

Engaging Families in the IEP Process

By, Amanda Kaahanui

SPIN - Special Parent Information Network

Aloha! I'm Amanda.
I'm mom to an 22 year old 2022 graduate (gasp) who had an IEP.

I'm also a wife of 28 years, work for the State, lived in Hawaii for 31 years, love to papercraft, can't stand the seaweed around musubi, like to be alone but crave time with friends, feel like I'm socially awkward though I love to speak in public, fully vaxxed & boosted, love my android phone and can't live without my Alexa. I'm also passionate about helping my son succeed in life and I love supporting families on their own journeys of advocacy and action. I'm complicated and unique, just like you.



Aloha kakou!

Please introduce yourself and share what kind of self care you will do for yourself this weekend.

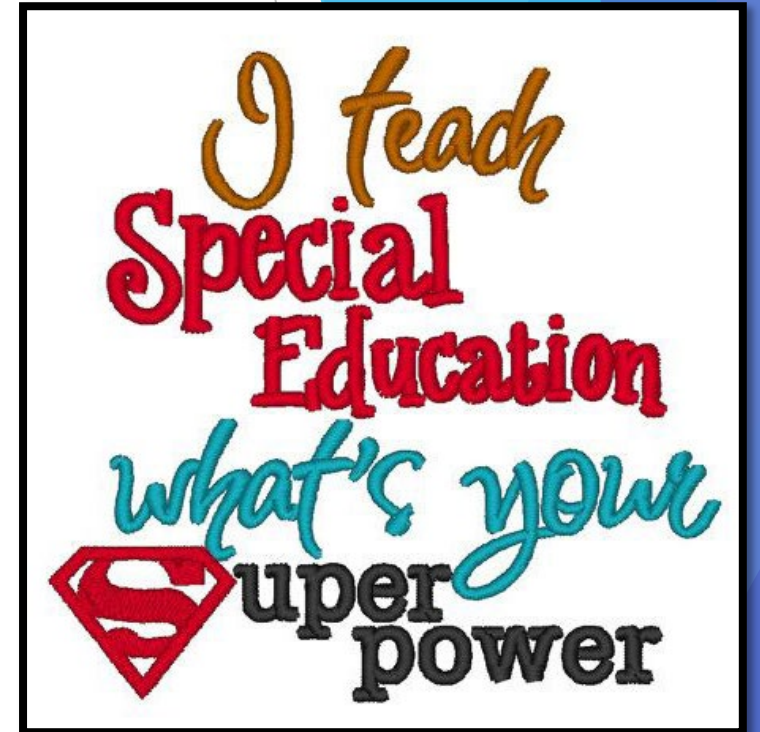


Setting the Stage for Today

- ▶ We are
 - ▶ Student centered
 - ▶ Present and engaged
 - ▶ Solution-oriented
 - ▶ Equitable in dialog and discussions
 - ▶ Collaborative and supportive
 - ▶ Free to come and go as we need
 - ▶ Patient with technical glitches
- ▶ Borrowed from a slide from the 2024 SPIN Conference on building empathy and resilience “Building Better Sandcastles” by CJ Chappell, Christine Montague-Hicks and Sheri Taketa (used by permission)
- ▶ <https://spinconference.org/2024-spin-conference-spins-ocean-of-possibilities/>

Mahalo for Choosing Special Education!

- ▶ You are serving the most needy, sweet, challenging, loving, complex, happy, demanding, inspiring, rebellious, resilient kids in your school.
- ▶ It will probably be the most difficult and the most rewarding teaching position you will ever have.
- ▶ You have a large support system, you are not alone!
- ▶ We are all rooting for you to be successful, especially parents, because if you rock as a special education teacher, our kids will rock too!



It's all about Partnerships

- ▶ Treat parents as equal partners in the education of their children
- ▶ Everyone brings a unique lens to the table
- ▶ You have education/experience in the classroom, parents have life experience with their child



Partnerships Respect Perspective

Families must be seen as bringing intimate knowledge and understanding of their child, their family, their strengths and needs.



