



# Effective Communication with School During COVID-19

*Where do we go from here?*

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**Special Education Mediation Services (SEMS)**



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# Today's Training Team

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SEMS Mediator/Facilitator Training Specialist



# 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.



# Today's Discussion

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- Why communication in special education is so unique and especially important.
- How the Covid 19 pandemic impacted communication and collaboration for schools and families and what we learned from the pandemic.
- Effective communication techniques to improve communication and collaboration for your student's success.



# What Makes Communication in Special Education So Unique?



- Federal law requires that schools attempt to collaborate with the parent(s) of children with disabilities.
- Parents of children with disabilities deal with stresses and feelings that touch upon powerful emotions, and these emotions may spill over in meetings.
- School staff deal with many difficult stresses and limitations, and they may surface in meetings.



# What Makes Communication in Special Education Unique?



- Parents of children with disabilities may feel powerless in meetings due to the sheer disparity in numbers and previous negative experiences.
- Parents and School staff may have very different perceptions about a student's needs, based upon their observations and interactions in two different environments (school vs. at home).
- The three most important words in Special Education law (“appropriate” “reasonable” and “unique),” leave lots of room for differing interpretations and disagreement.

# What Happened During the Pandemic?



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Parents observed firsthand the inner workings of their children's education, became more involved and communicated more often with teachers.

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Many parents concluded that their children needed more individualized instruction and learning options.

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Technology and innovation, by necessity, became clear drivers of successful learning and communication.

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Schools that failed to meet families' needs and new expectations, especially in minority communities, lost students in large numbers.

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# What We Learned From The Pandemic About Effective Communication and Collaboration

- When treated as collaborative partners **and** provided the necessary tools, parents will increase their engagement in their children's education and student outcomes will improve.
- In schools that don't prioritize nurturing and welcoming collaborative engagement, especially in minority communities, many parents will give up and even walk away from their home school.
- Technology has become a critical tool for improving communication and increasing family engagement.

**Student Success = (Teacher + Student + Curriculum/Material) + Family**

# The Importance of Family Engagement

Studies consistently indicate the critical importance of family engagement in student success.

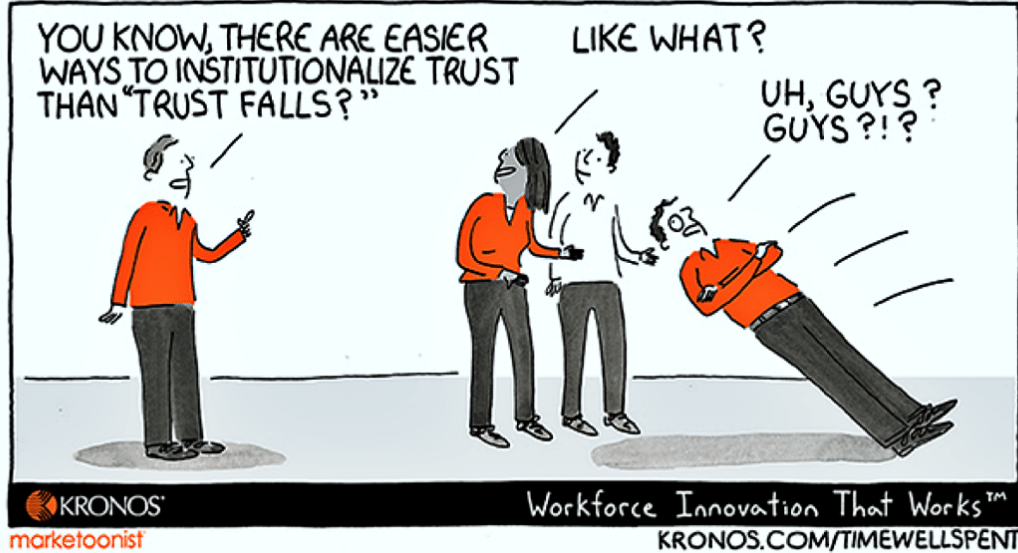
In the past ten years, a number of studies firmly established the benefit of family engagement **and** collaboration in student outcomes.

Collaboration builds on the traditional family engagement model and includes two-way communication, home-school coordination and joint problem solving.



# Building Trusting Relationships

TIME WELL SPENT™



- 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.



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How you say it is as important as what you say- actual words make up only 7% of what you communicate!

Your body language can change the meaning of your spoken message- 58% of what you communicate comes from your body language.

Paraverbal messages-your tone, pitch and pacing make up 35% of your communication.

People will generally listen better if they see you as a collaborator, rather than as someone who disagrees with or criticizes them

So Others **Want** To Hear Your Message



HOW TO GET SOMEONE TO LISTEN TO YOU -- BEFORE YOU TELL THEM WHAT YOU THINK, DO THESE FIVE THINGS:

- Listen actively - reflect back what they said to show you hear them
- Let them know how important they or their opinions are to your student's success- compliment them
- Ask them "open minded" questions to understand, gain knowledge and determine their underlying interests
- Use "yes..and", rather than "yes...but"
- Apologize when you forget these principles!



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- ▶ 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.
- ▶ When we really listen, we begin to hear different levels of communication. Getting to a deeper level of understanding, rather than coming up with an immediate answer, is key to more effective problem solving.



# The Importance of Understanding Other's Perceptions

Discovering what the other person 'sees' in a given situation can be an insightful tool for successful communication.

Conflict is not only about a disagreement over an outcome, but often is based upon misunderstandings and differences in perceptions.

Often, when you are willing to consider and look at something from someone else's perspective, you discover that their views and perceptions are actually different than what you thought they were.



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# Identifying underlying Interests

Often when people state a position, they have an underlying “interest” that they do not share with you

That interest may be based upon a fear of something or a previous bad experience they had or just wanting to feel respected.

In order to find out what their underlying interests are, you need to ask them some open-ended questions.



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To identify underlying interests, ask:

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?



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# Taking Emotion Out of Dialogue

- ▶ De-personalize Conflict
  - ▶ Remember that your child's education depends upon the whole "team's" good intentions.
  - ▶ Identify the most generous interpretation of other's view/idea



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# When to Ask For A Free Facilitator

- ➔ If you are uneasy about a meeting or your school relations are strained
- ➔ IFSP, IEP, BIP, MDR settings
- ➔ Resolution sessions



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# When to Use Mediation

- ▶ Any special education dispute
  - ▶ Eligibility for programs, services
  - ▶ Evaluation interpretations
  - ▶ Transition, discipline issues
  - ▶ Service delivery, effectiveness
- ▶ Resolution sessions
- ▶ Communication, relationship issues





- Special Education Mediation Services
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Michigan Department of Education  
Office of Special Education

# We are here to support you!

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For more information visit:

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# 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).

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