



Family Engagement Newsletter

Home-School Communication During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Wendy Overturf

Research shows that when families are involved with their children's education, children tend to perform better in school. For children with IEPs, families can provide valuable insight regarding their child's strengths and abilities. When families and schools work together, a partnership of support for children with IEPs can develop to ensure that IEP goals are met and skills are generalized across a variety of settings.

During this uncertain time (COVID), family-school collaboration is more essential than ever. Families and educators are dealing with new challenges and stressors. Everyone's situation will be different. Meaningful and clear communication and collaboration between parents and schools can go a long way toward solving problems. Innovation while school buildings are closed, in a hybrid model, or when parents choose a virtual option will help avoid disagreements between the school district and parents when schools resume normal operations.

The most recent [guidance from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#) emphasizes "that as LEAs (school districts) use different instructional strategies in response to the ongoing pandemic that they must have in place for the 2020-21 school year an individualized education program (IEP) for each student with a disability that is reasonably calculated to enable the student to make progress both in the general education curriculum and toward their IEP goals that is appropriate in light of the student's circumstances. The IEPs must be implemented as written, and IEP teams may want to consider including in the IEP contingency or conditional plans in case, for example, school or district closures are necessary again during the school year, or for those school districts beginning the school year providing virtual instruction, when the students are able to return to the school building for in-person instruction."

Schools are often using various types of electronic communication to meet their obligations. Most contacts and IEPs with parents will be using a non-face-to-face modality that may include videoconferences, phone calls, and emails. The WI DPI has a [webpage](#) that gives more information on virtual IEP meetings including how to prepare for a virtual meeting and virtual IEP meeting tips. If the school has not done so already, it is important that parents reach out to school personnel to determine the best way to be in contact if there is a concern with their child's learning. Some examples of concerns include, but are not limited to:

- Child is unable to access content online due to technology difficulties, or lack of internet
- Child is unable to understand the material being presented
- Child is unable to focus on the instruction
- Child does not have all materials at home to complete assigned work
- Child is experiencing increased behavioral issues with virtual instruction
- Parents feel the child is not making progress toward IEP goals

Families are encouraged to keep a dated written log of learning and possible concerns that they have so that when they contact the district they are able to be specific about their issues. For example, they might record the amount of extra time or one-to-one parent support their child needed to complete the assignment or that their child did not seem to understand the material at all. If there seems to be a persistent issue, parents need to communicate with their child's special education teacher and request an IEP meeting. It is possible that additional supports might need to be put in place to make sure that their child continues to make progress with the IEP goals and continues to make progress in the general education curriculum.



Parents can also check out the Questions and Answers document from the U.S. Department of Education on [Providing Services To Children With Disabilities During The Coronavirus Disease 2019 Outbreak](#) for more information. Another valuable resource is the [Back to School Prep Sheet for Parents Preparing for an IEP meeting during COVID-19](#). This resource was developed for families as they and educators learn how to hold and participate in virtual Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, where online or hybrid instruction is possible or necessary.

Statewide Events

[New Community of Practice: Supporting Students with IEPs During COVID-19](#)

Offered for professionals by the WI DPI Special Education Team to provide ongoing guidance from DPI as well as opportunities for participants to collaborate and share ideas and resources. Upcoming topics will be based on participant feedback. The meetings will take place approximately twice a month, are free and available to anyone interested in learning and sharing best practices to support students with IEPs during COVID-19. Registration for each meeting is available on [this flier](#).

Transition Improvement Grant: Community of Practice (CoP)

During the 2020-2021 school year, the Transition Improvement Grant (TIG) will be offering three Communities of Practice. The topics are: [Mental Health](#), [Graduation for All](#), and [Career and Technical Education](#)

[Recognize, Report, and Respond: Conducting a Systematic Bullying Investigation](#)

Date: December 8, 2020. 11-1 pm
All 50 states and Washington D.C. have enacted legislation related to bullying and bully prevention. Unfortunately, these legislative efforts do not provide direction for conducting investigations or implementing bully prevention programming at the state, district, or school level. The foundation for any school- or district-wide bully prevention plan is the investigative process. This session will include three components. 1) Learn how to recognize bullying and differentiate it from other forms of peer aggression. 2) Examples of different reporting protocols that can be used by students, teachers, and parents. 3) Outline an investigative protocol, where participants will be provided with a framework for conducting investigations and responding to reported bullying incidents.