Partnerships Respect Perspective



Professionals bring a body of knowledge specific to their field. They have access to peers who bring additional resources and options for families to choose from. Professionals also have valuable experiences and knowledge of working with a wide variety of families and experiences.

Partnerships Respect Perspective

Families and Professionals

This is my life:

- + Personal
- + We work too
- + No breaks
- + We did not plan for this
- + We hear a lot of opinions
- + I am my child's expert, advocate, care coordinator
- + We are doing the best we can
- + I want to do better, but I don't know how/don't have the time/ I'm burnt out

This is my job:

- + Professional
- + My shift ends at 3:00
- + I went to school for this / I chose this as a job
- + I know some stuff about different things
- + I am your child's CC, but only for this school
- + I am doing the best I can
- + I want to help you (but you're not letting me)



Communication & Partnerships

- ▶ Build a foundation of mutual trust and respect - let it start with you - if you don't know something, say so
- ▶ Get to know your parents. Invite them into your classroom, have an ice cream party, start a group chat...
- ▶ Schools have multiple ways to share info with families
 - ▶ Website - passive / one way communication
 - ▶ Calendars - passive / one way communication
 - ▶ Newsletters - passive / one way communication
 - ▶ Informational meetings - direct / one way / possible two-way
 - ▶ Back to School nights - direct / one way / possible two-way
 - ▶ Curriculum nights - direct / one way
 - ▶ Phone, text, email - direct / two-way
 - ▶ Apps (Remind, Participate, ect.) - direct / two-way
 - ▶ Parent/Teacher conference - direct / two-way



How do families share info with you?

Communication & Partnerships

- ▶ Small Group Discussion
 - ▶ Break into groups of 3
 - ▶ 7 minutes to share in your group
 - ▶ Share out
- ▶ **How do you communicate with families?**
 - ▶ What kinds of things do you do to get to know your families?
 - ▶ How do you let families know what's happening in your classroom?
 - ▶ How do families communicate with you?



It's all about Equal Partnerships

- ▶ Don't make parents wait outside the conference room before the IEP meeting. Invite them in when they arrive, they are equal members of the team, after all. If other members of the team are entering the conference room, the parent should be able to enter too.
- ▶ It seems silly to say, but don't seat parents at the small table or in small chairs unless everyone is using them.



Brain Break: Laugh Yoga

<https://youtu.be/1uHglkR8y88>

Dr. Matthew Wappett showed us
how to reduce stress with Laugh
Yoga.

(43:00 - 45:50)



Don't Take Things Personally

- ▶ You may be the only person at school the family sees or talks to, which means they may vent or take frustrations out on you.
- ▶ It is often the 'System' that parents are railing against, not you personally.
 - ▶ Think about your own "triggers" that a parent may say that causes you stress
 - ▶ Do you feel attacked? Do you feel they don't respect you? Do you feel they are being rude or using rude language?
 - ▶ What do you think is the underlying reason a parent may say something that causes you stress?
 - ▶ Are they worried about their child's learning?
 - ▶ Do they have their own personal stressors that are causing them to lash out?
- ▶ What strategies do you use to de-escalate a situation with a parent, student, admin, colleague or family member?



Don't Take Stress Personally

- ▶ Remember, when we are stressed out, we have no filters. We have a hard time being nice. We are selfish in our thinking and only concerned about our own “survival”.
- ▶ Before a meeting, try some breathing exercises to get into a “relaxation response” instead of being in a “stress response”
- ▶ Watch Dr. Wappett’s SPIN Workshop on stress. It’s very enlightening.
 - ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5RF6syOxBE>
 - ▶ Or download the slides: <https://spinconference.org/spin-conference-2022/>
 - ▶ Our bodies do not differentiate between the stress of being chased by a lion or being stuck in traffic, it’s the same stress. We are in a constant state of stress, all the time. It can cause us to say or do things we may regret later.
- ▶ Share out ways you reduce stress for
 - ▶ Yourself
 - ▶ Your students
 - ▶ Or how do you defuse a stressful situation?



