

CLAIMING CHILDREN



FEDERATION OF FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH ... FALL 1999

Special Theme Issue

Collaborating with Schools

Barbara Huff, Executive Director, Federation

Schools are a major part of our children's lives. We can have quality mental health services and sound strategies to keep our children at home and in the community, but if schools are not on board with our children and families, we will have a hard time planning for their future success. The entire system of care is important to our children, and that includes succeeding in school.

As we all know, our children are most vulnerable to school issues. The dropout rate is documented at more than 50 percent for our children, and too many are picked up by the justice system once they leave school. This is unacceptable.

Kids need to be in school and they need to feel successful. No parent believes that schools are obligated to go it alone. In fact, schools need families to help them help our children. Families also know that mental health services are a key — if our children can succeed emotionally, they have a better chance of suc-

ceeding academically. Thus, as we look toward a new school year, we must strengthen our resolve to build collaborative partnerships with schools and the community agencies that serve them.

Collaborating with Schools — Easier Said Than Done

Family members continue to say that schools make or break effective collaborations. In many cases, resistance from school personnel stems from fears related to serving our children. In building effective collaborations, we need to recognize the fears and help educators to move beyond them. Some of the prevalent fears educators have are:

- If we identify students as needing support we will have to provide that support, and we don't have the resources to do so.
- We don't know how to address the child's emotional and behavioral needs, so it is easier for us if the student does not attend school.

(continued on page 2)

INSIDE

Collaborating with Schools **1**

Update on IDEA '97 **4**

How To Keep Your Cool in School **8**

Family Voice, Teacher Voice **10**

Supporting Your Child **12**

Promising Practices **14**

Message from the President **16**

Dixie Jordan, Deborah Toth-Dennis, and Tom Hanley served as guest consultants to this issue.



Collaborating with Schools (continued from page 1)

- Schools cannot be therapists for children, so it is better that they go elsewhere for help.

Students who need support to be successful in school do not always receive it. Failure to address the needs of students with emotional disturbance is a portent for poor community results as well as poor academic results. The failure to identify students with emotional disturbance in schools has been well documented. And the numbers are staggering. Researchers who conducted the National Longitudinal Transition Study found that within three to five years of leaving school, 48 percent of young women with emotional disturbance were mothers, as compared to 28 percent of young women with other disabilities. Fifty-eight percent of the students with emotional disturbance had been arrested, compared to 19 percent of those with other disabilities. And, 10 percent of youth with emotional disturbance were living in a correctional facility, halfway house, drug treatment center, or “on the street” — twice as many as the students with other disabilities.

As families and advocates, we need to help schools address these fears in productive ways. Schools need the support of a system of care. Mental health needs of all children should be addressed where the children are.

Federal legislation — specifically the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) and its 1997 amendments — is helping to expand educators’ thinking about meeting the mental health needs of students. As families, we can use this law to push for earlier identification and support. We need to be vigilant in showing the fallacy of waiting (sometimes years) until the child fails before discussing possible services.

Further, we need to help schools find sound ways to address professional shortages. Schools will never have

Collaboration Works

Tressa Eide, Mississippi

When I think of a positive collaboration with the school, a certain student comes to mind. She was 18 years old and had mild developmental disabilities and mental health problems. Six weeks before she was to graduate from high school with a certificate, she became violent and threatened someone at school, an offense that typically resulted in suspension.

I got the call at the Mississippi Families as Allies office and went to the school, where I met the assistant principal. He ushered me and the youth into a room. I was expecting the worst, but to my surprise, he began the conversation by stating that he did not want to suspend the girl. He looked at her and said he was proud of how far she had come. He asked her, “What can we do to help you get through the next few weeks?” She looked directly at me and said, “I want to work with you!”

The assistant principal and I worked out a contingency plan. If she refrained from violence and threats, the student would be allowed to work as a volunteer in the Federation office on Friday afternoons. I picked her up each Friday and we had lunch together before going to the office.

I am proud to say she received her certificate and continues to volunteer in our office. This past year she received the volunteer of the year award.

enough professionals to meet the needs of all children, and so they must look to the community for assistance. As family members, we can help them learn about innovative approaches and encourage them to try promising practices. And rather than frame the issue as, “what is wrong with the schools,” we should shift our focus to how schools can better use related services, community services, and other resources to serve students more effectively.

Finally, we can encourage schools to ask

(continued on page 3)

“Advocates from Keys for Networking in Kansas have worked hard to develop a positive relationship with the school district superintendent and the mayor’s office. This year our efforts resulted in a major city-wide rally to celebrate the start of the new school year. Parents, children, educators, and policymakers held a candlelight vigil on the steps of the state capital where they committed to safe, strong partnerships between home, school, and community.”

Jane Adams
Keys for Networking
Kansas



Collaborating with Schools (continued from page 2)

the children what they need to be successful. It's amazing how often they will tell you exactly what they need. And when they do, it is up to us to make sure they get it.

A Commitment To Collaborate

As the articles in this special topical issue of *Claiming Children* show, there are many committed people who are doing the right things for children. As we start the school year, I invite you to read about how families are forming collaborative partnerships with schools and are seeing

positive results. This issue contains tips from family members, and suggestions from school personnel. Of particular importance are the reflections from young people on how schools can support and help them succeed.

It is my hope that these efforts to collaborate with schools will expand so that some day we can look back and wonder why any child was allowed to fail or not receive the help he or she needed. I look forward to the day when we can truly say, "We take care of all children in our schools."

Developing a Collaborative Partnership with the School

Pat Harles, North Dakota

My son entered first grade with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). He is now in high school and thanks, in part, to the collaborative partnership I was able to form with educators, he may finish school "out" of special education. It wasn't always easy, but here are some of the things that fostered collaboration.

