



## Step Three Research to Practice Brief: ADAPT MULTI-TIERED FSCP TOOLS, INCLUDING SPECIFIC SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPPORTS (More About How)

### Shared Multi-Tiered Academic and Behavioral Partnering Tiered Adult Skills Partnering in the Special Education Process

*The goal is that educators and family members... “are on the team and at the table” in supporting every student’s school success.*

Colorado Department of Education, 2009

Established instructional principles underlie the effectiveness of families and schools working together to provide *coordinated, consistent, continuous, connected, congruent, and complementary* learning for students. These include generalization to new situations (Sheridan, 1997), increased practice (or dosage) (Kaiser & Stainbrook (2010), and experiencing similar adult expectations, thus less time and effort needed to “cross the border” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003) between home and school. Also, student social-emotional-behavioral attributes – personal attitudes about education, beliefs about oneself as a learner, development of self-regulatory knowledge and skill, and development of varied learning behaviors – are enhanced by families and schools working together (El Nokali, N.E., Bachman, & Votruba-Dazel, 2010).

Recent focus on how families can support their children’s learning at home is helping to identify programs and strategies that can provide guidance. Generally, the following ingredients in home-school learning structures have been found to be helpful: (a) offering families choices in how to support learning, asking how the strategies will fit with routine and family members; (b) establishing specific, measurable outcomes with stated purpose. (c) providing instruction, support, and follow-up offered at different times and places; (d) tying home learning activities specifically to school curriculum, with the student participating in the linkage; (e) including reinforcement for families and students; (f) designing simple progress monitoring so can adjust to ongoing feedback, sharing data frequently. (Christenson, S.L.& Reschly, A.L., 2010; Future of School Psychology Task Force on Family-School Partnerships, 2007). Much is still unknown, especially about such academic areas as math and writing, and differential effects for diverse learners from varying backgrounds and of different ages. However, educators and families can readily apply the structures and strategies with proven effectiveness and evaluate their efforts in an ongoing way. Universal tier findings apply to all students and provide a base from which more intensive upper level shared interventions can be built. In the upper tiers, academic and social-emotional-behavioral learning strategies, although definitely interrelated, are discussed separately.

### Shared Academic and Behavioral Partnering

*Parents should be viewed as integral to the solution of any school-based problems children may be exhibiting. However, often we look for solutions only within the schools, where teachers and other personnel often have limited time and resources. Involving parent in the intervention process can increase the opportunities for positive outcomes.*

Peacock and Collett, 2010



## Universal Tier Learning Partnerships

Marzano (2003), after an extensive review of the school effectiveness literature, identified the home environment as one of the key factors influencing achievement. Student achievement was highest in families who reported frequent and systematic discussions about school or schoolwork, who routinely supervised homework, TV viewing, and after school activities, and who communicated high expectations within a warm and supportive environment. Based on this review, he recommended that schools develop effective venues where families could learn about positive home support strategies. Families benefit from knowing that they support education when, at home, they make positive comments about school, demonstrate interest in and awareness of school activities, converse about current events, discuss their own educational values and aspirations, encourage high achievement expectations, and monitor after school activities and homework (Marzano, 2003). Such “invisible” home support activities relate to positive ratings of involvement as reported by students, parents and teachers (Seginer, 2006) and are stronger predictors of a child’s achievement, language and literacy skills, and teachers’ perceptions of a child’s school abilities than traditional markers that stress a family’s presence at the school (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). The role of non-resident parents - especially fathers - also must be recognized since increases in student achievement have been reported when fathers’ roles and efforts are promoted (Flouri, 2005).

