutions

Effective communicators can use brainstorming techniques during meetings to help identify ways to achieve any common goals. During brainstorming, suggestions for solutions are compiled by participants, without passing judgment on any of them. The list of possible solutions can then be prioritized from those offering the most potential for success to the least. When all participants join in the creation of possible alternatives for helping Lisa succeed, they are more invested in reaching their goal. In Lisa’s case, a brainstormed list created by her, her teachers, and her parents might include the following: serving detention for a month; quitting her job; keeping an assignment notebook; eliminating or restricting her television-watching; staying after school once a week for homework assistance; and rewarding Lisa if she meets a certain criterion by the end of the quarter.

Summarize Goals and Solutions

Summarizing the statement of goals and proposed solutions verbally (and perhaps in writing), before the end of the meeting, is beneficial for all participants. This prevents any misunderstandings and provides an opportunity for clarification. In our example, the teacher summarizes the meeting by stating, “Let me summarize what we all agreed on. We all want Lisa to succeed in science. One way to have Lisa be more successful is to help her turn in all of her homework assignments. One thing Lisa will do is keep an assignment notebook in which she records her assignments and due dates, which she will show daily to her parents and teachers.
Another step will be for Lisa and her parents to find a place at home for her to complete her homework. Her parents will assist her by asking regularly if she has completed her homework assignments. Finally, Lisa will attend after-school help sessions if she does not understand what to do to complete the assignments. We will meet and review Lisa’s progress toward her goals within one month, at which time we will determine whether we need to modify any of the possible solutions.”

**Follow Up to Monitor Progress**

Summarization makes the entire conversation positive and concrete. A goal statement is made, possible solutions are listed, one is selected for implementation and evaluation, and follow-up target dates are set for monitoring progress toward goal attainment.

All steps promote communication with everyone involved in educating students with disabilities. Review the following **In the Classroom** feature, which can be used to ensure decisions made by the group during problem solving are more easily executed. Whatever model of communication you use, note that practicing good communication skills enables you to be effective in the many roles associated with collaboration.

### In the Classroom...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication Summary Sheet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For: _________________________ On: _________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Student’s Name) (Date)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversation Among (list participants):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________________________________ ______________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________________________________ ______________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________________________________ ______________________________</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goals Identified:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solution Steps to be implemented (and by whom):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Solution Step</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress toward goals will be reviewed on:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Date) (By Whom)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Omar

Mrs. Mayer is a second-grade teacher. In November, she began to worry about one of her students, Omar. At the beginning of the school year, Mrs. Mayer noticed that Omar seemed to be behind his classmates academically. In spite of additional review of first-grade material, Omar continued to have problems with reading and writing tasks and had a hard time maintaining attention to tasks.

When November arrived and Omar was still struggling, Mrs. Mayer decided that she and Omar needed some assistance. She contacted her school’s general education prereferral intervention assistance team. The team members included a first-, third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade teacher, a school psychologist, the principal, and a special education teacher. The team scheduled a meeting to discuss the nature and severity of Omar’s difficulties and designed intervention strategies that Mrs. Mayer could implement and review within a specified timeline.

Questions for Reflection

1. How would you determine whether a problem was serious enough to contact the prereferral intervention assistance team?
2. How would you determine whether your assessment of Omar’s problem was objective and unbiased?

Additional information on implementing these and other collaboration skills are discussed in Correa, Jones, Thomas, and Morsink (2005).
Often, these steps are sequential, in that each item checked should be undertaken before the next concern. Mrs. Mayer first reviewed Omar’s records to verify that vision and hearing screenings had taken place. Parent conferences and student interviews were conducted to discuss the problem areas and consider possible solutions. She collected, analyzed, and filed samples of Omar’s recent academic class work and evidence of disciplinary actions. She informally asked for advice from other teachers, school counselors, special education teachers, and mainstream assistance teams. Mrs. Mayer made documentation available to the intervention team of specific intervention strategies she had tried before asking the team for help. All of this information was useful to team members in deciding what other modifications, adaptations, or interventions might be tried to find the best educational program for Omar. For an illustration of all the steps in the referral process, see Figure 2.1.

The Intervention Process
The strategies addressed in the intervention process are designed, implemented, and evaluated before any formal referral for special education services. These are not special education procedures but are part of the general education system required by some state special education legislation (see, for example, guidelines for “General Education Intervention” on the Website of the Indiana State Department of Education). The In the Classroom feature on page 33 identifies a checklist of steps in a prereferral process.

Prereferral procedures are preventative in nature, intended to reduce inappropriate referrals and decrease the likelihood of future problems. These procedures provide general education teachers and students with immediate assistance with classroom-related problems, including disciplinary issues. To determine whether the general education intervention is appropriate, team members may observe the student before the prereferral intervention takes place. It is wise to try to involve the parents whenever possible; however, before any general education intervention plan is implemented, parents must be notified in writing of the team’s recommendation for intervention strategies and the rationale behind implementing them. Finally, the intervention is implemented.

Establishing Timelines. Once intervention strategies are developed, timelines are set to accompany the implementation and review of those strategies. In Mrs. Mayer’s case, a strategy was designed to be implemented with Omar. A one-month timeline was established for her to implement, monitor, and evaluate Omar’s progress. If adequate improvement is observed, the intervention will continue (or discontinue if it appears no longer necessary). However, if inadequate progress is noted, one of two steps may occur. First, the strategies may be redesigned along with new timelines, which Mrs. Mayer would then implement. Second, if the problem seems more severe or persistent than general classroom interventions can address, the team may decide to begin the referral process for special education services. At that point, Omar’s parents will be contacted and asked to give permission for an educational evaluation for possible special education services. Omar’s parents can request an educational evaluation for special education at any time during this process, and their request will be honored and not delayed due to the implementation of the general education intervention.