- **Use a strength-based approach when developing the IEP.** In first grade, we began the IEP meeting by looking at my son's strengths and our family's strengths — and writing them down in the IEP. The educators never told us we were bad parents or that we needed to go to training. Rather, we talked about how to build upon his strengths at school and at home. We also looked at positive intervention strategies. The important thing was that we did not let the school do all of the work. We were involved and educated about our rights.
- **Never give up.** There were times when the best plans got off track. We always went back to the IEP meeting and talked about what we might do differently. They never blamed us. They made us feel like we knew our child best and had important insights to offer.
- **Expect some teachers not to follow through.** When we encountered a teacher who was not following through with the IEP, we'd request a meeting and

go back to the table. We were very careful not to be critical, but rather to frame the issue as, "What can we do that might work?" Teachers need much more support. One strategy we found useful was to bring in the psychologist to explain our child's disability and how it might affect his behavior at school. We also used this strategy successfully to dispel teachers' misperceptions that with a new treatment we'd see a major turnaround.

- **Meet with the principal before school starts.** We found that it was important to lay the facts on the table. We described the special cycle of behaviors — what to expect and what had worked in the past to help him.
- **Do not back down.** While we came to these meetings as team members and avoided taking an adversarial stance in these instances, we knew our rights. Should we have had to "go to war", we were ready and willing to use the legal system.

Collaborating with Teachers

- **Remember that teachers are people too.** Be polite, even if you are annoyed. Help the teacher understand how important she or he is in your child's life.
- **Give the teacher a "heads up" on your child.** Each school year, I give my child's teacher a binder. In this binder I put relevant information: what worked in the past and what had failed; information about my child's disability; and information on modifications that worked in the past.
- **Don't be offended when a teacher says, "I have been teaching for over 25 years, so I am sure we will get along fine," and dismisses you.** Don't take anything personally. Be prepared to step in and help when reality sets in.
- **Tell the teacher about a lesson that your child particularly liked.** Such discussions let the teacher know that he or she reached your child and that the methodology was a success. Encourage your child to share feedback of this nature.
- **Send thank you notes at the end of the semester and at the end of the year.** Even if you cannot think of one good thing to say, thank the teacher for the opportunity to work with him or her.

Susan Rogers
Texas



Update on IDEA '97

Dixie Jordan, PACER Center, Minnesota

The U.S. Department of Education has reported what many parents already know — that children with emotional disabilities are the least well-served group of students nationwide. New provisions in the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) and its 1997 Amendments provide a unique opportunity for parents and teachers to make a difference in how children are educated. IDEA '97 ensures that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team considers strategies to help a child before behaviors become severe, promotes the use of positive interventions, and strengthens the role of families. Specific areas of major interest to families of children with emotional disturbance (ED) include:

- Evaluation and eligibility.
- Individualized Education Program.
- Suspensions.
- Removals for drugs, weapons, or dangerous behavior.

The parents' voice in placement is really important, since children with emotional disturbance are often placed in unnecessarily restrictive settings. A strong preference in the law is for the regular classroom and school, with appropriate supports.

Evaluation and Eligibility

Children must be evaluated in all areas of suspected disability, even if the needs are not part of the disability category under which a child qualifies for services. For instance, if a child qualifies for services because of an emotional disability but also has a learning disability, he or she should be evaluated in both areas. If needed, services must be provided in both areas.

Parents are to be part of the team of persons who determine whether the

child needs special education and related services, what services will be provided, and where they will be provided.

Functional behavioral assessment (FBA), a process for collecting data to understand *why* a child behaves as he or she does, is required whenever a child is removed from his or her educational placement for more than 10 school days in a school year. It also is useful whenever there are questions about why a specific misbehavior continues to occur. Understanding the purpose of inappropriate behaviors should lead to the development of positive interventions to help children learn necessary behavior skills. If a child already has a functional behavioral assessment and a behavior intervention plan, the team must review the plan. An IEP meeting is required if any member of the team believes the plan should be changed.

What Parents Can Do

- Request an evaluation if one is needed. Put your request in writing.
- Attend all meetings related to your child's educational program.
- Be sure that placement decisions are based on specific data about your child, not just on convenience.
- Request a functional behavioral assessment if your child's behavior does not improve with typical school interventions, or if there are unanswered questions about why your child behaves in a particular way.
- Ask about the credentials or expertise of persons conducting the functional behavioral assessment and how the process will be completed.

Individualized Educational Programs

Parents (and schools) can invite anyone with special knowledge or expertise

(continued on page 5)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and its 1997 Amendments is a practical law that offers excellent supports for children with emotional and behavioral issues and the families who love them.



Update on IDEA '97 (continued from page 4)

about a child's educational needs to the IEP team meeting.

Two new "special factors" among a list of factors to be considered by the IEP team will positively affect education for children with emotional disabilities. They are:

- The use of positive interventions for children whose behaviors interfere with learning. Positive interventions are not punishments or negative consequences, but are strategies specifically designed to teach a child acceptable ways of dealing with anger, stress, or other behavioral concerns.
- Whether a child needs an assistive technology (AT) device and services to make progress in school. Assistive technology can include computer use, books on tape, or any other equipment needed by a child to make progress in his or her program. Assistive technology services include teaching parents how to use an assistive technology device to support the child's learning.

In addition, IEP's now must address how a child will participate in the general education curriculum and what supports are needed for that to happen. Modifications made to the general curriculum must be written into the IEP.

A general education teacher is to participate in developing the IEP and should describe the supports he or she needs for a child to be successfully included in the regular classroom. IEP's must be accessible to any teacher or service provider who will help implement services, and they must be informed about any specific accommodations, modifications, or other supports that are in the IEP.

Parents are to be informed of their child's progress at least as often as progress is reported to parents of children who do not have disabilities. Reports must let parents know if their child

is making progress toward IEP goals and if the progress is sufficient for the child to meet the goals by the end of the year.

What Parents Can Do

As a parent, you should ask for an IEP meeting when you believe your child:

- Needs assistive technology to complete homework or class work, or to be included in school activities.
- Needs accommodations and additional supports to succeed in the regular classroom.
- Is having behavioral problems but has no positive interventions in the IEP. The team is required to consider such interventions for children whose behavior interferes with learning.
- Is not making sufficient progress to pass classes or meet IEP goals by the end of the year. There may be a need for more or different services.