Positive child outcomes also are observed when families feel they understand grade level expectations and know how to enhance learning at home. Families often desire and require more information about specific curriculum and instructional methods, especially in regards to time management, homework, and how to increase motivation for success (Grolnick, Ryan, & Deci, 1991). Teachers who encourage families to request more information about the curriculum and classroom assignments also report more successful sharing of ideas about home-school approaches to enhance a student’s success (McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Student improvements at school occur when teachers and family members feel confident about asking each other questions about a child’s learning and struggles (Sheridan, Taylor, & Woods, 2008). Such open conversations enable teachers and families to gain the knowledge and confidence to make informed school-wide as well as individual student decisions (Davies, 2001). When families feel informed about school requirements and expectations, they are more able to participate and collaborate on school improvement and family-school partnering efforts (Westmoreland, Rosenberg, Lopez, & Weiss, 2009). Families who feel more confident in their knowledge of child development, parenting, and behavioral guidance, and who have high self-efficacy in their ability to help their child learn also have children who are rated higher on self-regulation, self-control, self-competence, and self-esteem, all of which have a strong impact on school achievement (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005).

Families benefit from information on how to monitor and discuss homework, how much help to give, and how to reward persistence (Jordan, Snow, & Porche, 2000). Indeed, homework has been described as the “linchpin in the relationship between home and school” (Gill & Schlossman, 2003). In most research findings successful homework completion is correlated with academic achievement (Dawson, 2008), although there are differences for different levels of schooling. Also, homework is considered a measure of school engagement (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, in 2011) and an important structure for supporting families in coordinating student learning (Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, Whetsel, & Green, 2005). Key findings in partnering for successful homework practices are summarized as follows: (a) invite families to participate in homework partnering, provide structure and information, share with them the



purpose, teach effective strategies, and create two-way communication systems (Walker et al., 2005); (b) base homework policies and plans on effective, proven practices, including developmental appropriateness (Cooper & Valentine, 2001); (c) include meaningful ways for families to be involved, such as in interactive homework or TIPS (Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork) which has been proven effective (Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001); (d) monitor and grade homework, providing feedback to families and students regularly, reinforcing efforts and problem-solving if concerns (Dawson, 2008); and (e) know that some students and/or families may struggle because of disabilities, personal stress, emotional and/or attentional challenges and that individual or small group “upper tier” strategies will be needed to ensure every student successfully engages in homework learning (Dawson, 2008).

## Upper Tier Learning Partnerships

When students struggle with academic or social-emotional-behavioral learning, as do many students with disabilities, it is important to strategically partner with all adults in the student’s life. Shared interventions and increased monitoring help to “surround a student” to support his/her success. Family-school protocols are possible structures for addressing learning struggles. Research is continuing to identify partnering applications for specific areas such as literacy or social skills.

**Social, emotional, behavioral learning.** Targeted plans, explicitly developed by families and school staff, with carefully scripted responsibilities have been effective for increasing prosocial skills, decreasing problem behaviors, and improving academic performance (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2008). Usually, these are individual interventions that are monitored and revised according to data obtained at home and school. Specific family-school interventions can be easily integrated into special education and/or Response-to-Intervention (RtI) problem solving, with adaptations to match specific goals and as a prescribed intervention. *Home-school notes*, *conjoint behavioral consultation*, and *wraparound* are three different family-school protocols, which have been shown to be effective as partnering interventions.

*Home-school notes* (or “home-school-home” notes) provide a systematic frame and are similar to a traditional behavioral contracting system but directly link home responses to school behaviors (Jurbergs, Palcic, & Kelly, 2007; Kelly, 1995). The student actively participates in school-home communication, monitoring, and teaming, allowing for coordination of learning between home and school. Formats vary, but a common frame includes the following basic components: identifying target academic skills or behaviors; developing a method to track progress; applying home-based contingencies; employing strengths; establishing clear responsibilities for school staff and family members, and developing a two-way communication system (Future of School Psychology Task Force on Family-School Partnerships, 2007; Peacock & Collett, 2010). Consultation with someone such as a school mental health professional can help with breakdowns at school, home, or in-between until systems are fine-tuned and working (Peacock & Collett, 2010).

*Conjoint behavioral consultation* (CBC) has been defined as, “a structured, indirect form of service delivery, in which parents and teachers work together to address the academic, social, or behavioral needs of an individual for whom both parties bear some responsibility” (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 1992, p. 122). In CBC, parents, teachers, and other caregivers engage in a structured problem-solving process with a consultant, usually a school mental health professional. The four problem-solving steps are: needs identification, needs analysis, plan implementation, and plan evaluation. CBC has been shown to be effective with a wide range of issues including externalizing and internalizing behaviors, academic performance, and with diverse clients (Sheridan and Kratochwill, 2008).