Don't Take Things Personally

- ▶ We all make mistakes and we are not all-knowing creatures. It's ok to admit you flubbed up, it's ok to say you don't know something.
- ▶ Try not to judge families based on: the child's diagnosis, the student forgetting their hearing aids/glasses/communication device, lack of communication, a snippy comment, lack of engagement, etc. They could be going through a hard time right now.
- ▶ Remember that unless you are the child's first preschool teacher, there have been others before you and the relationship between school and family could be broken, strained or hostile. Come in fresh, come in ready to be a partner and don't pull back if rebuffed. Take the high road, always.



Believe in My Kid

- ▶ Reading the PLAAFP is often very depressing for parents. The lists are long on all things their kid can not do, and short on their strengths and accomplishments.
- ▶ Aim high! Think positive! Go ahead and have high expectations. Parents will appreciate that you see their child's potential and are committed to helping them reach it.
 - ▶ As our kids move through education and we don't see improvements, or very slow improvements, we start to lose hope. We need teachers to help us continue to reach for higher expectations.
- ▶ Celebrate baby steps, regardless of how small, and build on them.
 - ▶ "They can count to 3 consistently" is better than "they cannot count to 5"



Believe in My Kid

- ▶ Tell parents about good things that happen at school. If you only communicate with them about behavior issues or other negative things that need to be “addressed”, they won’t look forward to hearing from you. Positive reinforcement works on parents too 😊.
 - ▶ How do you tell a parent when good things happen at school?



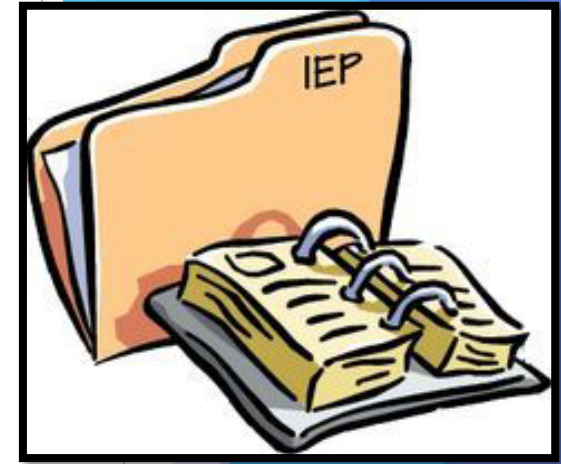
Prepare Your Parents

- ▶ Don't wait for the annual IEP meeting to tell parents their child is struggling.
- ▶ Don't wait for the annual IEP meeting to tell parents their child is improving.
- ▶ Preparation also includes:
 - ▶ Sharing the student's work/test scores with parents all year long.
 - ▶ Introduce new ideas/teaching strategies/ideas for new or different services early on so parents have time to ask questions, give feedback and help prepare their child for something new.
 - ▶ Keep parents informed if something looks like it needs to change on the IEP (goals/objectives and/or services/modification/accommodations). You don't have to wait for the annual IEP meeting for the "Big Reveal".



The IEP as a SHARED Document

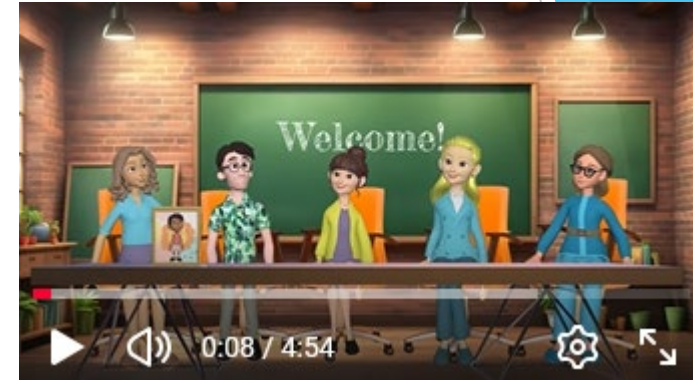
- ▶ Start the IEP process early. Don't wait till the day before the meeting to write up a draft. (if you need to, ask your admin for planning time)
- ▶ If you have an idea for a goal/objective, let the family know as early as possible to get their feedback. This can happen any time of the year.
- ▶ Ask parents for input into what kinds of goals/objectives they would like to see on the IEP. What are they most concerned about for their child's learning? Start these conversations early; you don't have to wait for the IEP meeting. Give them time to think about it.
- ▶ Send a copy of the draft IEP to parents at least a week before your meeting so they have a chance to read it over and come prepared to the meeting. Often both parents can't come to the meeting. Sharing in advance gives both parents the chance to review the draft.
- ▶ If you have gone back and forth with a working draft, by the time the IEP meeting comes around, most of the work is done.