Suspensions

The IDEA regulations permit suspension for 10 school days in a school year without services, if services are not provided to children who do not have disabilities. After the tenth day of removal, however, needed services must be provided during any further removals. Services must allow a child to continue to make appropriate progress in his or her classes, as well as to progress in achieving the IEP goals. The IEP team must meet after the tenth day of suspension in a school year to develop a plan for functional assessment or to review the existing behavioral intervention plan.

If a child has been removed from school for more than 10 days, either at one time or through a series of suspensions that constitute a pattern of exclusion, a change of placement has occurred. Considerations in determining whether a child's placement has been changed due

(continued on page 6)

.....

"Bring a copy of your child's IEP to all parent-teacher conferences. Go over it with each of your child's teachers in order to be certain that all of the child's teachers have seen the document and understand your child's needs. This will help gather feedback for future IEP meetings as well."

Teri Toothman
West Virginia

.....



"IDEA creates opportunities for educators and families to form partnerships and to improve outcomes for children with emotional disabilities. Parents must use their knowledge of their children to build programs that truly improve their lives."

Dixie Jordan
Minnesota

Update on IDEA '97 (continued from page 5)

to a series of suspensions include the length of each suspension, how close the suspensions are to one another, and how many times the child was suspended.

If a change of placement has occurred as a result of a series of short-term suspensions, or because of a disciplinary removal for drugs, weapons, or dangerous behavior, the IEP team must conduct a manifestation determination review (for more information, see the section "Removals for Drugs, Weapons, or Dangerous Behavior").

What Parents Can Do

If frequent suspension is a concern:

- Ask for an IEP meeting to discuss alternatives to suspension. Ask what positive interventions have been used and what the results have been.
- If suspensions have exceeded 10 school days in a school year, discuss whether the removals constitute a pattern, and what can be done about them. Ask for data on the removals. Ask questions such as "Why?" and "How long?"
- Read the school rules before going to an IEP meeting, and know what behaviors will result in suspension. If your child does not (is unable to) follow those rules regularly, talk about what could be done to teach positive behaviors.

Removals for Drugs, Weapons, or Dangerous Behavior

Schools may order a child placed in an appropriate interim alternative educational setting (IAES) for up to 45 calendar days for having weapons or drugs (or trying to sell controlled substances, such as their own medications) at school or any school function. The IEP team will determine the location of the interim alternative educational setting, which must be based on the needs of

the child. The child's IEP must be fully implemented in the interim alternative educational setting, and he or she must return to the previous school program when the 45 days (maximum) are up.

Removal on the grounds of "dangerousness" is slightly different than for drugs or weapons, because it requires that schools initiate a hearing to determine if the child poses a serious threat despite their best efforts to intervene. A hearing officer may order the child to be placed in an appropriate interim alternative educational setting for up to 45 calendar days.

Interim alternative educational settings must be appropriate to the needs of children placed there. A child must be able to participate in the general curriculum, receive all services in the IEP, and receive instruction and supports so that the behavior does not recur.

For children who have had a disciplinary change in placement for 45 days, the IEP team must conduct a manifestation determination review to determine whether the behavior in question is part of the child's disability. To help the team determine if the behavior is part of the child's disability, find out if :

- The child's placement and services are appropriate.
- The child understands the impact and consequences of the behavior.
- The child can control the behavior.

If the behavior is not a manifestation, the child can be disciplined like any other student, except that appropriate services must continue during disciplinary removals.

What Parents Can Do

- Visit any proposed interim alternative educational setting before agreeing to the placement. Ask about positive behavior role models and what ap-

(continued on page 7)



Update on IDEA '97 (continued from page 6)

proach will be used to help your child learn the necessary skills to be successful upon return to the regular placement.

- If you are a parent of color, ask for data on ethnic or racial representation in any proposed placement. Such placements must not become “dumping grounds” for children of color; call your state human rights office if you have questions or concerns.
- Make sure your child will use the same textbooks and benefit from the same kind of instruction that is available in the regular school setting, and that all IEP services are available with

appropriately licensed personnel.

- For a manifestation review meeting, bring all information, including any psychological letters or reports. The obligation is on the school district to show that your child’s behavior is not related to his or her disability.
- In a hearing called by the school for removal on the grounds of dangerousness, make recommendations to the hearing officer about what you think will work and will not work. The hearing officer will determine the placement, which must be appropriate to the child’s needs.

Parent Tips for Making the Most of IEP Meetings

Janet Smith, FACES of Stark County, Ohio

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting offers parents an opportunity to advocate for their child. The process is most successful when it is viewed as a partnership that includes the parent, the child, school personnel, and the entire community support system.

As a parent, whether you have a good relationship with the school or find yourself only talking to your child’s teachers and related service personnel when there are problems, the following suggestions can help foster more open communication.

- **Do your homework.** Know your child’s rights and responsibilities under federal and state laws. A parent can request an IEP at any point during the year. An IEP meeting should be convened whenever there is a significant change in the child’s circumstances.
- **Come prepared to discuss your child’s needs and abilities.** You may enhance your preparedness by being a familiar face in your child’s school. For example, join the PTA and volunteer in the classroom.
- **Don’t sign anything unless you understand it and agree with it.** You have a right to ask questions and feel comfortable with all information presented.
- **Focus on more than academic goals.** You should discuss other skills — technical, social, and cultural — that your child will need in order to succeed in life. Make sure your child’s schedule includes opportunities to participate in the arts and other areas that may be of interest to him or her.
- **Make sure the IEP addresses the whole child.** The written plan should make provisions for recognizing and rewarding self-discipline and personal responsibility.
- **Take an advocate with you to the meeting.** The law provides that you may bring someone with you who can help produce a sound IEP for your child. If you do not know someone, contact your local parent organization for suggestions. Make sure you trust the person before inviting him or her to attend the IEP meeting.