Intervention Strategies. Intervention strategies vary depending on the specific needs of the student, but may include modifications in (a) the curriculum, (b) instructional procedures, (c) classroom management, or (d) classroom environment. Curriculum modifications involve altering the curriculum or adapting the curriculum currently used, such as using materials at a lower reading level. Modifications in instructional procedures include providing additional instruction or using different presentation formats, varying the types of practice activities, modifying task demands or testing procedures, or regrouping students within instructional activities. Modifying classroom management procedures...
involves intensifying behavioral monitoring for increasing attention to task, providing individual student behavioral contracts, or increasing reinforcement. Environmental modifications consist of rearranging the classroom desks, making the classroom more accessible, or changing seating positions. Finally, other resources available within the school and community may be used to assist in making general education interventions.

**Research on Prereferral Interventions**

Buck, Polloway, Smith-Thomas, and Cook (2003) surveyed 50 state departments of education and the District of Columbia regarding their prereferral intervention practices, and found that
there was considerable variability from state to state, in whether prereferral interventions were required, the terminology used to describe them, and how they were carried out. Although prereferral intervention practices are not always successful (Rock & Zigmond, 2001), they are often effective in preventing special education placement (Burns & Symington, 2002).

**Collaboration for Referrals and Placements**

The special education referral process can be initiated by almost anyone, including the student, although the student’s teachers or parents usually make the referral. Each school has written referral procedures, designated staff for the various positions within the referral process, and accompanying forms.

Once the prereferral team determined that the strategies Mrs. Mayer had implemented on her own were insufficient to help Omar successfully perform in second grade, the referral process for educational evaluation began. Mrs. Mayer completed a “Referral Evaluation Form” from the school (see Figure 2.2 for a sample referral form). Once the referral form was completed, Omar’s parents were contacted and asked to meet with school personnel. They were told that their son had been referred for an educational evaluation. They were told why he was referred and were asked to provide written permission to proceed. Omar’s parents were informed about the evaluation procedures, and told that a case conference committee meeting would be scheduled within 65 school days of the parent’s signing the permission for testing. They were also told about how the school had already attempted to help Omar through the general education prereferral intervention.

All information should be presented verbally and in writing for the parents, and in the parent’s native language. If parents speak Spanish, then school personnel must communicate with the parents using Spanish. Some school districts have developed handouts describing parents’ rights. Figure 2.3 contains a handout used by the Crawfordsville Community School Corporation based on Indiana state special education law.

**The Educational Evaluation or Assessment Step**

The educational evaluation for a referral to special education is much more comprehensive than the evaluation described for prereferrals by the general education teams. This evaluation provides extensive information on how the student learns best and the student’s level of performance, and identifies strengths and potential need areas. The evaluation team includes a
Date Received ___________
Student Name ______________________________________ Sex _______ Birthdate __________
School ___________________________ Grade _______ Teacher __________________________
Parent/Guardian ___________________________ Primary Language __________________________
Address ____________________________________ Home Phone ___________ Work Phone __________
Current Educational Program _________________________________________________________________
Referring Person ________________________________________________
(signed) ____________________________________________ (title) __________________________ (date) __________
Principal/Designee's (signature) ____________________________ (date) __________________________

1. Please describe briefly the reason(s) for this referral.

2. Documentation of the general education intervention (attach copy of the GEI plan): What are effects of intervention?
   Comments from the remedial reading instructor, if applicable:

3. Documentation of support services such as counseling or psychological (non-testing) services provided by school or other agency.
   Comments and observations from the school counselor:

   Has a previous psychological evaluation been conducted?
   Yes _______ No _______ Date __________ Agency __________________________________________

4. Documentation of conferences or attempts to conference, with the parent and appropriate school personnel concerning the student's specific problem(s).

5. Which of the disabilities/handicaps do you suspect?
   ______ Autism _______ Communication disorders _______ Emotional disability
   ______ Hearing impairment _______ Learning disability _______ Mental disability
   ______ Orthopedic impairment _______ Other health impairment
   ______ Traumatic brain injury _______ Visual impairment

**Figure 2.2**
Sample Referral Form
6. In what subjects are the student’s problems most apparent?

7. List schools previously attended and dates:

8. Comments from school nurse:

   Current general health _________________________________________________________________

   Previous medical problems ___________________________________________________________

   Is the student taking medication? ___ If yes, specify _____________________________________

   Vision: L _______________ R _______________ Correction _________________________________

   Date of vision screening ____________________ (must be done within a year)

9. Comments from speech, hearing, and language clinician:

   Hearing: L _______________ R _______________ Correction ________________________________

   Date of hearing screening ____________________ (must be done within a year)

10. Is the student receiving speech and language therapy? In the past?

11. Copy and attach information from the student’s education record:

   1. Previous achievement test results
   2. Grades earned since school entry
   3. Attendance record
   4. Summary of disciplinary actions

   Complete and send all referral information to Special Services.

School psychologist and other school specialists as needed (see Figure 2.4). For example, if a child is suspected of having a problem involving speech or language, then a speech and language therapist would be a member of that evaluation team. In the case of Omar, who is suspected of having reading and writing problems that may be associated with learning disabilities, a teacher of students with learning disabilities will be a member of that team.

The education evaluation includes various activities, procedures, and tests. A physical examination, developmental history, and vision and hearing tests may be required. A battery of academic, intellectual, adaptive, and social-emotional tests are administered, depending on the specific referral reason. Observations of the student throughout the school day may be completed. The classroom teacher is asked to evaluate the student’s classroom strengths and need areas.

All testing must be culturally unbiased, completed in the student’s native language, and must consider cultural background and presumed disability, to provide the most accurate picture of the student’s current level of functioning. This means, for example, that if a student’s native language is Spanish, then it may be important to administer tests in Spanish; otherwise, an inaccurate picture of the student’s abilities may be obtained. Parents, teachers, or other school personnel can request a reevaluation whenever one is deemed necessary.