*Wraparound* coordinates comprehensive systems of care for students with the most severe and persistent concerns. Families are active, central partners and community agencies are often involved, utilizing a special format for planning student interventions. Wraparound promotes a philosophical and literal “wrapping of services,” whereby the whole needs of the student and family are addressed through a strength-based approach to service planning. While many wraparound programs have been community-based in the past, advocates for school-based wraparound services argue that there are many benefits for using the school as the entry point for collaborative family-school-community services. More specifically, children spend a significant portion of their day in the school context and school remains the primary setting for the establishment of primary and secondary interventions. Youth who received services under the wraparound model have been found to be more likely to remain in their home school, demonstrate positive classroom performance, and have a reduced number of residential placements. Eber, Sugai, Smith, and Scott (2002) describe specific school applications. Their process has specific steps, but follows a basic problem-solving sequence.

Social skill development, anger control, stress and anxiety management, family change adjustment, and school success skills can all be a focus of school-based social-emotional-behavioral interventions such as in counseling or support groups (Peacock & Collett, 2010). Families and classroom teachers alike are seen as partnering in assessment, reinforcement, and practice of a student’s social-emotional-behavioral learning. Specific family-school partnering activities may be prescribed by a program or theoretical orientation. Albright and Weissberg (2010) highlight evidence-based social-emotional learning (SEL) programs which incorporate a home component such as family training, skill practice, and student presentations of learned skills. In general there seems to be widespread agreement among mental health practitioners as to the effectiveness and importance of family participation in child or adolescents’ treatment and social-emotional-behavioral learning (Friedburg & McClure, 2002; Laugeson, Frankel, Mogil, & Dillon, 2008)

**Academic learning.** Home-school academic interventions often focus on specific skill sets based on screening results or diagnostic/prescriptive assessment. Family support may be seen in drill practices, review, or specific monitoring. Specificity usually depends on the level of skill required and the family comfort. Peacock and Collett (2010) identify reading interventions such as *repeated readings*, *listening preview*, *phrase drill error correction*, and *asking key questions*. *Dialogic reading*, when the child tells the story to an adult, has been shown strong increases in reading skill when both teachers and families share the strategy. Although not as well studied as literacy, home-school math practice, with positive reinforcement, has shown results (Ginsburg-Block, Manz, & McWayne, 2010; Peacock & Collett, 2010). The Future of School Psychology Task Force on Family-School Partnerships (2007) cites numerous academic areas in which family skill reinforcement is effective and easily implemented with family instruction and ongoing follow-up.

## Tiered Adult Skills

### Universal

**Communication.** In addition to the general understandings of developing effective family-school partnerships, some specific helpful adult skill sets have been identified. Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson, & Beegle (2004) have conducted research and developed guidelines for collaboration between family and school. According to Blue-Banning et al, (2004), behavior that facilitates effective partnerships must include: communication,



commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect. Fette et al. (2009), when referring to their research state, “Specific behaviors important to communication with families were recommended, including using humor, being kind and encouraging, using good eye-contact and active listening strategies, providing a comfortable atmosphere, returning calls quickly, identifying children’s positive attributes and behaviors and sharing those, and being honest and direct” (p. 12). Blue-Banning et al. (2004), in examining what both families and teachers believe to be most important to staff and teachers in open and honest communication, found the following: listening carefully; avoiding jargon; being nonjudgmental, sensitive, and non-blaming; and including positive comments in addition to describing the challenges that a child currently experiences at home and school. Specific effective communication skills, discussed by Sheridan and Kratochwill (2008) in the context of family-school consultation, are “discrete verbal and nonverbal proficiencies...used to obtain and share information and establish and maintain positive relationships” (p. 66). These include (1) understanding and responding to nonverbal cues; (2) asking open questions; (3) using minimal encouragers; (4) paraphrasing and summarizing; (5) reflecting/restating; and (6) perspective taking – listening to and acknowledging different perspectives and adopting a strength-based approach.