New project supports families!

The Families and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE) aims to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities. It links families, advocates, and self-advocates to communicate the new focus of IDEA. The Federation of Families is a partner with FAPE.

Here are some of the ways FAPE may support family involvement:

- *Provide written information about IDEA '97.*
- *Offer training on IDEA '97.*

Refer individuals to national, state, and local disability organizations and advocates.

Provide information on best practices to improve results for students with disabilities.

Contact the Federation or FAPE for more information. You can reach FAPE at:

PACER Center, 4826 Chicago Avenue South, Minneapolis, MN 55417-1098. Or call toll free: (888)248-0822. Voice: (612) 827-2966. TTY: (612) 827-7770. www.fape.org



Youth Speak Out

How To Keep Your Cool in School

Kenny Rogers, Youth Advocate, Texas

Entering high school for the first time can be extremely scary. The school is bigger, the halls are noisier, the kids are giants, you have choices of what you want to eat in the cafeteria, strange faces are everywhere you look, and this all happens in the first 30 minutes. For kids who are hyperactive or who have anxiety, this is stimulus overload. It is no wonder that many times it is hard for adults to get us up in the morning to go to school.

Ideas for Making the Transition to High School

Here are a few ways that my teacher helped me cope with high school.

- **Take the student to the high school and show him or her around.** Do this while the student is still in middle school and before the school year ends.
- **Make sure the student is introduced to key people** (e.g., counselor, front office staff, nurse, attendance staff, principal). This helps in two ways: the student feels that there are some people there who know him or her; the student can put a face with the name of the key people.
- **Make sure the student has support when classes change.** Students need help surviving the rush.
- **Make sure the student understands the lunchroom.** Students have more choices and are expected to pick one in a hurry and move on. My freshman year, I ate the same thing every-day for lunch. It wasn't because I didn't like anything else — it was just what came first on the list to choose from. Try and get a copy of the menu in advance so you can make your decision the night before.

Once in high school, it is helpful to find

It Is Very Important To Stay in School

Angela Nelson, Illinois

I did not graduate from high school. I often wonder if it is my fault that I did not graduate or the fault of the adults who were supposed to be guiding me. I had fallen behind in reading and math so quickly that soon it was far too difficult to catch up. Then I found myself an adult with poor reading and math and spelling skills. It is as an adult that the lack of my high school diploma affects me daily. I cannot get a good job that pays more than minimum wage.

Do you know how hard it is to try and live off of minimum wage? I cannot buy the things I like or sometimes I need. Every day of my life is living on a budget. When you are an adult, people don't want to take care of you any more. Why should they? You are an adult. If I can give one piece of advice, it would be: Stay in school and demand your right to an education.

a teacher with whom you feel comfortable. Designate that teacher's room as the "safe room" — the place you can go whenever you are anxious, tired, or overwhelmed. A safe room also gives other teachers an out when they get frustrated and need for you to be someplace else. The safe room teacher has the ability to help you get back on track. I also used the safe room for moral support. If someone said or did something that upset me, I knew that I could always go by the room and get a morale booster (e.g., a hug, a compliment).

Talk with counselors and the special education staff about groups that you might participate in throughout the year. This is a great way to meet other kids and to learn more about them. In my case, I think they called it recreational

(continued on page 9)

"My parents had a difficult time getting an IEP for me even though I had many unexcused absences due to my treatment. Once I did get an IEP, teachers and students treated me differently. There is a common misperception that if you are mentally ill you are stupid. What helped me the most was having someone I could trust to talk to about anything and to know that no matter what problems I was having, that person would keep my information confidential. I was fortunate because that person was my psychiatrist. I think most kids would benefit by having someone to talk to, such as a mentor or another young person who has also been through the system or has lived through similar circumstances."

Julie LaMonaca
Oregon



How To Keep Your Cool in School (continued from page 8)

training in my IEP. It is hard for me to talk to or to meet others, so being in groups helped me get to know people.

When Something Is Wrong

When I'm in the classroom and something bugs me, I first give a little growl (this is very soft so that no one else hears it). Then I count to 10 breathing slowly, and close my eyes. If this doesn't work, I ask to go to my safe room. While I'm there, the safe room teacher processes with me what happened and offers some possible responses for next time.

Once, when I was feeling very anxious about something, I put a red heart shaped piece of wood in my pocket. My mom gave it to me when I started elementary school. She told me to put it in my pocket and whenever I felt afraid to just put my hand in my pocket and

know that she loved me and would be there for me. This might sound like a sissy sort of thing to do, but it worked over and over for me. Nobody knew that I was touching my heart.

If I am not having a good day, I try and let the teacher know at the beginning of class. I ask the teacher not to call on me that day. This way the other kids won't make fun of me if I stutter or hesitate to give the answer. Most teachers are good about doing this. Some teachers will even make sure that the kids sitting around me do not irritate me on those days.

These are just a few of the things that I do to make it through the day. If all else fails, I know that I can call my mom or dad and they will be right there to help me out.

Attention! The Youth Committee is planning a number of activities at this year's FFCMH Annual Conference. There will be a meeting room and some social events for young people. Please check at the registration table for a youth packet and more information on how to participate.

Tips for Surviving High School

Amin Valentine, New York

- **Follow yourself.** Don't follow the crowd just to be "in" with them. When I stopped following the crowd, I figured out where I was going with myself.
- **Seek out advice from people you trust to tell you the truth.** At one point I wanted to drop out. I talked to a friend who convinced me that I was capable of finishing. She urged me to wake up and face reality. I looked at where I wanted to end up and what I wanted to be doing. I decided to struggle now so that I would be set in the future.
- **Learn to ignore people.** Unfortunately, I got into a lot of fights. I would get picked on a lot by others and I would get into fights with them to make them stop. After a while I realized I could ignore them and avoid fighting. Ignoring is hard be-

cause sometimes we believe that what they say is true. When that happens, it is important to face and deal with our own issues. For example, some guys teased me about hanging out with girls. When I stopped and thought about it, I decided it was true — I did — but it was not a problem.