[18th Annual Wisconsin Transition Conference](#)

Date: February 11-12, 2021

Location: Kalahari Resort and Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, WI
This event will feature face-to-face, streaming live, and on-demand learning. Check the flyer for information on the keynote, how Kalahari plans to minimize risk for those who attend the live sessions, and the new streaming platform.



[At Home Learning Strategies](#)

[Early Literacy Activity Calendar: December 2020](#)

Activities designed to help kids have fun while practicing fine motor skills, solving puzzles, exploring science and nature, and more. Each day features a fun activity that will help your child develop pre-reading skills.



[Children's Activity Calendar: December 2020](#)

Celebrate the holiday season with programming activities, craft projects, and book suggestions for older children.

[December can be a month of multicultural holiday lessons.](#)

December is an opportunity to have fun and give and receive gifts, but it is also a month filled with teachable moments. Consider having a weekly date with your family to learn about a different winter holiday or tradition throughout the month. Also check out this [holiday song](#) that features several of the diverse multicultural winter holidays.



[Outdoor Winter Activities](#)

While it may sound warm and cozy to spend the winter months inside your house, you might be surprised at the multitude of mental and physical benefits for children spending time outdoors. Active play is fun and beneficial. Aside from providing opportunity for regular physical activity of a child's own design, play is shown to improve a child's motor function, creativity, decision-making, problem-solving and social skills.

[75 Christmas Crafts for Kids](#)

Fun project ideas from HGTV for crafters big and small.



[Hanukkah and Kwanzaa Activities, Lessons and Crafts](#)

Preschool and Kindergarten Hanukkah and Kwanzaa Crafts, Activities, Lessons, Games, and Printables.

[40 Festive Christmas Activities to Make Your Day Even Merrier](#)

Holiday crafts, games and timeless traditions will entertain everyone on your list. Create a holiday playlist, have a scavenger hunt, make a popcorn-cranberry garland, and writing a letter to a soldier are just a few of the ideas!



[Counting Snowballs](#)

Number games are a fun way to help kids with number recognition and counting. The more hands-on an activity is the more fun kids will have and the more likely they are to remember the content.



[Polar Bear Oreos](#)

A frozen fun winter-themed kids treat or holiday party dessert. This is an easy kid-friendly recipe that parents can do with their children. This recipe can also be adapted to [make Oreo snowmen](#).



[Winter Multiplication Worksheets](#)

Does your child need to practice multiplication facts? Try using these free downloadable worksheets. Each worksheet has a secret word puzzle that is solved by matching the answers to the Secret Message Alphabet Key at the bottom of the page.

[Play Dough Mats](#)

It is play dough, but with a difference! Download and print these super cute play dough mats from [Picklebums](#) and let your kids go to town with their creations. There are bug bodies, plant pots, human faces, monsters – so many options to inspire their doughy designs. This is a great activity to do at home with your children. Parents can also make homemade play dough in the microwave with a few simple ingredients. Check out the [recipe](#).

[New Year's Eve Activities](#)

New Year's Eve is a special time to reflect upon the past year and to celebrate all the amazing goals and dreams that you and your children have for the upcoming year. New Year's Eve can be a family time, filled with sparkling cider, party poppers, and lots of fun crafts and activities. Check the link for a list of ten fun New Year's Eve activities that kids can do with their parents.



Online Resources: Communication

[Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\)](#)

The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) strongly supports the parents' right to be involved in the special education their child receives. As IDEA states: Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by... strengthening the role and responsibility of parents and ensuring that families ... have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home. This website provides many resources for parents so that they can be an active participant in the IEP process.

[WI FACETS IEP Checklist](#)

The IEP checklist takes you through three steps - preparing for, participating in and following up after the IEP. Be ready with our easy to follow checklist!

[Wisconsin Statewide Parent-Educator Initiative \(WSPEI\)](#)

WSPEI is all about partnerships. Its goal is to help families and school districts find or create the resources that will help them build positive working relationships that lead to shared decision making and better outcomes for the student. It supports increased sharing of information among families, schools, projects, organizations and agencies through networking meetings, conferences, person-to-person contact, and media.

