

# COMMUNICATION SCAFFOLDING

## Communication Tips For Educators

Georgia Department of Education

Family Engagement Supports



**"Making Education Work for All Georgians"**

**Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent**

Compiled and/or written by Patricia Solomon,  
Family Engagement Specialist,  
Division for Special Education Supports, with  
The Parent Mentor Partnership: *Listen Lead Link*  
@ GaDOE, May 2012

PARENTS  
EDUCATORS  
COMMUNITY  
MEMBERS

[2012]



## Some Rules of Engagement for the IEP Meeting and Beyond!

An uncomfortable glance, a moment of awkward silence or, perhaps, even an escalating voice from one of your participants can be show stoppers in an IEP meeting ..... feelings of mistrust, misunderstanding or simply missed opportunities can replay in everyone's memory banks long after an I.E.P meeting ends.

As critical as it is to be prepared with timely data, progress reports and other pertinent information, simple *rules of engagement* often are the last items on the preparation checklist! With shorter time lines, diminishing school dollars and mounting academic demands, educators can improve meeting outcomes by practicing some simple techniques. Slowing down the pace of meetings, for example, can put the parent at ease so he or she does not feel as if the action is going on around him/her without a part. Remembering that federal law is typically not the parent's specialty nor is it his or her course of study if college, will help you keep some perspective on the reality of the session. Who wants a gathering where some guests look as if they want to run out the door?

-----  
For lots of great ideas, stories and researched practices visit the Parent Mentor Partnership website on a regular basis.

GO TO: [www.parentmentors.org](http://www.parentmentors.org)

Read about Justine Salter whose mom is a Parent Mentor in Columbia County. Justine uses an augmentative device effectively at his high school. In fact, despite being nonverbal, Justine is expected to graduate with a general education diploma.



**Ever get frustrated when you cannot find the most needed links on the GaDOE Website?**



Well, just go to [www.parentmentor.org](http://www.parentmentor.org) and you can be linked to the most popular pages in seconds.

## Let's Talk About the Big Meeting!

### **Communication is the Ticket to an Effective IEP plan**

Patti Solomon, Family Engagement Specialist, GaDOE

*Jonah's father and mother smile pleasantly as they both sit down with the rest of the Individual Education Program (IEP) team for Jonah's annual IEP meeting. Everyone politely begins to listen to the lead teacher, read Jonah's present education levels. Yet, as the educator reads aloud, she hears a clicking sound and immediately looks up to witness Johnny's dad typing an email on his Blackberry. She continues to read while her mind is zeroing in on the emotion of feeling disrespected by Jonah's father. The teacher finishes outlining Jonah's present levels and asks the team if there are any questions. Jonah's dad immediately asks her how long the meeting will take and would she skip all this school bureaucracy and get to the point. What is she to say?*

Perhaps, it is too late once the meeting is in progress to make an impression on Jonah's father of the importance of his input into Jonah's plan. A stern lecture right there on the spot delivering the merits of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its mandate that families be involved at every step of the special education process, including the IEP development, most likely will not convince this father to become engaged in the meeting.

So, what are the steps to convince parents, as well as educators, of the vital role a parent can make in the IEP process? Perhaps, the conversation needs to start inside the school building. Educators often talk about fidelity in academics but rarely question if they are communicating and partnering with families with evidence-based communication practices that lead to better student results.

Are teachers making sure the time and day for the IEP meeting is as convenient for the parent as it is for the education partners? Is a typical scenario that all teachers regularly discuss the student's educational needs with the parent as the school year progresses – not just once a year at the IEP meeting? Does the IEP team truly value the parent's input?

These are critical questions when we look at 30 years of family engagement research that indicates many parents of students with disabilities are not fully participating members of their child's IEP Team. Even more disturbing is taking a look at the Georgia Department of Education's IEP annual attendance data that showed about 40 percent of parents in Georgia with a child on an IEP did not even show up to their child's annual meeting in 2010.

So inside the hectic lives of educators, is there a doable way to engage and partner with families? The answer can be found in business journals, leadership books and many other pieces of research that chronicles success stories of leaders when it comes to team building and communicating effectively. It doesn't matter how well written the IEP goals are if the parent is not emotionally satisfied that his or her child is getting what is needed.

#### **Try using the "CEO Approach to Communication"**

Think of yourself as the *executive officer* responsible for ensuring that Jonah's plan reflects reachable yet effective goals to reach academic expectations. As the leader, your job is to look at the big picture, build



consensus and keep the end in mind. You are not only the lead at the IEP meeting but in the pre-work with the team, especially your parents, so the work with Jonah's father would begin at the beginning of the school year. In addition, you can set the atmosphere of the meeting and the attitude. Being the leader also means seeking out new evidence-based practices to improve the teamwork at the IEP meeting such as training students to lead their own IEP meeting. Truly, a leadership approach is critical to making each IEP team work to develop shared expectations that lead to goals attached to true collaboration.