- **Seek out supports.** Friends and family supports make it easier for you. Look to them for help and do not be afraid to let people know what you need. Sometimes, you might be afraid to share, but I learned that if you have no secrets, no one can hold anything against you.
- **Try.** If you fail to try, you try to fail. It is important to overcome what you don't want. Be patient.



Family Voice, Teacher Voice

Finding Common Ground Through the Wraparound Process

Lucille Eber, LaGrange Area Department of Special Education, Illinois

Through our experiences implementing the wraparound process with school and community teams, we have learned that family involvement is not enough. We need family voice and ownership in the planning process. Teacher voice and ownership are just as critical. A plan that is truly owned and valued by both family and teacher is more likely to be practical and effective — not to mention implemented!

When the voices of those who spend the most time with the student are brought together, realistic problem-solving and creative planning is more likely to happen. Families and teachers need an opportunity to tell their stories before wraparound team meetings take place. During individual conversations with the team facilitator, family members and teachers are encouraged to describe their past and current efforts and successes, share their frustrations, and explain their dreams or goals for the student. Strengths of the student as well as strengths of the family and teachers also are pursued in initial conversations.

Enhancing Family and Teacher Voice

The following story illustrates the need for bringing family and teacher voices together to maximize the impact of system of care components.

Joe, a 13-year-old eighth grader with low reading skills had been receiving special education services since second grade. Disruptive behavior at school had increased steadily in recent years.

Joe's mother was becoming more concerned about her son's school problems as well as some behaviors at home. She contacted a mental health hotline for help. A caseworker was assigned to provide ongoing support and access to ser-

vices that included an after-school tutor and a therapist.

Although both mental health and special education services were being delivered, there was no direct coordination of services and goals except through Joe's mother, who was attempting to navigate both systems on her son's behalf, accepting everything that was offered in response to her pleas for help. Neither the family nor the school were aware of the goals for his individual therapy, as neither had met with the therapist, who was only contracted to see Joe, not collaborate or participate in coordinated service planning. The teachers were not aware of what the tutor was addressing with Joe. Reading skills were not improving, and the disruptive behavior at school continued.

Questions raised by the above story include:

1. Is there consensus about needs and desired outcomes for Joe across home, school, and community?
2. What are the targeted outcomes for each service currently being provided?
3. How could resources be blended to maximize impact for Joe?

To answer these questions, the wraparound facilitator must help the team recognize different perspectives. An illustration of this process, using the preceding story, follows.

Recognizing Different Perspectives of Team Members

During the initial conversations with the family, teacher, and other core team members, the wraparound facilitator finds out how individuals perceive their role with the student. This is different than job title. Examples of roles identified by core team members include:

The wraparound process guides teams of professionals, families, and support providers to create strength-based supports and interventions for students who have or are at risk of developing emotional and behavioral disabilities. Wraparound brings teachers, families, and community representatives together with a commitment to a family-centered, strength-based process. This results in the creation of unique services that support the student as well as the family, teacher, and other caregivers. Supports and services found in wraparound plans include respite, mentors, peer supports, parent partners, and assistance for families in need of basic supports such as housing, transportation, job assistance, childcare, and health and safety supports.

School components of wraparound plans include strength-based academic, behavioral, and social skills instructional strategies, assistive technology, and consultation and supports for teachers. A key element in this process involves families (including the student) and professionals reaching consensus on the outcomes they want to achieve.

(continued on page 11)



Family Voice, Teacher Voice (continued from page 10)

- Parent: “I feel I am an advocate for my child.”
- Special education teacher: “I am responsible for Joe’s academics and his behavior.”
- School counselor: “Joe comes me when he is in trouble and I help him problem-solve.”

The facilitator helps team members hear, understand, and respect each other’s perspective before services are identified and interventions are designed. The facilitator’s role is to look for similarities and differences in perspectives.

To facilitate this process, core team members may be asked to identify their personal goals (related to their role) for the student, how they have attempted to meet those goals, what has worked, and what barriers they have encountered. Blending parent, student, and teacher perspectives together provides information that can move the team toward proactive problem solving. For example, the parent’s major concern is that her son still can’t read. The teacher’s major concern is the acting-out behavior at school. The student stated that he wants to read better. He also indicated that he doesn’t like to be embarrassed and would rather “get in trouble than look stupid.” Discussion revealed that Joe’s inability to read seems to be a reason for much of his acting-out behavior at school.

Team members’ voices and strengths are key when working toward consensus on proactive interventions. Consider these examples:

- The parent states her son needs more reading instruction, because “listening to tapes isn’t teaching him to read better.” Because the school team is so focused on behavior issues, intensive reading instruction has not been as much of a priority as the mother feels is needed. Joe’s mother is con-

cerned that without improved reading skills, his transition to high school next year will be doomed to failure. The team challenge is to identify instructional strategies that capitalize on Joe’s strengths so that his reading skills improve. The team discusses how Joe’s strengths suggest some specific reading approaches.

- The special education teacher states that she is concerned about misbehavior, both in the classroom and throughout the school. She is frustrated about how to intervene. Through further team discussion, it is determined that information needs to be gathered about when and where incidents are occurring so that a positive behavior support plan can be developed. Other team members (i.e. counselor, other teachers) agree to assist with this data collection so the team can support the teacher in effectively addressing this issue.

Both family and teacher perspectives need to be heard and considered as the team moves forward. Focusing on the family’s voice helped the team recognize that avoiding frustrating academic tasks is the cause of some of Joe’s acting-out behavior, the major issue for school staff. Hearing the family’s concerns focused the team on raising expectations and increasing efforts to teach Joe how to read.

The strengths identified by the teachers and the family led the team into constructive problem solving about best methods to increase reading ability and, thereby, reduce Joe’s need to act out. Perspectives shared among team members indicate a need for carefully defined home/school messages about desired behavior. Finally, team members realized they needed to collect baseline data about behavior and develop positive behavior supports for Joe to ensure successful behaviors in various school settings.