The Case Conference Committee

A case conference committee or multidisciplinary team is composed of all individuals concerned with a particular student. The amendments to IDEA require that general education teachers participate in the development, review, and revision of IEPs. Moreover, the amendments require that parents be included as members of any group that makes educational decisions about their child. The members include the parents and their child; general and special education teachers; the school psychologist; school administrators, such as the building principal or special education director; and any other related personnel, such as the school nurse, counselor, and social worker, or specialists such as speech and language, physical, or occupational therapists.

A case conference committee meeting is convened after the educational evaluation is finished. The meeting is intended to determine whether the student is eligible for special education
I. Educational evaluations and placement in special education programs cannot be done without written parental consent.

II. Parents have the right to inspect school records within a reasonable period of time of their request.

III. Parents have the right to have educational records explained to them by school personnel.

IV. Parents have the right to receive copies of the student's educational record.

V. Parents have the right to ask that records be amended if they believe that the information therein is incorrect.

VI. Tests during the evaluation should be valid, fair, and in the child's native language.

VII. The parent has the right to an independent educational evaluation at the school's expense if the parent disagrees with the findings of the evaluation completed by the school personnel.

VIII. The case conference committee must consider the results of independent evaluations obtained by parents.

IX. The parents must be notified in writing of an upcoming case conference. The conference should be set at a mutually agreeable time and place. The notice should be in the parents' native language and should include a list of those expected to participate in the conference.

X. The parent may bring any other individual to the conference including an advocate.

XI. The case conference committee must receive written parental consent before a child can be placed into any special education program. Parents must receive a copy of the educational evaluation, their parental rights, and the case conference summary.

XII. The public agency (school) must ensure that a child is placed with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent of his/her abilities.

XIII. A case conference must be scheduled at least once a year to review a child's educational program and placement.

XIV. A number of educational placements should be discussed at case conferences to ensure that children are placed in the least-restrictive environment.

XV. A parent, public agency (school), or state agency may initiate a due process hearing whenever any of these parties is concerned or dissatisfied with the educational evaluation, placement, or program of a student. This request must be made in writing.

XVI. Parents may bring legal counsel and individuals with training and knowledge in special education to a hearing.

XVII. Mediation may be sought when the parent and the school cannot through the case conference committee process agree on the student's identification, evaluation or educational placement.

XVIII. Complaints alleging the violations of these rights and the laws pertaining to special education may be submitted to the state Department of Education.

XIX. The public agency must appoint a surrogate parent whenever a child with a suspected disability is a ward of the state or whenever no parent is identified or can be located.

Figure 2.3
Summary of Parental Rights
Note: From "Parental Rights: Crawfordsville Community School Corporation." Reprinted with permission.
General Education Teachers teach any grade level, any subject area, K–12; may be responsible for implementing part or all of a student’s IEP.

Special Education Teachers teach any grade level, any disability area K–12; may teach in any of settings described for general education teachers; usually have primary responsibility for the implementation of the IEP.

School Psychologists or Diagnosticians take the lead on the educational evaluations, have major responsibilities administering, scoring, and interpreting tests; sometimes serve as behavioral consultant to teachers.

Counselors advise students; may conduct some social and emotional assessment; may deliver counseling sessions or advise teachers on how to deal with social-emotional needs for their students.

Speech/Language Therapists work with students who require assistance with any speech and or language needs.

Physical Therapists provide assessment and interventions in gross motor areas.

Occupational Therapists provide assessment and interventions for students in the fine motor areas.

School Nurses often provide medical histories, distribute medications to students; provide a link between families and other school personnel.

School Administrators provide administrative assistance among all involved; may include school principals, vice principals, directors of special education, directors of special services, and special education coordinators.

Social Workers provide the link between families and schools; have similar roles to that of counselors.

Paraprofessionals provide assistance to teachers, special education teachers, and students with disabilities.

Other school specialists provide assistance in specialized ways, including adaptive physical education; sign language interpreting; bilingual special education; mobility specialists, psychometrists (complete educational testing), probation officers, and other consultants as necessary.

meeting with so many school personnel. Prepare for meetings by thinking about how to present information in comprehensible ways for parents and students. It may be beneficial to practice with another teacher when describing classroom routines. For example, parents may be unfamiliar with terminology that is used so commonly among teachers (e.g., decoding is a term frequently used by teachers but not necessarily by parents and children). Try to describe class activities, student performance, and behaviors using concrete, simple, direct language. Teachers frequently use abbreviations or acronyms when speaking with each other (e.g., saying “LD” instead of “learning disabilities”) and should avoid doing so when speaking at case conference committees, so that parents do not become lost in the “educational jargon.” Secure brochures describing common disabilities in ways suitable for parents and for students. Brochures, important phone numbers, e-mail addresses, and Websites can be printed on handouts for parents.

When parents feel comfortable at the meeting, they will be more likely to share important information about their child. Parental input at the meeting can be invaluable. Parents have insight into their child’s behaviors that no one at the school may have considered. They can provide input regarding the student’s study habits at home and any difficulties encountered during homework. During the case conference committee, one member records the information on the case conference summary form. A copy of this is distributed to the parents at the end of the meeting. Figure 2.5 displays a sample case conference summary form. If the student does not qualify for special education, the student may still qualify for services under Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act (see chapter 1). Figure 2.6 presents a flowchart of student needs considered under IDEA and under Section 504.