May, 2012

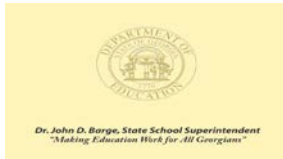
## **Some Tips from an IEP Has Been** **Patti Solomon, Family Engagement Specialist**

Here are some communication tips from attending many IEPs through the years as an educational partner and as a parent of a daughter with a disability. In addition, reading books such as "How to Deal with Difficult People," by Dale Carnegie or "The Power of Focus" by Jack Canfield are examples of great learning tools in the business realm to develop learning tools to lead IEP meetings that produce strong results with true teamwork.

### **Getting it All Done Before the Meeting:**

- Communicate with a tone of partnership and encourage two-way communication.
- Learn and respect the families' culture and expectations.
- Invite the family to observe in the classroom and/or meet with them before the meeting.
- Explain to the family their rights under IDEA. A quick fact sheet is a user-friendly format based on the GaDOE Special Education web page as well as a Parent Rights video which is chaptered for easy learning in English and Spanish. The official parent rights also are translated in seven languages on the site. [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org)
- Use an effective invitation tool, such as *Doodle*, to make sure the meeting time is convenient for all participants. Go to [www.parentmentors.org](http://www.parentmentors.org) for a one-sheet explanation sheet to use this time saving method.
- Let your parent know he/she does not have to come alone to the meeting and ask if assistance is needed with transportation and/or childcare.
- Solicit and value parent opinions. Send home a work sheet, an email or a text (depending on your parent preference for communication) before the meeting asking what for his/her hopes and dreams for the child. Don't be afraid to ask what worked well this year and what did not. Get issues of concern out in the open before the meeting. **There should be no surprises at an IEP meeting!**
- Minimize personnel in attendance as along as everyone the parent wants is there.





### Leading an Effective Meeting:

- Greet your parents and walk into the meeting together. It is difficult to walk into a room full of educators already seated at a table. Sit next to the parent and not across from him/her to remove physical barriers.
- Put a picture of the student on the table if he or she cannot attend.
- Advise your team members not to share nods, glances, notes or inside jokes during the meeting. The parent will notice.
- Explain in user-friendly language without educational jargon.
- Always begin with the child's strengths and be positive
- Be sensitive to certain confidential information that the parent may not want discussed with the entire team.
- Respect ideas from the parent even if they are not yours or would not meet school policy or best practices. Respond with assuring starters such as, "**YES**, that is an interesting idea how can we incorporate it into ....." or "I hear what you are saying **AND** we want to build on your ideas so...."
- Using tools such as a white board or an LCD projector to show the IEP as it is
- Don't leave the meeting without discussing future communication: how, what, when, where. Set up a pulse check for the parent.

### What if the Parent Becomes Angry?

- Suggest everyone take a five minute break.
- Remain calm. Remember discussing a child's deficits is very emotional for a parent. Using reflective language can neutralize situation. "I hear what you are saying...."
- Never use the words "**NO**" or "**BUT**"!
- Listen attentively and watch your body language such as posture, eye contact and the way you hold your arms. Also watch others' body language especially if their body language does not match what they are saying.
- Watch your tone of voice.
- Don't argue, interrupt, accuse or judge. Keep in mind this meeting is about the student not the parent. Reassure the parent that you care about the student.
- Remember, not all difficult parents were born that way; some were created by teachers who were unresponsive to simple requests or hostile to parental involvement.
- Administrators set the tone in the building, so it's important that you work with your administrative team and PTA/PTO if your parents perceive the school as uninviting. Remember, consistently on the IDEA Parent Surveys in Georgia for the past five years (schools are chosen to participate on a cyclical annual time table) the question with the question receiving the lowest favorable responses is one that asks if the parent feels comfortable in his/her home school.





### Steps to Take After the Meeting:

- Remember the IEP is living document
- Check in with the parent to make sure all is going well
- Encourage Home Learning. Go to [www.gadoe.org](http://www.gadoe.org) to the parent page to find out what is expected at each grade level. For students in middle school and high school, encourage joining [www.gacollege411.org](http://www.gacollege411.org) for career and college planning.



### Finally:

For more information about working with families, go to [www.parentmentors.org](http://www.parentmentors.org)  
Slide Summary from Today's Presentation

### Scaffolding Communication:

Scaffolding is considered a way to close the gap between what the student must learn and the skill level of that learner. The term "scaffolding" comes from the Zone Of Proximal Development, a theory discovered in the 1930s by Lev Vygotsky, social cognitive psychologist. Vygotsky, L. (1978). "Interaction between learning and development"

If educators recognize where a parent or a group of parents fall within a **zone of proximal communication**, wouldn't they then be able to scaffold the *type*, the *method*, the *content* and *amount* of information sent home in a more purposeful and effective way?