## Upper Tiers

**Conflict resolution.** An important set of communication competencies in the upper tiers involves conflict resolution. Openly identifying and resolving conflict is needed in reaching out to all students and families. Sometimes conflict, misunderstandings, and communication breakdowns occur between home and school, even with strong universal practices, often because schools are working with many students and families are usually focusing on one. With genuine partnering, however, there is a commitment to resolve differences in the best interest of the student and his/her school success. Discussing and respecting differences can ignite helpful changes in practice and force courageous conversations (Minke & Anderson, 2008). Conflict can be more common and more intense when a student is struggling since issues of efficacy, frustration, and discouragement emerge on all sides (Minke & Anderson, 2008). More time and resources are often needed to resolve positively, thus tapping upper tier resources.

Differences that occur when families and schools partner should be accepted respectfully with an eye towards compromise and mutually acceptable solutions. Clarke, Sheridan, and Woods (2010) stress the importance of establishing jointly developed measurable goals to help keep a conflict focused on solving a student issue, using mutually obtained objective information. Rudney (2005) describes three non-adversarial approaches to managing conflict: *consensus-based strategies*, using structured problem-solving such as “define, plan, implement, and evaluate” (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011); *negotiation skills* such as perspective taking and identifying shared actions; and *strategies to deal with anger* which include focusing on the present, active listening, and using a mediator if needed. Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, and Soodak (2005) cite a “win-win” approach to negotiate agreements. Christenson and Sheridan (2001) outline effective strategies and communication skills that can resolve a specific concern and maintain respectful relationships. They suggest separating the person from the issue, focusing on mutual interests, exploring several options, and



basing decisions on objective criteria. Helpful communication skills to resolve conflict are: active listening, paraphrasing, humor, and summarizing. Sometimes conflict resolution requires mediation or legal action, such as is formally available in special education (Wright & Wright, 2005).

### **Partnering in the Special Education Process**

*Parents are experts on their children, and the teachers and therapists are experts in their fields. When the groups come together to share their expertise in setting goals and developing treatment plans for an individual child, the outcome is likely to be a more effective intervention approach.*

Kaiser and Stainbrook, 2010

All the identified partnering practices in the previous research briefs can be applied to students with disabilities and their families. However, because students are found eligible for special education because they meet specific criteria and need specialized instruction, more individualized and targeted (upper tier) partnering is often indicated in supporting positive relationships. Families and school staff may have already experienced challenges in successfully partnering around a child's school success (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, in 2011). Various levels of effectiveness may have been experienced, with relationships becoming burdened by ongoing needs for intervention and/or support despite months or even years of hard work. In order to fully and collaboratively partner with families when stress mounts and when people may not have the answers they seek, the most important groundwork to be laid is a basic and fundamental level of trust (Minke, 2008). A relationship can be more difficult to cultivate if families or educators have had negative experiences in the past or when partners' sense of efficacy is relatively weak (Hoover-Dempsey, Whitaker, & Ice, 2010). Efficacy deals with feelings that one is capable of helping a child learn as well as individuals feeling confident in their ability to partner with one another. Often teachers, students, and families are worried and lacking in confidence when a child is struggling. Following the special education process, applying problem-solving and data-based decision-making, and integrating thoughtful practices provide a road map for partnering with students with disabilities and their families.

### **The Special Education Process**

Special education is an important, school-based legal process with numerous mandates and specified parameters. Unfortunately, as found by the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002), this process has become overly focused on procedures and paperwork to the neglect of student outcomes. Harry (1992) specifically addressed the common role of the special education parent as a "consent giver" by recommending that parents become co-assessors and co-teachers in the special education process. Naseef (2001) states, that in reality, many family members of children with disabilities are already intimately involved with assessing, teaching, and partnering with professionals around their children's progress, outside of the special education process, and that this should be seamlessly continued in working with schools. Family participation tends to be dictated by due process rights and seldom includes active teaming in regards to assessment, coordinated intervention planning and implementation, and progress monitoring (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011). Even after a child is identified as having a disability, families may not understand the specific learning or emotional concerns or why certain interventions have been adapted (Peacock & Collett, 2010).