Related Services

Related services are other services that are necessary to help students with disabilities benefit from special education services. Related services may include physical therapy, occupational
**CASE REVIEW CONFERENCE SUMMARY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student's Name</th>
<th>DOB</th>
<th>School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents/Guardian</td>
<td>Address</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>Surrogate Parent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee Meeting: (date) (time) (location)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Case Review Committee was composed of the following:

- **Chairperson** Administrator
- Teacher
- Evaluation Team Member(s)
- Parent(s) Student
- Others

- The eligibility decision has been __________
- Least-restrictive placement has been __________

**Purpose of conference**

- initial evaluation
- re-evaluation
- review of IEP
- transition planning
- new to district

**Multidisciplinary report of present level of performance:**

- 
- 
- 
- 
- 

Based on the data presented, the following eligibility decision was made:

**The student is**

**Placement recommendation**

- Harmful effect considered: ______ yes

**Options considered:**

- Reasons options were rejected: 

**Other factors relevant to the proposed placement**

- 

**Signatures of committee members with dissenting opinions:**

- 
- 
- 

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**Figure 2.5**

Summary from Case Conference Committee Meeting
therapy, audiological services, counseling, rehabilitation counseling, social work services, parent counseling, psychological services, school health services, medical services, early identification, transportation, recreation services, or other services identified by the case conference committee. If a situation requires substantial mobility adaptations, the case conference committee might recommend bus routes with special or adapted vehicles, assign an aide as an assistant, or acquire special equipment like oxygen, ramps, or lifts.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP)
An IEP is written by the case conference committee when it is determined that a student is eligible for special education services. The IEP has several major components, including the following:

- Student’s current level of academic achievement and functional performance
- Statement of measurable annual goals, including academic and functional goals
• Statement of short-term objectives for children who take alternative assessments
• Statement of special and related services, based on peer reviewed research and any program modifications to be provided or support for the child
• Statement of any individual modifications in state- or district-wide assessment procedures,
• Statement of why a child cannot participate in state- or district-wide assessment procedures if an alternative assessment is recommended.
• Initiation dates of service delivery and the duration and frequency of services
• Statement of transition services for all students 16 years of age and older, including appropriate postsecondary goals and transition services needed to meet goals
• Statement of how annual goals will be measured, how parents will be informed, and how progress will be monitored

Moreover, when a special education student is placed in a general education setting, the IEP will contain modifications needed, including curriculum, instructional procedures, staffing, classroom organization, and special equipment, materials, or aides.

Although IEP formats used by school districts vary across the country, all must contain the required components. The Companion Website presents a sample IEP. Some computerized IEP programs are available commercially and are used to assist in developing the basic format of the IEPs (see the Technology Highlight feature).

Reviews of IEP software can be found in the Journal of Special Education Technology.

Special education paperwork can be reduced by using efficient systems for recording data, maintaining records, and for communications. Advances in technology can help save teachers valuable time. For example, teachers can use basic templates with school stationery for communications in a word processing program, and databases containing frequently used names and addresses. Such timesaving programs are common features on most computers.

There are also a number of software programs commercially available to assist with writing Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Many of these programs share common features in that they work easily on both PC and Mac computer platforms. Many contain general templates of information that is required by law to be included in the IEPs. Some also contain banks of possible IEP objectives. Some of the available programs include: Goalview, Edupoint, IEP Planner, IEP Plus, IEP Ware, IEP Online, Welligent, IEP Team Software, and Tera Systems IEP Manager. A simple search using one of the widely available search engines such as google.com on the Web will provide numerous commercially available programs.

Commercially available programs are usually advertised as highly relevant, timesaving devices that help teachers produce high quality IEPs. Although this may be true in many cases, teachers should use caution to ensure that students’ IEP objectives are not limited simply to what is available within individual software programs.
School districts provide the parents with a written summary of the case conference committee meeting (see Figure 2.5), a copy of the IEP, and a copy of the parental rights (see Figure 2.3), and parents must provide written consent agreeing to the IEP before any services can begin.

**Writing Goals and Objectives**

A critical component of the IEP is the specification of the long-term annual goals and short-term objectives. Short-term objectives are required only for students who take alternative assessments. Long-term annual goals are based upon the case conference committee’s judgment of what the individual student should accomplish within a year. Annual goals can refer to academic functioning, such as reading grade-level textbooks at specific skill levels, or social behavior, such as exhibiting appropriate behavior in the cafeteria. In some cases, annual goals can refer to adaptive behavior or life skills, such as ordering independently in a restaurant or managing a personal bank account.

Annual goals are measurable, positive, student-oriented, and relevant (Polloway, Patton, & Serna, 2001). Goals that are measurable can be more easily evaluated later. For example, “[Student] will read and comprehend grade-level reading materials,” is much easier to measure at the end of the year than, “[Student] will improve reading.” Positively written goals (e.g., “[Student] will use appropriate language in the classroom at all times”) provide better implications for instruction than negatively written goals (e.g., “[Student] will stop swearing”). Student-oriented goals describe what the student will do (as in the previous examples), rather than what others will do (e.g., “[Student] will be given spelling worksheets”). Finally, relevant goals are not always limited to academic goals, but provide for the student’s current and future needs, including social-emotional functioning, communication, and career-vocational areas when appropriate (Polloway, Patton, & Serna, 2001).

Short-term objectives are more limited and precise, and specify the steps to be taken to achieve long-term annual goals. For example, short-term objectives relevant to a long-term annual goal in reading should specify the subskills (e.g., letter identification, word recognition) that students will acquire on the way to meeting the long-term goal. Short-term objectives should also be measurable, positive, student-oriented, and relevant. In addition, short-term objectives are usually best when they specify conditions, behavior, and criteria. As an example, consider the following objective: “In the lunchroom, [student] will use appropriate tone of voice at all times.” In this case, “lunchroom” specifies the conditions, “appropriate tone of voice” specifies the behavior, and “at all times” (i.e., 100% of the time) specifies the criteria. When objectives are specified in this way, they can be easily evaluated on the way toward meeting long-term goals.

**Transition Services**

Transition services are required to be written into IEPs when students turn 16 but, in fact, may be appropriate at younger ages (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2004). IDEA and its amendments also require transitioning for preschoolers.

