Engaging Families in Transition

Engaging Families During Secondary School & Transition to Adulthood

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Learning Targets

- I can name 3 reasons why family involvement is important to transition success
- I can apply the family systems framework to our CTT work with families
- I can identify what is and is not school-family-community engagement
- I can determine what types of family engagement activities our CTT currently does well & identify at least 1 new activity we could implement
- I can use specific strategies for engaging culturally diverse families with my CTT

Thinking about Adulthood….

- What do you consider to be a successful adult life for students with whom you work?
- How should families be involved?

What’s so Important about Family Involvement?

A New Wave of Evidence (2002). www.sedl.org/connections
School Practices are KEY

The strongest, most consistent predictors of parent involvement at home and school are the specific school programs and teacher practices that encourage and guide parent involvement.

Dr. Joyce Epstein, Johns Hopkins University

http://www.dropoutprevention.org/webcast/11-engaging-families-pathway-college

The Family as a Mobile

In a mobile, all the pieces, no matter what the size or shape, can be grouped together and balanced by shortening or lengthening the strings attached, or rearranging the distance between pieces.

So it is with a family. None of the family members is identical to any other; they are all different and at different levels of growth.

As in a mobile, you can’t arrange one without thinking of the other.


Family Systems Framework

- Family Characteristics
  - Description of the family
  - Personal characteristics
  - Special challenges

- Family Life Cycle
  - Stages and Transitions
  - Changes in Characteristics
  - Changes in Functions
  - Changes in Life Roles

- Extended Family
- Parent-child
- Siblings

Family Functions
- Affection, Self-esteem, Economics, Daily care, Socialization, Recreation, Education, Spiritual

Changing Characteristics of Families: What does it mean for us?

- What are our current expectations for families to be engaged in transition?

- Does the changing composition of families impact our assumptions about postschool outcomes?
Engaging Families in Transition

Role of Siblings & Extended Families in Transition

- Provide first experiences in peer relationships
- Support inclusion in neighborhood, school, & community
- Older siblings often are role models for postschool outcomes
- Siblings may take on the role care or coordination of services
- Students often turn to extended family members (aunts/uncles, grandparents, etc.) for support post high school
- Advantageous for transition professionals to have a sense of sibling relationships & support involvement as desired by family

Thought Questions about Siblings & Extended Family Members….

- What is the potential role of siblings and extended family members with the families you work with?
- In which situations would it be positive? Which ones would be negative?
- Do you think it is appropriate to have brothers and sisters (younger and older) involved in educational planning and implementation? At what age? What about grandparents? Aunts & uncles? Cousins?
- What strategies might enhance positive interactions and involvement of siblings & extended family members in transition planning?

Family Functions

- Economic
- Daily care
- Recreation
- Socialization
- Self-esteem
- Affection
- Education
- Spiritual functions
Engaging Families in Transition

**Family Life Cycle**

- Developmental
- Later in life
- Independence
- Launching
- Partners
- With Adolescents
- With Small Children
- Unexpected

**Emergent Adult Role**

- Assumptions in society
- What is reality for families with adolescents with disabilities?
- Stressor for families: uncertain of status & capabilities of adolescent with disabilities
- Typical experiences for teenagers often missed with adolescent with disabilities
- Cultural issues: adulthood ≠ independence
- Obstacles families face in self-determination
- Strategies for supporting self-determination

**Thought Questions… Emergent Adult Roles for a Student you know….

- How has this student participated in any emergent adult roles?
- How do you think the student’s family feel about promoting self-determination or more adult roles?
- Are there strategies you can think of to assist the student’s family in overcoming obstacles to supporting adult roles?
- Is it possible to promote self-determination within family-centered and culturally appropriate ways?

**Pause and Reflect**

**Learning Targets**

- I can name 3 reasons why family involvement is important to transition success
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**Reflective Questions**

- What did you learn?
- What do you still want to know?
Strategies for Engaging Families during Secondary School and Transition to Adulthood

Models of Family-Community-School Engagement

Engagement is NOT….. Engagement Is ….

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Parents are more likely to become involved when they:

- Understand they SHOULD be involved
- Know they are CAPABLE of making a contribution
- Feel INVITED by the school and their children

(Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2004)

Engaging Families in Transition

Strategies to Support Families in Transition

1. Encourage Early Expectations
2. Help Parents to Recognize the Importance of their Contributions
3. Support Parents to Honor Choices of their Child
4. Increase Role of Social Support Network
5. Address Parent Concerns Regarding Future

Why Focus on Culturally Diverse Families?