NOTE:
IDEA discourages draft IEPs so there is no chance for predermination. But it does say if a draft is made, it must be share with parents in advance of the IEP meeting.

Positions vs Interests

- ▶ <https://youtu.be/TJIHrKB4ugY>
- ▶ A position is a statement
- ▶ The interest is the reason behind the statement
 - ▶ Parent Position: I want my kid to have 1 hour of speech a week.
 - ▶ Interest: I'm afraid my child will be made fun of or be bullied over their speech. I worry they won't be able to get a job if they can't communicate. I'm sad they don't have any friends because other kids can't understand them.



- ▶ School Position: No
- ▶ Interest: The SLP is already at max capacity, and the student may miss other academic or enrichment opportunities.

When we understand what the interest is, it's easier to find a common solution together. "Let's work on a plan to start a lunch bunch & create opportunities in his classroom to practice his communication goals and meet back in 2 months to review"

Idea Exchange

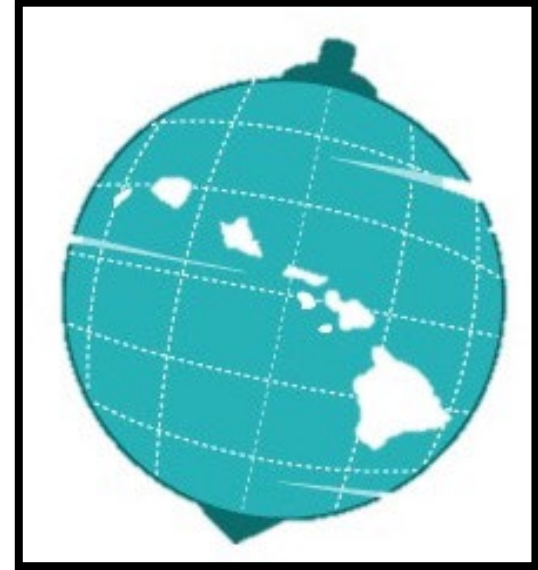
- ▶ Break into groups of 3
- ▶ Share at least one thing that you have done to help families in one of these categories
 - ▶ Understand the IEP process
 - ▶ Contribute to the IEP before a meeting
 - ▶ Communicated with families about good things
 - ▶ Received support from Admin for IEP prep

OR

- ▶ A time when you navigated a positions vs interest roadblock in an IEP meeting
- ▶ Share out something that resonated with you

SPIN - Special Parent Information Network

- ▶ SPIN is funded by the DOE and housed in the Dept. of Health, Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) office.
- ▶ We provide information, resources and referrals, along with parent-to-parent support to families with kids aged birth to 22 in public school who have a disability.
- ▶ Sign up for our E-Newsletter and E-blasts to share with your families. Email us at spin@doh.hawaii.gov
- ▶ Visit SPIN online for resources and information. Our wildly popular Parent's Guide to Special Education is available on our website and can be downloaded as a PDF. Spinhawaii.org and find us on Facebook too!
- ▶ Join us for the next annual SPIN Conference. The resource fair is amazing!
 - ▶ SPINconference.org has past recorded workshops



Mahalo!

- ▶ Any questions?
- ▶ Contact SPIN: 586-8126 or Amanda.Kaahanui@doh.Hawaii.gov