Often, transition services can be implemented the year before students begin to accumulate credits toward high school graduation. At the annual review meeting, when the student is 16, the case conference committee may determine student educational, vocational, or employment training needs. Specific interagency linkages and responsibilities must be explicated in the Individualized Transition Plan (ITP), which is a supplement to the IEP. The Companion Website contains a sample ITP. The committee also determines whether students may require continual adult services upon completion of high school.
Monitoring IEPs

Legal safeguards are provided to ensure IEPs are monitored to reflect accurately the needs of individuals with disabilities. Regular reviews and evaluations of progress are required. Due process procedures are always available to resolve any disputes between the parents and the school district regarding the student's education.

Due Process. Due process is how conflicts are resolved between parents and schools regarding the student's education. Disagreements can arise in several areas: whether a student is eligible for special education, the outcome of an educational evaluation, the educational placement, the IEP, or some aspect of the “free, appropriate public education” (FAPE) guaranteed by IDEA.

Several alternatives exist for resolving these disagreements, some of which take place before a formal due process hearing. The simplest procedure for resolving conflicts is through informal meetings with parents and school personnel.

If conflicts remain unresolved during informal meetings, mediation can be used to try to resolve the dispute. Mediation is a voluntary process that must be requested by both parties. After a formal mediation request is signed by both parties, the state selects a mediator, and schedules a hearing within 10 working days. Mediators should be trained in special education and mediation, possess excellent interpersonal skills, and serve as neutral facilitators. If mediation is successful, a written agreement is completed and forwarded to the case conference committee for its approval. Many conflicts can be resolved through mediation (Murdick, Gartin, & Crabtree, 2002).

A request for a due process hearing is a formal request by either the parents or the school district to have the dispute arbitrated by an independent hearing officer. This process is more formal than mediation and must take place within timelines as specified in the law. The case is presented to the independent hearing officer, who makes a decision based on evidence presented by both parties. Both parents and school district may be represented by legal counsel, present information pertaining to the case, bring forth relevant witnesses, and are entitled to see, at least five days before the hearing, any evidence the other party plans to introduce. Due process hearings can be open or closed to the public, and the student may or may not be present. After listening to all the evidence, hearing officers produce a written decision. After the hearing decision, but within a specified number of days, the decision must be either executed or appealed to the appropriate state board of special education by either party.

The appeal of the due process hearing decision must describe the parts of the decision that are objectionable and the associated rationale. The state board of special education is required to schedule another impartial review of the hearing and report on its decision. Its decision is considered final, unless either party appeals to the civil court within 30 calendar days. Throughout this process, the students remain in their current placement unless both parties agree to something else.

Special education departments in each school district have policies and procedures outlining teachers' roles and responsibilities should they become involved in these processes. The intent of the law is to best serve the student with disabilities, and these safeguards are in place to ensure that both parents and school district personnel are afforded due process rights.

Annual Reviews. Annual review meetings are conducted to monitor progress. During these meetings, teachers, parents, and other team members discuss the student's progress and make recommendations to amend, modify, or adjust the IEP as necessary. Changes in a student's educational placement to a more or less restrictive environment might be made based on the review.
Collaboration: Partnerships and Procedures

Research Highlight

Collaborative Practices

Several research teams studied schools achieving excellence for students with and without disabilities. These projects were referred to as “Beacons of Excellence” (e.g., McLaughlin, 2002). Similar collaborative practices emerged across schools. These practices included teaching strategies as well as practices that supported climates and cultures conducive for collaboration, and that encouraged high expectations for all students.

One project examined six elementary and middle schools (Caron & McLaughlin, 2002). Selected sites in this embedded case study research design were considered exemplary and teachers were interviewed regarding collaborative practices. Findings revealed variations across schools with respect to collaboration. Although collaborative planning and teaching was evident at all schools, only three of the six schools provided specific co-planning time for teachers. In addition, some sites (but not all) indicated that technology, especially the use of e-mail, greatly facilitated collaborative practices by saving time and speeding up communications. Principal leadership also represented two distinct styles ranging from collaborative shared decision making to more directive models.

Moreover, collaboration was manifested differently across sites. At several schools, collaborative planning and teaching appeared to revolve solely around co-planning for upcoming instructional units that were typically co-taught. During this time, general and special educators identified critical content, materials, objectives, adaptations required for some students, and instructional strategies for all students. At other sites, co-planning involved larger amounts of time at the beginning of the school year during which general needs were identified, along with IEP goals and potential adaptations and modifications that would be required throughout the school year. In many of these cases co-planning was not linked to co-teaching. In other cases, collaboration and co-planning was used when significant issues or challenges appeared. For example, if a student encountered difficulties with a particular unit of instruction, a special educator might be called on for assistance in co-planning and even working with that student.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why might the type of collaborative planning and instruction vary across schools?
2. Is one type of collaborative planning and instruction more effective?
3. What other variables might influence the effectiveness of collaborative planning and instruction?
4. Would certain procedures be more effective for elementary schools? For middle schools? For high schools?

Collaboration as Partnerships

Relationships develop among the many individuals working together to design optimal educational programs for students with disabilities. Relationships of special education and general education teachers may develop into collaborative consultation for shared decision making and planning, and co-teaching relationships. Collaborative partnerships can also develop with paraprofessionals and with parents and families. These partnerships can substantially improve the school and life functioning of students with disabilities. The Research Highlight feature describes collaborative practices of schools achieving excellence for students with and without disabilities.

Consultation Between Special and Regular Educators

Consultation exists when two individuals, such as special and general educators, work together to decide on intervention strategies for a specific student. During these meetings, which can be formal or informal, and verbal or in writing, effective communication procedures are critical.
For example, special education teachers may send weekly notes or e-mails to general education teachers to ask about the progress of specific students with disabilities. Teachers then describe any potentially difficult assignments with which they expect students with disabilities will require additional assistance, as in the following examples:

- A biology teacher indicates that a science fair project is being assigned next week. It will be due in a month, and students with disabilities may benefit from extra assistance.
- A history teacher indicates an important unit test is approaching and students with disabilities may require additional studying assistance.