“We were engaged in an unsuccessful wraparound. The team agreed to work through the problems. At the pre-meeting, an advocate from the Federation met with the principal and teacher. During the discussion about strengths, the facilitator asked the teacher what she needed from the team. In tears, the teacher said, ‘No one has ever asked that. Now I know that you are as concerned about me as you are about the child.’ We learned an important lesson that day: Treat the teacher like you do the parent.”

Jane Adams
Kansas



Supporting Your Child

Tips for Collaborating with Schools

DeAnn Lechtenberger, Region XIII Education Resource Center, Texas

The new school year is upon us. If you are like most parents, you send your child off to school with a new backpack or lunch kit, hoping you have covered all the bases and hoping your child will start with a clean slate and have a positive school experience.

Following are a few suggestions that encourage partnering between school personnel and the family.

Set up a good communication system with your child's teachers.

- Learn your child's daily schedule.
- Become familiar with classroom and school rules and policies.
- Make sure teachers have information to assist them in planning for your child (e.g., medication schedule, IEP, emergency numbers).
- Establish a check-in system on a daily or weekly basis, especially for the first few weeks of school to see how the teacher views your child's adjustment to the classroom. This will allow you to head off problems before they become too complicated.
- Teach your child where to leave school notices, homework, etc. when he or she comes home so you can review them.
- Respond to all school notices in a timely manner; model the behavior you will expect from school personnel when you make a request from them.
- Assume the best when your child comes home with stories about what goes on at school. Encourage two-way communication that can clear up concerns without assigning blame and assuming guilt.

"Parents should purchase assignment books if not provided by the school. Show your child how to write all assignments down each day. Check the assignments off as completed and then sign when finished. This lets the teacher know that homework has been addressed at home. Families should set a limit on homework time and schedule play or relaxation time periodically during homework."

Teri Toothman
West Virginia

- As family schedules and responsibilities allow, look for opportunities to participate in school activities (e.g., PTA, room parent, volunteering). This will keep you informed of what is going on at school and allow you more access to teachers and other parents. You can network and build a support system for you and your child.
- Let the teacher and other school personnel know from the beginning that you expect to work as a team to make this a positive and productive year for everyone.

Familiarize Your Child with School Surroundings and Routines

- If your child is going to a new school, arrange for a tour. Tour the school to allow your child to meet his or her teachers and view the classrooms.
- Encourage your child to help in planning his or her daily schedule.
- Establish bedtimes and study guidelines to allow structure at home. This will help your child be prepared for each new day. Set up a special place and time for homework each night.
- Pack lunches and backpacks the night before to ensure a smooth morning routine. Some children even prefer to set out their clothes for the next day to lessen the morning decision making stresses.
- Reserve some afternoon or evening free time with friends and family. All children need some "down time" to unwind and interact positively with others. Set time limits for homework and make sure there is time for fun.
- Talk about school every day to find out your child's perspective on how things are going. Focus on the positive, but listen to concerns. Discuss them with school personnel when necessary. If not, minor issues may develop into more serious concerns.

(continued on page 13)



Supporting Your Child (continued from page 12)

Identify the Supports Your Family and the School Staff Need for Success

- Ask your child's teachers what it would take to help make this a successful time in your child's school career, and then work with others to put these things in place. Check for necessary academic modifications and materials (e.g., special seating arrangements, highlighters, peer coaches, training for school staff in such areas as using assistive technology and implementing positive behavioral supports) that may need to be addressed on an individual basis.
- Identify mental health supports or other related services that are available at the school (e.g., school counselors or psychologists, peer mediators) and link them with the mental health professionals who are working with your child and family.
- Ask your child's teachers or case manager what community programs or positive behavior supports are available to address the needs of your child, your family, and your child's teachers. Include positive behavior supports in all plans.
- Design an individual discipline plan and a crisis intervention plan if they are needed. Such plans should include a safe place and/or a person at school whom your child can see when he or she is feeling vulnerable.
- Keep school personnel informed of any changes in medication and talk with them about how medication may affect your child during school hours.
- Tell your case manager, if you have one, whom to contact at the school.
- Just as you want to encourage the school to call and report when things are going well, contact school personnel to acknowledge their efforts.

- For every criticism or problem you bring to the schools, be prepared to offer at least one or two corrective suggestions.

Homework Hints

Susan Rogers, Dallas FFCMH, Texas

- **Be consistent.** Set up a regularly scheduled time for your child to do homework.
- **Be quiet.** Find a quiet place for studying. Be sure there is plenty of light.
- **Be attentive.** Turn off the television and the radio. Sit at the table with your child and read. This allows you to be there when he or she needs your help.
- **Be a good listener.** Before your child begins working, discuss the directions for the assignment. Make sure your child understands the task.
- **Be organized.** Have all necessary supplies, books, and materials available to complete the assignment (pencils, pens, sharpeners, rulers, erasers, dictionary, etc.).
- **Be a role model.** While your child is completing his or her homework, set a good example by reading or working on your own project.
- **Be corrective.** Once homework is completed, review your child's work. Identify any errors that you find and encourage your child to make the necessary corrections. Provide examples to clarify corrected answers.
- **Be thorough.** Check to make sure that all homework assignments have been completed.
- **Be prepared.** Encourage your child to place all assignments in a folder or notebook. Homework should be left by the door or in an area where it can be readily located.
- **Be positive.** Praise your child for a job well done!

"Often times when I make suggestions, schools don't listen or act on these suggestions. Don't shut schools out if, at first, they do not respond. Sometimes all it takes is for one teacher or school staff member to hear you and back you up to give you the support you need to get things done!"

Pat Baker
Utah

"Working with schools is all about relationships. You have to build a relationship with your child's teachers and encourage a positive relationship between your child and his or her teachers. When kids feel disconnected, trouble really begins to start. We all have to work together on helping our children feel wanted and safe at school."