With the passage of IDEA 2004, the subsequent Final Rule (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) and ECEA (Colorado Department of Education, 2007), explicit partnering language is now in place which carefully and clearly defines the family role as full team members who are equal decision-makers in their child’s assessment, eligibility, IEP development, IEP implementation, and review. This language needs to be shared explicitly with educators and families to guide special education partnering at all times (C. Lines, personal communication, October 10, 2010). If these actions are implemented, teams will naturally create partnerships focused on student outcomes, honoring the law. Steps of the special education process linked with the actual language from the Final Rule (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) are stated below.

**Special Education Process and Key Legal Language to Guide Practice (U.S. Department of Education, 2006; Colorado Department of Education, 2007))**

<p>Assessment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must...include information provided by the parent... must review existing evaluation data, including evaluations and information provided by the parent ...and based on that review, and input from the child’s parents, identify what additional data, if any, are needed</li> </ul> <p>And additionally, for Specific Learning Disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...data-based documentation of repeated assessment of achievement ...which was provided to the child’s parents</li> </ul>
<p>Eligibility</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...a group of qualified professionals and the child’s parents determine whether the child is a child with a disability</li> </ul> <p>and additionally, for Specific Learning Disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...if the child has participated in a process that assesses the child’s responses to scientific, research-based intervention, the documentation that the child’s parents were notified about amount and nature of student performance data that would be collected ...and strategies for increasing the child’s rate of learning...and parents’ right to request an evaluation</li> </ul>
<p>IEP Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IEP Team for each child includes the parent...and, whenever appropriate, the child with a disability...in developing the IEP, the IEP team must consider ...the concerns of the parents for enhancing the education of their child</li> </ul>
<p>IEP Implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The IEP...must include a statement of annual measurable goals and...when periodic reports on the progress the child is making toward meeting the annual goals will be provided</li> <li>• Related services...<i>Parent counseling and training</i> means assisting the parents in understanding the special needs of their child; providing parents with information about child development; helping parents acquire the necessary skills that will help them to support the implementation of their child’s IEP or IFSP.</li> </ul>
<p>IEP Review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ...Revise the IEP, as appropriate, to address any lack of</li> </ul>



	expected progress...information about the child provided to, or by, the parents...
Re-evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Must...include information provided by the parent... must review existing evaluation data, including evaluations and information provided by the parent ...and based on that review, and input from the child’s parents, identify what additional data, if any, are needed</li> </ul>
Changing an Existing IEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...in changing an IEP, the parent of a child with a disability and the public agency may agree not to convene an IEP meeting</li> </ul>

A related service in IEP development is defined as “...developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education...*parent counseling and training* means assisting parents in understanding the special needs of their child; providing parents with information about child development; and helping parents to acquire the necessary skills that will allow them to support the implementation of their child’s IEP or IFSP” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 46761). According to Lake, Norlin, Copenhaver, and Rudio (2005), Congress wrote this into the law so as to “ have a process for parents to have an opportunity to learn their roles in the IEP process...provide them information...and make them an active part of the IEP...It is hoped that these related services, if used effectively, will create a strong partnership between the school and the parents.” (p.7) It is these authors’ belief, however, that this process has been largely overlooked by IEP teams. Examples of parent counseling and training might be: training in behavior management, using assistive technology in the home, learning sign language, learning how to participate on a team, and/or co-implementing the IEP goals (Lake et al. 2005). IEP teams should consider the need for parent counseling at the initial eligibility meeting (Lake et al, 2005). However, if the intervention, multidisciplinary, and IEP teams have been including families as equal partners throughout the process, as stated in the law (U.S. Department of Education, 2006), they will have been learning and partnering throughout – a natural form of counseling and training.