This information alerts special education teachers who can then help decide whether additional assistance is needed and then work with teachers in developing appropriate interventions as needed for students with disabilities.

In other cases, teachers may ask for specific input from the special education teacher, for example on how to deal with behavior problems. Kampwirth (2003) described how a special education teacher partnered with a general education teacher. After discussion, the general education teacher focused on two specific concerns: teasing and not turning in homework. The two teachers worked out specific plans for conferencing with the student, home-school notes with the parent, and peer mediation in class. These interventions were monitored and found to be effective in improving the student’s behavior.

**Co-Teaching**

Different models of collaboration and co-teaching are used to meet the needs of diverse learners within a single classroom setting. During co-teaching, two teachers are present in the classroom during instructional periods (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000).

There are several different ways co-teaching can be carried out (Correa, Jones, Thomas, & Morsink, 2005; Friend & Cook, 2003; Walther-Thomas et al., 2000). In interactive teaching (or team teaching), teachers take turns presenting and leading classroom activities, and share responsibilities equally. In other cases, one teacher assumes more responsibility for delivering instruction, and the other teacher assists individual students (one teach, one drift), or observes individual students to improve instructional decision making (one teach, one observe). In station teaching, smaller groups of students move through several independent workstations for new information, review or practice, while the teachers monitor different stations. In parallel teaching, the class is divided into skill or ability groups, and each teacher leads one group. In alternative teaching, one teacher leads the larger group, while the other teacher (often, the special education teacher) provides additional practice or strategies to students who may require additional support. In practice, however, roles of the two teachers can deviate from these (Weiss & Lloyd, 2003).

Co-teaching at the secondary level can present some unique challenges, because of such factors as increased emphasis on content knowledge, the pace of instruction, scheduling constraints, the expectation for independent study skills, and high stakes testing (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Murray (2004) suggested that general education teachers develop “dream lists” of what they would like most from special education teachers with whom they would be collaborating. These teachers then met with special education teachers to revise and discuss the lists, and reflect on the outcome of the meetings. Similarly, Murawski and Dieker (2004) recommended systematically sharing hopes, attitudes, responsibilities, and expectations before proceeding with co-teaching. They provided a chart of teacher activities to help organize tasks. For example, if one teacher is lecturing, the other teacher could be modeling effective note-taking procedures or managing classroom behavior. While one teacher is passing out papers, the other teacher could be reviewing directions and demonstrating the first problem.
As one teacher prepares lesson plans, the other teacher could provide suggestions for accommodations and adaptations for diverse learners. Establishing a chart such as this could help maximize efficiency during co-teaching.

An important consideration in co-teaching is building in sufficient planning time for the two teachers to work cooperatively to develop lessons to co-teach (Murray, 2004). Ask for assistance from school administrators to include as much co-planning time as possible. Consider using the following guidelines when establishing co-teaching:

- Decide goals and objectives for co-teaching.
- Inform parents and request their support and permission, especially if co-teaching alters any IEP placement decisions that were made with parental consent.
- Determine student and teacher attitudes toward the co-teaching.
- Document how instructional responsibilities were shared during co-teaching, what instructional adaptations were made for students with disabilities, and how instruction changed over time.

Research Support

Although many descriptions of co-teaching have been provided, fewer models have been validated through empirical research evidence, and it is not known whether there is a “best” model of co-teaching at present (Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Weiss & Brigham, 2000). When co-teaching, be sure to develop your own systematic measures to evaluate its effectiveness in promoting academic and social growth for all students.

Generally, teachers and students have reported positive attitudes toward co-teaching (Weiss & Brigham, 2000). Reported benefits of co-teaching include improved instruction, increased enthusiasm for teaching, more communication, and more opportunities to generalize learned skills to the general education class environment (Reinhiller, 1996).

Challenges to effective co-teaching have also been described (Murray, 2004; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002) that include budgetary constraints, lack of sufficient planning time, lack of cooperation, personality conflicts, and increased teacher workloads. Other concerns include maintaining the full continuum of services for students, fear of losing necessary services, confronting negative attitudes, and confidentiality issues. Use of effective communication strategies discussed earlier can ensure that the co-teaching experience is pleasant and productive.

Collaboration with Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals may be aides to special education teachers, specialized aides for students with disabilities, or general aides for teachers within a school. Within those roles, paraprofessionals assume a variety of responsibilities, including recordkeeping, supervising, monitoring seatwork and classroom behavior, feeding and toileting, and providing instruction. It is important that paraprofessionals are viewed as part of a team and that they receive appropriate role clarification, training, and supervision (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001; Riggs, 2004). In many cases, paraprofessionals have not been informed specifically what their duties are, a situation that can lead to communication problems (Trautman, 2004).

Develop schedules for paraprofessionals that include the person responsible and the date for completion for specific tasks. Schedule also where all people will be at different times of the day or week (Katsiyannis, Hodge, & Lanford, 2000; Pickett & Gerlach, 2003).

Very specialized responsibilities may be assigned to a paraprofessional. In the case of Jamal, a third-grader who uses a motorized wheelchair and has difficulties communicating and using his hands, a paraprofessional accompanies him throughout the school day. The paraprofessional functions as Jamal’s assistant and accompanies him before, during, and after school in any activities, including helping him eat at lunch and dress appropriately for physical education and recess. It may be a new experience for general education teachers to have another adult in their classrooms during instruction, but once teachers become familiar with the activities Jamal can accomplish independently, they will gain a better understanding of how to maximize the role of the paraprofessional. For example, activities the paraprofessional can help Jamal with include handling his class materials, reading tests out loud to him, writing down his responses, and assisting with mobility.
Paraprofessionals assist students in their tasks throughout the school day. However, it is possible for paraprofessionals to spend too much time in close proximity with their students. This can lead to more limited sense of ownership by and less interaction with the teacher, separation from classmates and peer interaction, overdependence on adults, and a loss of personal control (Giangreco et al., 2001; Marks, Schrader, & Levine, 1999). Students should receive all the assistance they need, but not more than they require.