### Understanding Motivation (willingness and/or ability to engage)



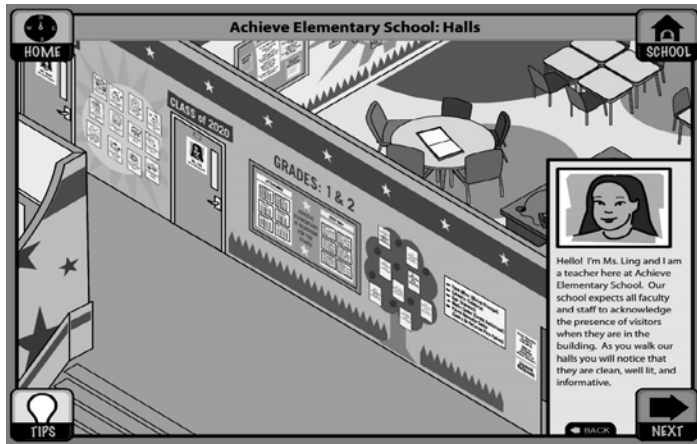
- Self actualization
- Esteem Needs
- Belonging Needs
- Safety Needs



Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent  
"Making Education Work for All Georgians"

## Parent Friendly Schools: TOOL

GaDOE Title I Parent Involvement



### Parent Friendly Schools:

Go to the Parent Involvement Page under Title I on the GaDOE website to use this interactive tool to ensure your school is culturally competent



**PTA's National Standards for Family-School Partnerships**



Dr. John D. Barge, State School Superintendent  
"Making Education Work for All Georgians"

## **Strengthening Families Protective Factors**

Although the Strengthening Families' approach initially was developed for early care and education programs, we now see partners - in a large variety of other settings and work with many different populations - exploring ways to apply the approach.

### **GA Parent Mentor Partnership**

More than 100 parents working for school districts across Georgia

A data-driven national model for family/school /community collaboration, the Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership encourages families of students with disabilities and/or other academic risks to be critical players in the school improvement process.

[www.parentmentors.org](http://www.parentmentors.org)

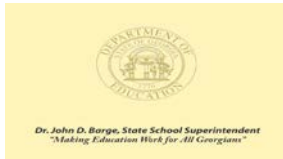
To find out if you have a parent mentor, go to "Find a Mentor" on the top of the parent mentor website.

For more Family Engagement Information from the Georgia Department of Education.

[www.gadoe.parents.aspx](http://www.gadoe.parents.aspx)

**Patti Solomon  
Family Engagement Specialist  
Georgia Department of Education  
Divisions for Special Education Services and Supports  
Patricia Solomon, Family Engagement Specialist  
1870 Twin Towers East  
Atlanta, Georgia 30334  
404-657-7328  
Website: [http://www.gadoe.org/ci\\_exceptional.aspx](http://www.gadoe.org/ci_exceptional.aspx)**





## **Communication Factors to Consider**

**CULTURE:** Ethnicity, language, religion, socioeconomics, values, education

**MESSAGE:** Hierarchy of need/delivery

**FREQUENCY:** How many times

**FORMAT:** Many mediums

**AUDIENCE:** All of the above should be determined on the audience

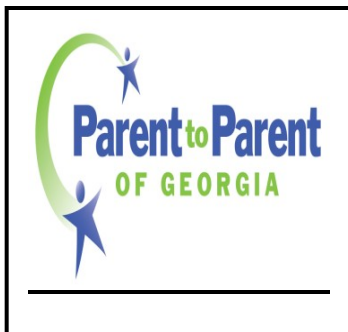
**Reflective Listening:** Seeking to understand an idea, and then offering the information back to the speaker, to confirm that the message was understood correctly.

**Paraphrasing:** Re-stating the facts in another way.

**Empathy:** Consciously sharing the sadness or happiness of another person.

-----  
*More Resources:*

**Call for Assistant Monday-thru-Friday**



Georgia's Parent Training Information Center  
under IDEA is Parent to Parent of Georgia

[www.p2pga.org](http://www.p2pga.org)

1-800-229-2038



## Vital Behaviors Handout: " What are Core Vital Behaviors for Parents in the Education Process?"

### Preschool, Elementary and Middle School

Parents routinely help their child learn at home using materials provided by the school to target one area of need.

**OR**

### High School

Parents routinely help their student plan for college or further education after high school and for a career.

### General Checklist for Developing Vital Behaviors:

- \_\_\_1. Identify one targeted area of need related to your school's measurable goal (examples might be pre-school readiness, academics, behavior, or transition to the next level)
- \_\_\_2. Collaborate with school personnel to find/develop activities and materials parents can do with the children at home to meet the targeted need.
- \_\_\_3. Provide parents with training in how to do the activities with the materials and check to see if they understand. ("Check for understanding" data).
- \_\_\_4. Provide parents with practice using the materials and descriptive feedback on how they did.
- \_\_\_5. Provide opportunities for parents to discuss their experiences in working with their children. (What went well? What were the barriers? How to work around the barriers? How to improve next time?)
- \_\_\_6. Check to see if the parents used the materials with their children at least three times during the year. ("Check for doing" benchmark data)
- \_\_\_7. Report the percentage of parents who actually did the suggested activities with their children each time you collected benchmark data. (At least three times a year)

**A Planning Tool by the Parent Mentor Partnership, GaDOE, May 2012**

# WHAT WILL CHANGE?