Carolyn Nava
Colorado



Promising Practices in Providing Family-Friendly, School-Based Mental Health Services

"Parents want to be able to talk with someone who has been there — someone who has tried to have the difficult conversations with school personnel, who has worried about the potential for extreme frustration on their child's part, and who has felt blamed for their child's disability. The WRAP case manager fits these requirements."

Marsha Thibodeau
Rhode Island

"The welcoming committee has resulted in the school and community being more friendly to children. I am very proud to be a parent representative. I believe I am helping not just my own child, but all children."

Elizabeth Alvarez
California

Increasingly, new approaches are being developed that respect the family's role in their child's educational program. Following are several practices that have shown promise.

Welcoming and Social Support — Fundamental to Prevention

Howard Adelman, School Mental Health Project, California
Elizabeth Alvarez, Elizabeth Learning Center, California

Staff at the School Mental Health Project at the University of California-Los Angeles have developed an approach that involves family members in welcoming and offering social support at school sites. Welcoming committees are usually staffed and coordinated by parent volunteers. In some schools, the parent representative is a paid position, with a desk in the central office.

The welcoming committee makes sure that new students and families feel safe and respected at school. For example, in addition to greeting students and families who visit the school, parent representatives conduct orientations, make sure new students have been assigned peer buddies, and prepare flyers, displays, or other information briefs for families. In some cases, the parent representative prepares folders for new students and facilitates parent support groups at school.

Because parent representatives are familiar with the school and community, schools include them on school improvement teams.

A guide entitled *What Schools Can Do To Welcome and Meet the Needs of All Students and Families* is available for families and schools. The guide provides a comprehensive overview of how to set up a welcoming and social support system. Contact Howard Adelman at the School Mental Health Project, The Center for Mental Health in Schools, Department of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095, call (310)825-3634, or visit the web site (<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>).

Project WRAP

Marsha Thibodeau and Pam Watson, South Shore Mental Health Center, Rhode Island
Sandra Keenan, Narragansett School System, Rhode Island

Since 1996, the school districts in Narragansett and South Kingston, Rhode Island, the local community mental health center, and other local agencies have been improving results for students with mental health needs. Their initiative, called Project WRAP, coordinates and integrates wraparound services for middle school youngsters who have emotional disturbance.

Project WRAP uses a case management

(continued on page 15)

School Strategist Position

Jackie Baldwin, Wisconsin Family Ties

The Northwood Alliance for Children and Families, in partnership with the Cooperative Education School Association #9, is piloting a new position — school strategist. The school strategist supports students with mental health needs and their families to ensure that the school program is successful. The school strategist's responsibilities include:

- Promoting cooperation and coordination among schools, family, and community agency personnel.
- Assisting with crisis planning, functional behavioral assessments, and IEP development.
- Acting as an information and referral source for other services that the school may be able to access.
- Providing training and consultation to school personnel.



Family-Friendly, School-Based Services (continued from page 14)

approach for coordination and communication. The WRAP case manager must be the parent or primary care giver of a child with mental health needs who also has had experience navigating the community service system.

At the core of Project WRAP is a student support center, which is located within the school building. At the center, identified students receive instruction and intervention in social skills, behavioral management, problem solving, organizational skills, academic remediation, and alternative curricula. Community agencies provide specialized services within the support center. Students participate in the center either on an individually scheduled basis or drop in as needed.

For more information on this project, contact Sandra Keenan at: keenans@ride.ri.net.

Parent Teacher Action Research Facilitated by Parent Liaisons

Carol Benway, Parent Liaison, Vermont
Pam Kay, University of Vermont

Over the last few years, selected school districts in Vermont have been using Parent-Teacher Action Research (PTAR) as a structure to help parents and teachers collaborate. Parent liaisons facilitate the process.

In the PTAR process, kindergarten teachers identify children who need extra emotional and/or behavioral support. The PTAR process then is implemented with interested families and teachers in the first and second grades. The parent liaison role is important, especially at the early stages of collaboration. It ensures that parents participate as equal partners in their child's education.

Parent liaisons generally meet with parent and teacher teams monthly. The

parents and teachers begin their work by describing the child's strengths and identifying what is puzzling to them about the child's behavior. They ask, "What do we need to know to help this child learn?" This discussion forms the basis for the action research process, which involves the following steps:

- Choose the research question.
- Collect the data.
- Reflect on the data and share thoughts with one another.
- Analyze the data, making sure that both parents and teachers participate.
- Formulate a practical theory.
- Brainstorm ideas and choose those for which there is mutual agreement for a plan of action.
- Plan a course of action and implement it.

Researchers at the University of Vermont (The Achieving, Behaving, Caring Project) have been tracking the effectiveness of this approach. In one study the researchers compared data for students whose parents participated in PTAR with data for those whose parents did not. Initial results show that on the whole, children in the PTAR group had fewer classroom problems. Parents who participated in PTAR rated their children higher in cooperation, self-control, and total competence than did the other parents. Further, the families who participated in PTAR reported feeling more empowered in working with the school, while the comparison families indicated a lack of empowerment.

For more information about this project (which was funded by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs), contact the web site at the Center for Effective Collaboration: <http://www.air.org/cecp/preventionstrategies>.

FFCMH National Office Staff

Executive Director

Barbara Huff

Staff

Marc Carrano
Carolyn Nava
Trina Osher
Marion Robinson
Elaine Slaton
Mary Telesford

Board of Directors

President

Gail Daniels, Washington, DC

Vice President

Barbara Sample, Billings, MT

Secretary

Sandra Spencer, Greenville, NC

Treasurer

Jane Adams, Topeka, KS

Board Members

Kathleen Berg, Meridian, ID
Kathy Dennis, Chicago, IL
Patti Derr, Conroe, TX
Lucille Eber, LaGrange, IL
David Fassler, Burlington, VT
Karen Hart, Monterey, CA
Gene Karp, Arlington, VA
Julie LaMonaca, Billings, MT
Ira Lourie, Rockville, MD
Neal Mazer, Santa Barbara, CA
Angela Nelson, Chicago, IL
Sue Smith, Atlanta, GA
Amin Valentin, Putnam Valley, NY

Board Consultant

Barbara Friesan, Portland, OR

Claiming Children is edited and produced by Warger, Eavy & Associates. Address correspondence regarding the newsletter to them at: P.O. Box 3836, Reston, VA 20195. All other correspondence should be sent to the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health at 1021 Prince Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-2971.