**Communicating with Paraprofessionals**

On occasion, teachers may feel overwhelmed with their responsibilities and find it difficult to know what to do with paraprofessionals. This may be especially true if paraprofessionals have strong personalities, are older, or have worked in schools longer than the teacher. If a touchy situation arises, such as disagreeing on the amount of assistance necessary for a student, relations may become strained. To defuse these situations, use effective communication and problem-solving strategies to identify the problem and brainstorm potential solutions. If you do not think you can handle the situation alone, seek the assistance of a more established teacher within your school. Often, simply discussing the situation makes everyone feel more comfortable.

**Parents and Families as Partners**

Building positive partnerships with parents yields important benefits to your students’ education. Establish positive communication early in the school year and aim toward strengthening home–school cooperation. You will learn a great deal about your students from the parents’ perspective of how they learn and interact in the home and outside of school (Overton, 2005).

**Variability in Backgrounds and Family Structures**

Parents represent the continuum of educational backgrounds, as well as racial or ethnic and socioeconomic status. Be sensitive to all individual parental needs and make all parents welcome in your classroom. Many parents feel intimidated by teachers, so be sure to let them know you share their goal of wanting the best for their child.

State information in such a way that non-educators can understand what you are saying. If parents do not read or speak English, make the communications available in formats that are comprehensible to them. This may mean having native-language notes available for parents who do not read or speak English, or having interpreters available for those with hearing impairments or who speak another language. Remember to have information read to parents who may not have prerequisite literacy skills themselves.

Families of today represent a wide array of configurations. Chances are the stereotypical family, consisting of a mother who stays at home taking care of children and a father who works outside of the home, may not be representative of your students’ families. You may be working more closely with an individual who is not a parent but rather is the legal guardian of your student. Be sensitive to all family configurations. The *Diversity in the Classroom* feature provides some suggestions for interacting with diverse families.

**Positive Communication**

A good way to initiate positive communication with parents is to send introductory notes home at the beginning of the school year. For example, Ms. Susan Chung, an eighth-grade English teacher, sends home a short note introducing herself and describing her class.

A positive first communication is especially important if a problem arises later and contact with home is necessary. Parents may be more likely to feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues concerning their child if you have contacted them earlier. If you only communicate when there is a problem, parents get the understandable impression that you only want to see them when something bad has happened, and they may become more reluctant to maintain communication with the school.

Many teachers also request parents’ assistance regularly in their classes. This happens more frequently at elementary levels but also occurs at the secondary levels. For example, letters may be sent home asking if any parents could volunteer in the class. Sometimes teachers specify what types of volunteer activity would be beneficial (e.g., making photocopies, cutting out pictures from magazines, or baking cookies for class parties). At other times, teachers might ask for help in obtaining specialized materials needed during specific units of instruction. But no matter what the request, it is important to emphasize that you
Diversity in the Classroom

Working with Families from Diverse Backgrounds

Family involvement is a critical component of the special education process but is particularly critical for children from diverse backgrounds. Families representing diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds can provide important information on their child’s culture, language spoken at home, beliefs, customs, and other relevant background information. Schools need to be sensitive to all cultural values, beliefs, and needs when working with families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Some of the following can help build strong trust and collaboration with families:

- Maintain open and good lines of communication with families from the start of the school year.
- Ask families how they can help participate in their child’s educational program at home and school.
- When families speak a language other than English, have interpreters present for parent conferences and other school events such as open house, school plays, concerts, and athletic events.
- Translate home announcements and other school-related documents that go home so parents can access the content.
- Advertise locations of English as Second Language classes for interested families.
- Arrange for child care during family school visits when necessary.
- Determine whether families require transportation assistance to attend school functions.
- Arrange tutoring programs to assist both students and families who may require additional assistance with understanding school assignments.
- Schedule multicultural events during which individuals from different backgrounds have opportunities to share information about their respective backgrounds, food, clothing, and culture.

realize it may be impossible for some parents to volunteer in class due to other responsibilities or to contribute financially to class activities. Be sure parents understand that neither of these limitations undermine the value of their roles in supporting the education of their children.

Sending home “happy notes” is another way to maintain positive communication with parents. Happy notes communicate positive things from school that day, week, or month. School-to-home notebooks also can be effective means of maintaining communication with parents. Balance affirming messages with areas of concern, ask parents how they wish to communicate, and what information is most important for them (Davern, 2004).

Communicating About Homework

Establish a “homework communication line” with parents. Some teachers have students maintain assignment notebooks in which daily homework assignments are recorded, including a listing of the materials necessary to complete assignments. When Mrs. Hesser, a fifth-grade teacher, assigned problem numbers 2 through 8 on page 27 in the math book, due Thursday, the students wrote down that information, along with the notation that they need to take home their math books to complete the assignment. If there is no assignment, students are required to write “No homework tonight” in the assignment book. Parents are shown assignment books nightly, and are asked to check and initial the book. This extra supervision keeps parents informed of assignments and provides opportunities for monitoring homework. In some schools, “homework hotlines” have been established, in which parents can call a phone number, or check a Website, that informs them of their child’s homework assignments.
Disagreements

On occasion, some parents may appear hostile toward teachers. In these cases, it is recommended that teachers obtain district assistance immediately. Some districts may recommend that specific documentation procedures be implemented; others may recommend that parent conferences be scheduled and attended by several teachers, including the building administrators. Understand that parent hostility might be due to a number of reasons, and assistance is available to help improve parental relations and ensure the best possible education for the student.