### Problem Solving and Data-Based Decision Making

Understanding of the intention and definition of Response to Intervention (RtI) has been inconsistent. Nationally, the terms RtI and MTSS are sometimes used interchangeably. A Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is a relatively new tiered instructional teaming approach for all students (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). This framework usually includes a team problem solving process, which examines student data, prescribes research-based interventions, measures their effectiveness, and adapts strategies accordingly. In most MTSS or RtI frameworks, referrals can originate with teachers or families or from universal screening results. Information from RtI is one allowed criterion in IDEA 2004 (United States Department of Education, 2006) for identifying students with specific learning disabilities and has been adopted as such by the state of Colorado (Colorado Department of Education, 2007). When the RtI process is mandated by law, as in Colorado, family and educator partners should be aware of this special education possibility when it is first initiated with a student. In such cases, an MTSS or RtI problem solving process can be a component of child find in identifying students who may have one of the “milder disabilities” – such as SLD, S/L, ED, ADHD – which are approximately 70% of the students with disabilities (Freedman, 2009). In an MTSS or RtI framework, as in any shared endeavor, it is important that educators and families have a





common understanding of the terms, core components, and responsibilities. Numerous resources have been developed to support this partnering process (Colorado Department of Education, 2008a,b, 2009; Klotz & Cantor, 2007; Reschly, 2008)

Currently, family-school partnering in MTSS or RtI frameworks may look different from school to school, depending on such factors as age of students, community characteristics, state/district requirements and staff-family training. Family-school partnering in RtI has been explicitly recommended by various researchers and organizations (Burns & Gibbons, 2008; Reschly, Coolong-Chaffing, Christenson, & Gutkin, 2007). Colorado explicitly includes families throughout the process (Colorado Department of Education, 2008b).

Focusing on student outcomes in special education requires a similar ongoing problem solving and data-based decision making process as that seen in MTSS and in RtI. The National Center for Response to Intervention (2010) has stated that these principles are for all students. Herr and Bateman (2006a; 2006b) provide explicit guidance on improving the special education Individualized Educational Program (IEP) process by including parents as authentic partners and focusing on obtaining baselines, prioritizing measurable goals, and assessing progress objectively. They stress the importance of clarity and a results focus, using data. It is their belief that one of the most prevalent causes of special education due process hearings and adversarial actions between families and schools is the lack of mutually developed measurable goals and regularly shared objective data in measuring progress towards these goals. According to Herr and Bateman, the ensuring of FAPE (Free Appropriate Public Education) rests on the data-based processes of having measurable goals, monitoring progress, reviewing and revising the IEP if insufficient progress. Using curriculum-based measurement, a common process used in Response-to-Intervention in “developing legally correct and educationally meaningful IEPs” has been suggested as a way to support improved achievement for students with disabilities (Yell & Stecker, 2003). By doing this, teachers and families together, as the IEP team, can be responsive to student patterns of performance and respond accordingly, leading to meaningful educational progress.

Kaiser and Stainbrook (2010) describe a home-school process, which has been developed for working with younger students with language disabilities. The family is explicitly included in teaching, reinforcing, and generalizing skills in naturalistic settings. This collaborative work has proven effective in developing communication skills by increasing the continuity and dosage of interventions and by integrating practice into daily routines. Regular communication and progress monitoring allows timely sharing of data and responsiveness. Simple data collection and reporting strategies allow all to understand and implement the system. The family works closely with other team members, continuously learning about the child’s needs and how to assist in IEP implementation. The researchers recommend this process be applied to older students with other needs, such as literacy or social-emotional-behavioral skills, as a means to more effectively support student learning.

### **Thoughtful Practices**

A component of effective family-school partnering in special education is incorporating “thoughtful actions” into everyday practices. Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) outline four core beliefs that lead to effective family - school collaboration. These beliefs seem to have significance for families of students with disabilities and can help frame sensitive and thoughtful family-school partnering. These are: 1) all parents have dreams for their children and want to best for them, 2) all parents have the capacity to support their children’s learning, 3) parents and school staff should be equal partners, 4) the responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders (p. 28-39).



Understanding these beliefs, when incorporated into the legal and outcome-focused practices, helps practitioners develop empathy and understanding for families in special education. Linking with community resources, understanding the grieving process, and creating responsive meetings are all helpful partnering actions.

