A Seat at the Table: Encouraging Family-Professional Partnerships

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Introductions

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Participants Will

- Understand why family connections are important
- Revisit the role that parents are guaranteed under IDEIA
- Appreciate the challenges the parents' role presents
- Detail how educational professionals can foster positive partnerships with families

Connections Matter!

If you have a positive relationship with families, students will:

- Earn higher grades and test scores
- Be more likely to enroll in higher level programs
- Adapt well to school and attend regularly
- Have better social skills and behavior
- Graduate and go on to higher ed

Parent Role in IEP Process

- The IDEA guarantees meaningful opportunities for parental participation
  [20 U.S.C. § 1401 (c)(5)(b)]

The Law is Complicated

Systemic Challenges to the Parental Role

The IDEIA's vision of collaborative relationships and family-centered practice has been difficult to achieve, particularly for low-income and culturally diverse families
(Valle & Aponte, 2002)

Problems with the Advocacy Expectation

The law seeks to give parents equality in the decision-making process

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The hierarchy ideal in professional knowledge values professional knowledge over parental knowledge

(Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000)

Ways of Knowing

Professional Knowledge	Parent Knowledge
• Objective	• Subjective
• Scientific	• Emotional
• Valid	• Invalid

So What?

The *relationship* defines how parents perceive expert knowledge

How to Invite Parents to the Process

- Lay the foundation for trust:
  - Respect each person's expertise
  - Support child and parents
  - Follow through
  - Communicate
  - Listen
  - Be genuine

How to Invite Parents to the Process

- Be aware of the words we use:
  - "Authoritative discourse" quiets parent voices
  - Person first language

Implication

- Our words, actions and paper work need to reflect a value of parent input

Summary

- Negotiating the special education system is a cumbersome, intimidating process for parents
- The burden of change must be placed on the system to foster more genuine teacher/parent relationships to create a more equitable system

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