Parent Advisory Groups

Set up a parent advisory group in your school to meet every month or two. This group can function as a liaison between parents and the school regarding class projects, special curriculum areas, or regular school functions and as a disseminator of information. Teachers can share information about special class projects with all parents at regular parent advisory group meetings. For example, these meetings might be a nice time for Mrs. Hesser to let parents know about the assignment notebooks. Mrs. Hesser could make sure that all the parents knew that during the upcoming parent advisory meeting she would be presenting that information and that she welcomed their comments regarding how they thought the process was working.

Other suitable topics include discussing the upcoming co-teaching planned by the sixth-grade and special education teachers or discussing special education referral information. Again, these meetings afford extra opportunities for positive communication and collaboration efforts among family members and school personnel. Finally, teachers can ask the group to assist in identifying topics of interest to parents and specific presentations could be tailored to their needs.

Handling Disability Issues

It may be difficult for some parents to understand and accept that their child has a disability. In these cases, request assistance from the school social worker, counselor, or special education teacher. Parents may be frightened or feel overwhelmed trying to understand why their child has a disability, what needs to be done, and how they can help. It may be beneficial for parents to attend support groups for parents of children with specific disabilities. Use the expertise of the specialists within your school district to gather as much information as possible for the parents.

Disability Resources

Most schools have brochures and reference lists of sources suitable for parents to read concerning specific disability areas. Many parents appreciate knowing names of books or articles that describe additional information on their child’s disability. Reference lists can identify where the materials can be located (e.g., the town library, the school library, the special parents’ library). Professional organizations also maintain reference lists on specific disability areas. For example, the Council for Exceptional Children is the major special education organization, which not only maintains reference lists, but also has divisions specific to disability areas, such as the Division for Learning Disabilities and the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders. Each division provides information pertaining to specific disability areas, including journals, newsletters, and Websites.

Summary

- Collaboration—involving cooperation, effective communication, shared problem solving, planning, and finding solutions—is the process for ensuring that all students receive the free, appropriate public education mandated by IDEA.
- Both schools and parents have responsibilities under IDEA. Partnerships can involve parents and professionals representing a variety of areas, including general and special education teachers, administrators, school psychologists, counselors, social workers, and community mental health agencies.
- Effective communication is critical for successful collaboration. Effective communication involves active listening, depersonalizing situations, finding common goals, brainstorming steps for achieving common goals, identifying possible solutions, and summarizing the conversation. These steps can be very helpful in solving problems.
General education prereferral interventions are steps taken by schools to promote success in the regular classroom before deciding on referral for special education. These actions can involve general and special education teachers, specialists, administrators, parents, and students.

Effective communication and collaboration is particularly important in the referral and placement process. For case conference committees to perform successfully, effective communication is essential.

Building effective collaborative partnerships is one of the most significant tasks of a successful inclusive teacher. With effective teamwork, solutions can be found to any number of problems.

Collaboration can take the form of consultation, in which teachers work together to decide on intervention strategies for a specific student. Communication can take the form of notes, informal conversations, or scheduled meetings.

Collaboration can also take the form of co-teaching, in which a general education and special education teacher teach together in an inclusive classroom setting. Some models are (a) interactive teaching (one teach, one drift; or one teach, one observe), (b) station teaching, (c) parallel teaching, and (d) alternative teaching.

Effective collaboration with paraprofessionals can improve communication and clarification of roles and responsibilities.

Effective collaboration with parents is a key to effective inclusive teaching. Teachers should consider variability in family backgrounds and family structures, and maintain close, positive contacts with parents.

**Professional Standards Link: Collaboration: Partnerships and Procedures**

Information in this chapter links most directly to:

- CEC Standards: 5 (Learning Environments and Social Interactions), 7 (Instructional Planning), 9 (Professional and Ethical Practice), 10 (Collaboration)
- INTASC Standards: Principles 1 (understands central concepts of the discipline), 2 (provides appropriate learning opportunities), 9 (relationships with school personnel, families, agencies), 10 (reflects on practice)

- PRAXIS II™ Content Categories (Knowledge): 1 (Understanding Exceptionalities), 2 (Issues)
- PRAXIS II™ Content Categories (Application): 1 (Curriculum), 4 (Managing the Learning Environment), 5 (Professional Roles)

For a detailed listing of relevant professional standards, go to the Web Links module in chapter 2 of the Companion Website.
Inclusion Checklist
Collaboration: Partnerships and Procedures

If you would like to improve your communication skills, have you employed effective communication strategies, including the following? If not, see pages:

Effective communication, 27–33
- Active listening, 28
- Depersonalizing situations, 28
- Finding common goals, 28
- Brainstorming ideas, 28
- Summarizing the conversation, 28–29
- Follow up to monitor progress, 29

Collaboration and communication for intervention, 30–33
- Persistent student problems in your classroom, 30–33
  - Implementing general education pre-referral intervention procedures, 30–33
  - Implementing special education referral procedures, 33

Collaboration for referrals and placements, 33–42
- Familiarizing yourself with procedures for writing and monitoring IEPs, 39–42
- Resolving disagreements, using due process procedures, 42

Collaboration as partnerships, 43–48
- Implementing consultation to facilitate inclusion efforts, 43–44
- Using co-teaching to facilitate inclusion efforts, 44–45

- Team or interactive teaching, 44
- One teach, one drift, 44
- One teach, one observe, 44
- Station teaching, 44
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- Improving collaboration with paraprofessionals, 45–46
  - Roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, 45–46
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- Improving collaboration with parents and families, 46–48
  - Variability in backgrounds, 46
  - Positive communication efforts, 46–47
  - Homework communication efforts, 47
  - Disagreements, 48
  - Parent advisory groups, 48
  - Handling disability issues, 48
  - Disability resources, 48

The CD-ROM that accompanies this text is a searchable database of the strategies identified here as well as lesson plans that relate to chapter content. The CD-ROM software not only allows you to do searches for specific strategies and lesson plans, but also allows you to modify and adapt these teaching tools or create your own.