**Collaborating with community.** Connecting families with community resources is often a practice, which occurs as a result of ongoing interventions at school when there is the realization that supplementary support is indicated or because of a family request. School personnel who work with families in the special education process should be knowledgeable about availability, accessibility, and appropriateness of resources for specific needs. Empowering families to independently identify areas of strengths, concerns, and support occurs within the context of family-centered practices during collaboration with a school professional (Sheridan, Taylor, & Woods, 2008). It is helpful to have an established protocol which includes a discussion of financial and insurance issues, collaborative partnering with the school, and ongoing follow-up support for the family. “Family-driven care” (Duchnowski & Kutash, 2007) stresses the importance of the family seeing the school and community supports as a continuous continuum or “system of care.” This requires joint education about how each system operates so that each partner understands his/her shared role in supporting a student or family. Joint training with educators, family members, and community resources can be effective in sharing effective interventions and practices (C. Lines, personal communication, April 26, 2010).

**Understanding emotions.** When a child is diagnosed with a disability, medical condition or a mental illness, a family often experiences stages of grieving and emotional learning (Naseef, 2001). Moses (1983) describes this process as the continuous mourning over the loss of a child who is typically developing. Depending on age of the child and the family’s supports and protective factors, various strategies may be helpful at specific times. In partnering at the targeted-intensive tiers, it is important that school staff be aware of the possible grieving stages and incorporate that knowledge into the partnering processes. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969), in her original work on death and dying, identified the stages as denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and acceptance. Foley (2006), in his work with families of students with disabilities, specifically found that, although grieving was an individual process, families tended to experience a task-orientated cycle of *disorientation/disequilibrium, searching, nothingness/acknowledgement, recovery, and maintenance*. The latter two phases help the families to increase in everyday coping, understanding of their child’s needs, and greater feelings of acceptance and well-being. Naseef (2001) describes how families may continually re-experience these feelings, challenging school and community staff to understand and support as needed. He describes the family-professional interactions as “perilous partnerships.” Certain considerations, which might be helpful to practitioners, program developers, and policy makers, are highlighted by Foley (2006). These include the following: (a) having a child with a disability is stressful and to react to that stress emotionally is neither unusual nor abnormal; (b) the adjustment needs of the family cannot be separated from the developmental needs of the child; (c) the demands of daily life for families are enormous and constant; (d) there is no one right way to respond and therefore families must be afforded a range of resources with regard to sensitive and high quality care for their child. Moses (1983) talks about the importance of supporting the family in accepting a new and different reality. He offers these words to guide professionals:

How do parents survive the loss of a profound and central dream shattered by an impairment? How do parents grow from such a trauma and become enhancers of their



child's life as well as of their own lives? The answer appears to lie in working through grief in the context of meaningful human relationship. (p. 16)

**Creating Caring Meetings.** Designing responsive, two-way, collaborative meetings is important in special education. Although there are not absolute, replicated findings in the research, numerous best practices have been identified. Facilitation of meetings and interactive discussions need to be thoughtful and intentional. (Minke & Anderson, 2008). Preparation, organization, and knowing participants' purposes are all important in effective discussions. Identifying a liaison at the school to support a family in IEP implementation can be helpful. (Colorado Department of Education, 2008a; Miller & Kraft, 2008). This person can be available for questions about team processes for both professionals and families and support true teaming. The central role of identifying strengths, both for a student and a family, helps the family to feel respected and included (Miller & Kraft, 2008; Sheridan, Taylor, & Woods, 2008). Minke and Anderson (2008) stress that relatively small adjustments can develop meaningful participation of families. These can include ensuring families have time on the agenda, asking family members to bring their data, ensuring students are present and participatory, providing information in advance, and supporting co-facilitation between family members and professionals. Reiman, Beck, Coppola, and Engles (2010) surveyed families about the IEP meeting process and summarize their findings as follows: insure families have information about what to expect; invite families to provide input and participate in goal development; follow generally-accepted protocols of starting and ending on time and staying for entire meetings; support interpreted knowledge of the process for families learning English; and set a "mutually respectful and inclusive tone".