<http://www.ffcmh.org>

The publication is supported through a subcontract with the National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health, Georgetown University Child Development Center, funded through a cooperative agreement among the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, the Center for Mental Health Services' Child, Adolescent and Family Branch, and the Administration on Children, Youth, and Families.



Message from the President, Gail Daniels

"Salutations go out across the country to all involved stakeholders. We recognize that productive and responsive collaboration within our schools through the system of care can only be accomplished through your patriotic visions and your tenacious acts of courage. These efforts are essential for the continuous uplifting of our nation."

Gail Daniels

"Our children represent the nation's potential — mother, father, police officer, taxi driver, teacher, family organizer, minister, social worker, or president of the United States."

Gail Daniels

When thinking about schools and collaboration, we should consider that each school site has its own distinct needs and specialties. A common thread among all school sites is the need to be safe, drug free, culturally competent, and family friendly. To be collaborative, schools must have a set of principles that promotes listening to, engaging, and valuing all stakeholders (children, family, school staff, community providers, activists, and agency personnel). To meet this challenge, school systems require adequate supports including financial, educational, and human resources.

As we move toward the inclusion of our children with various emotional disabilities into regular school settings, in the context of effective school collaboration, we need to ask, "What is our focus?" And the answer must be, "All of our children."

It is in the best interest of our nation that our children are not only accepted in classrooms, but are nurtured and cared for by adults who like them. These adults must be able to understand and appreciate their individual learning pat-

terns so that they can educate our children according to their specific needs.

Entering school is a major step for our children. Here is where they separate from the familiar home surroundings and live in a new part-time home filled with a variety of races and cultures. Here they are expected to engage in activities with school staff, community participants, and their peers. Each school site represents a preparatory station for the larger society.

After the twelfth grade, our children branch out into that complex, more mysterious span of life called adulthood. There they will become more aware of how life is filled with swift transitions and multiple decisions for which they will be held accountable. Gradually, they will realize that they have transformed into the status of leaders and that it is their turn to offer their own diverse contributions to society. We live with the anticipation that the system of care will produce a solid foundation for the coming of a new age of the child, family, school, community, and society.

FEDERATION OF FAMILIES
FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

1021 Prince St. • Alexandria, VA 22314-2971

FEDERATION OF FAMILIES
FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH
1021 Prince St. • Alexandria, VA 22314-2971

THE FEDERATION OF FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH IS a national parent-run organization focused on the needs of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders and their families. The Federation's **MISSION** is to: provide leadership in the field of children's mental health; address the unique needs of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders from birth through transition to adulthood; ensure the rights to full citizenship, support and access to community-based services for children with mental health needs and their families; and provide information and engage in advocacy regarding research, prevention, early intervention, family support, education, transition services and other supports needed by children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders and their families.

THE FAMILIES OF THE FEDERATION COME FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE. Emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders cut across all income, educational, racial, ethnic, and religious groups. They are found among single parent and two-parent families and in birth, adoptive, and foster families. Yet, families raising a child with an emotional, behavioral, or mental disorder have many things in common. They share the need for an accurate assessment of their child's strengths and needs. They seek appropriate therapeutic, education, recreational programs for their children. Families also need services that support efforts to help their children learn, develop, and grow within their own homes and communities.

Families may face many challenges as they cope with the difficulties and demands of raising a child with an emotional, behavioral, or mental disorder. The absence of child care prevents families from participating in social or recreational activities. Families may experience isolation from friends and relatives. And, they may face staggering cost for special treatment, education, or other services.

Families also have many strengths. Many have learned to manage their circumstances very well. Families have developed a repertoire of support networks and strategies they can share with others. Families also have a unique view of the strengths and weaknesses of the service system.

FOCUS ON FAMILY PARTICIPATION AND SUPPORT IN A SYSTEM OF CARE is fundamental to the Federation. Therefore, the Federation works to develop and implement policies, legislation, funding mechanisms, and service systems that utilize the strengths of families by: ensuring that they are equal partners in the planning implementation and evaluation of services; viewing the child as a whole person and the family as a whole unit rather than emphasizing the disability; empowering families and children to make decisions about their own lives; and encouraging innovative programming which increases options and promotes the integration of services.

The Federation provides an **OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE** by enabling family members to work with professionals and other interested citizens to improve services for children with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders. The Federation aims to develop a cohesive, enduring union of groups and individuals who will articulately and effectively speak with one voice to policy makers, professional organizations, legislators, and the general public about the mental health needs of children and families.

FEDERATION OF FAMILIES
FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH
1021 Prince St. • Alexandria, VA 22314-2971

**Membership
Form — fill
it out and
send it in!**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: (home) _____ (work) _____

Fax: _____ e-mail _____

- Individual \$20.00
- Family \$30.00
- Family Organization \$50.00
- FFCMH Local Chapter ... \$100.00

Founding Members

- \$50.00
- \$100.00
- \$250.00
- \$500.00

Professional Organization:

- Budget under \$500K ... \$150.00
- Budget over \$500K \$250.00

Other _____

I am unable to pay for full membership at this time. Therefore, I am sending \$ _____ as a donation to help defray the costs of printing and postage. (Any amount is welcome; family members only, please.)

For information on becoming a chapter, please contact us for a Chapter Start-Up Kit.

VISA or Mastercard # _____

Expiration Date _____

Reminder: Don't forget to notify us when you move. We want to keep our mailing list current.