- Participation is lower due to: unfamiliarity with US practices, different perspectives level of involvement need, cultural unresponsiveness of the system (Al-Hassan & Gardner, 2002)
- Professionals operating under assumptions inherent in special education and practice. (Rao, 2001)
- Insensitivity toward the family’ s culture – during transition, this is particularly true – parents report transition services are unresponsiveness and even hurtful (deFur, et al., 2001).
- Culturally diverse families are less involved in school-based activities; passive participation may in fact lead to poor postschool outcomes (Greene et al., 2003)

1. Which Activities does your CTT Currently Support?
2. Write down what it is you are doing
3. Pick one that you currently don’t support
4. Come up with an example of how you could

Caring professionals who were honest, clear and knowledgeable & shared information and listened to families made a difference
Strong partnerships promotes cultural understanding\& responsiveness in transition planning

During Transition

- Families want their child to be as capable and self-sufficient as possible
- Families seek majority of support from informal and community networks
- Families view certain transition activities as highly important
- Families priorities for involvement differ from professional priorities (family and culture)
- Report more negative experiences than Euro-American families
- Parental influence leads to more positive outcomes
- Caring professionals who were honest, clear and knowledgeable & shared information and listened to families made a difference
- Strong partnerships promotes cultural understanding\& responsiveness in transition planning
Where do we go from here?

How do I connect? Where do I start? Will I offend someone?

What do I say? Do I have the knowledge? Am I uncomfortable?

Posture of Cultural Reciprocity
(Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012)

Steps to Cultural Reciprocity

Step 1: Identify the cultural values embedded in the professional interpretation of a student's disability and special services

Step 2: Find out whether the family recognizes and values these assumptions, and if not, how their view differs from yours

Step 3: Acknowledge and give explicit respect to any cultural differences and fully explain the cultural basis of the professional assumption

Step 4: Through discussion and collaboration, set about determining the most effective way of adapting professional interpretation and services to the family's value system

Strategies to Enhance Education & Cultural Reciprocity

- Seek out informal social supports
  - “cultural brokering” liaisons who can negotiate solutions acceptable to CLD families
  - Visit informal cultural networks
  - Offer workshops @ ICNs for families using culturally responsive methods
  - Initiate personal interactions not just written information

- Empower families
  - Recognize that families may be surprised at the expected level of interaction
  - Provide culturally responsive information & welcoming environment
  - Collaborate with extended family members
  - Learn about how families support education at home & in community
  - Keep families informed
  - Ask parent how they want to communicate with you

- Enhance cultural competence
  - Know your own world view
  - Learn about your families
  - Acknowledge and respect cultural views
  - Develop mutual goals

One (rural) School’s Approach....

- Shared Responsibility
  - Compact with families
  - SPIN Team
  - Parents on school-wide discipline plan committee

- Staff, Student & Parent Buy-in
  - Survey of parents, students and staff
  - Tied to student academic & transition outcomes
  - Grade level meetings

- Creating a Welcoming Environment
  - Home visits
  - Parent workshops
  - Culture fair (16 languages spoken)
  - Curriculum nights
  - Parent Activity Nights


Other Real Examples!

• Using volunteers to call, email, door hangers, distribute flyers about P-T conferences

• Redesigning Freshman Orientation session to: meet with teachers, learn about HS expectations, connect with community resources, tour school

• Family coordinator held a Fall Family Academy

• Parent liaisons:
  – Build relationships with families
  – Train educational staff
  – Attend P-T conferences
  – Teach families how to use online student tracking systems


Effective Strategies

• Welcome Families
  – Post welcoming signs & direct families to a staff member to help
  – Invite families to visit
  – Distribute flyers in community
  – Make phone calls to families
  – Contact people families trust (churches, service organizations)

• Meet on their Turf
  – Meet and greets in neighborhood
  – Offer classes to families
  – Hold meetings in locations where they go

Effective Strategies cont.

• Once is NOT Enough
  – Communicate often & at regular intervals
  – Repeat key actions weekly/monthly (e.g., Friday Flyer)

• Use All Communication Methods
  – Announcements on radio, bulletin boards, etc.
  – Use your community organizations
  – Create phone/email trees
  – Work with community to access internet

• Take Time to Talk to Families
  – Frequent meetings (formal and informal)
  – Use materials/activities to understand family values about transition


Pause and Reflect

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Reflective Questions

• What have we discussed thus far?
• What did you learn?
• What do you still want to know?
What's Next for Your CTT??

I can do it!