A strategy for working towards strength-based IEP meetings is to meaningfully include the student with a disability in the IEP meeting (which is a component of the Final Rule, 2006). This meaningful inclusion is often accomplished through student-led IEP meetings. In these meetings the student is central in partnering with IEP team members to develop their own goals, discuss their learning accommodations and modifications, and plan for their future (Childre & Chambres, 2005; Martin et al., 2006).

Home visits, connecting for coffee, small meetings, and cozy venues should all be considered. Serving food and including the families in choosing times and locations for meetings can give a respectful and important message about their importance as full partners. Including collaborative efforts in planning with home and school participants is helpful and involves such gestures as asking the family what might work for them (Minke & Anderson, 2008). Smaller meetings, with only those staff truly needing to be present, often create a more comfortable and efficient settings for all meeting attendees (Steve Kraft, personal communication, May 22, 2009). Similarly, communicating in an ongoing way with casual conversations between dyads and triads is often more efficient and comfortable than formal meetings. (Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011).

According to Breen & Fiedler (2003), "It is the responsibility of professionals to invite and welcome these insights and to empower families to become active members of their children's educational team" (p. 576). In describing transition teaming for students with disabilities, families identify elements such as communication, caring, connection, and celebration as key to building relationships that focus on true collaboration and a two-way exchange of information. Key strategies in encouraging participation can be summarized as follows (Breen & Fiedler, 2003; Colorado Department of Education, 2009; Lines, Miller, & Arthur-Stanley, 2011): (1) ask for family input as to student strengths, challenges, attitude, previous interventions;(2) ensure the family is an equal team member by intentionally telling



them about their role and importance; (3) involve families in identifying and reviewing data, setting measurable goals, designing interventions and monitoring progress; (3) develop ongoing communication and coordination processes; and (4) focus on student strengths and successes and resolving conflict as needed. It is somewhat a cliché. and should be thought of as a common sense practice but cannot be stressed enough, that in all interactions the focus should be to share what is working well, to focus on the positive, and then constructively to problem solve (while listening to all voices) for those times that are difficult (Kasa-Hendrickson, Buswell, & Harmon, 2009; Sheehey, 2006).

### **Research to Practice Application: Coordinating Tiered Home-School Learning for Every Student and Throughout the Special Education Process**

- Encourage every family to systematically and frequently discuss school, supervise homework and after-school time, warmly support high expectations, and reinforce student effort.
- Request home learning coordination from every family and educator, stated clearly from leadership; provide information on research; provide options and request feedback.
- Foster two-way dialogue between families and teachers about curriculum
- Offer families choices in what can work best within their routines and knowledge at home, tying to culture and language preferences.
- Ask families what they need to support learning at home, follow-up frequently, and offer liaison support for questions and support of efforts.
- Share information about support groups, organizations, and advocacy options.
- Link home and school efforts for students by including them in planning, communicating, reinforcing.
- Define educator and family roles and responsibilities in homework, always focusing on student success and ongoing teaming; problem-solve whenever needed.
- Design home-school interventions that focus on specific, measurable outcomes.
- Include regular, joint monitoring of student progress, with shared discussion and planning, using data.
- Follow up regularly to problem-solve, encourage, and continue family education; use one-to-one communication in addition to group sharing.
- Apply thoughtful practices such as collaborating with the community, understanding emotions, and creating caring meetings.

(Christenson & Carlson, 2005; Ginsburg-Block, Manz, & McWayne, 2010; Dawson, 2008; Reschly, 2008)

Please Note: The information in this research brief for the Colorado Department of Education *MTSS FSCP Implementation Guide* is from an unpublished CDE Exceptional Student Services Unit document, *Effective Family-School Partnering for Students with Disabilities: Research Review*, July 30, 2011. Sections of this review were taken from Lines, C., Miller, G.L., & Arthur-Stanley, A. (2011). *The power of family-school partnering (FSP): A practical guide for school mental health professionals and educators*. New York: Routledge.

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