[It Takes a Village to Teach a Child](#)

Educators need the cooperation of parents as partners in the educational process. In an ideal world, all parents, teachers, and school administrators would always agree on the best practices for teaching children. However, disagreements happen. Those disagreements can be emotionally charged and if those disagreements are not resolved, parents and school staff can end up working in different directions. Then it is often the student that suffers. To further the goal of building bridges between parents and teachers, the website provides several resources related to home-school communication and conflict resolution strategies.

[Family School Partnerships 2.0](#)

A booklet developed by the National Education Association. *Family-School-Community Partnerships 2.0* outlines ten strategies that are the foundation for creating effective partnerships, like building one-to-one relationships between families and teachers that are linked to learning.

[Tips for Parents: Parent –Teacher Conferences](#)

Although it is highly likely that parent-teacher conferences will be held virtually this school year, the website does contain valuable information on effective parent-teacher conferences. The content is available in both Spanish and English.

[KidSource Online](#)

Many teachers say that they do not often receive information from parents about problems at home. Many parents say that they do not know what the school expects from their children—or from them. Sharing information is essential and both teachers and parents are responsible for making it happen. This website has questions and answers that can help parents get the most out of talking to their child's teacher or with other school staff members.

[Building Parent-Teacher Relationships](#)

Effective communication is essential for building school-family partnerships. It constitutes the foundation for all other forms of family involvement in education. This website provides strategies that have been effective in improving parent-teacher communications.

[National PTA Standards for Family-School Partnerships](#)

The benefits of family-school-community partnerships are many: higher teacher morale, more parent involvement, and greater student success are only a few. This website outlines the standards developed by the National PTA for effective family-school partnerships. The website also has links to other resources related to building these partnerships.



“An optimist stays up until midnight to see the New Year in. A pessimist stays up to make sure the old year leaves.”

- Bill Vaughn

You'll never get bored when you try something new. There's really no limit to what you can do.”

- Dr. Seuss

“With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts.”

- Eleanor Roosevelt

“You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream.”

- C.S. Lewis

“Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come, whispering, ‘It will be happier.’”

- Alfred Lord Tennyson

“Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right.”

- Oprah Winfrey

All our dreams can come true if we have the courage to pursue them.

- Walt Disney



WI FACETS



Register online or by phone for free WI FACETS [workshops & webinars](#).

Online: Event titles below link to training information & registration.

Register by phone: Sandra: 877-374-0511

[Results Driven Accountability \(RDA\)](#)

Presenter: Lynn Winn, WI DPI

Date: December 2, 2020, 12-1 pm

[WSEMS: Friendly and Productive IEPs](#)

Presenter: Nissan Bar-Lev, CESA 7 and Courtney Salzer, WI FACETS

Date: December 7, 2020, 12-1 pm

[Placement Decisions and Home-Based Instruction](#)

Presenter: Paul Sherman, WI DPI

Date: December 9, 2020, 12-1 pm

[¿Qué pasa cuando tu hijo/hija con discapacidad cumple su mayoría de edad?](#)

Presenter: Lisa Pugh, The Arc WI

Date: December 10, 2020, 12-1 pm

To register contact **Nelsinia Ramos (414) 374-4645,**

nramos@wifacets.org

[Bullying](#)

Presenter: Bonnie Vander Meulen, WI FACETS

Date: December 15, 2020, 12-1 pm

[College & Career Ready \(CCR\) IEPs through the Lens of Early Childhood](#)

Presenter: Michelle Ogorek, Statewide Early Childhood Coordinator

Date: December 16, 2020, 12-1 pm

WI FACETS ARCHIVED WEBINARS

Available for download on our [website](#).



[Wisconsin's RtI Center's Annual Report 2019-2020](#)

The Wisconsin Response to Intervention (RtI) Center was created to assist Wisconsin's educational systems to build capacity, adopt and implement high-quality practices, make informed decisions, ensure sustainability of efforts, and increase success for all students. Districts developing and maintaining this framework with an equity lens, which aligns with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's mission of educational equity, will be able to provide students what they need to learn when they need it. The Wisconsin Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Network operates within the Wisconsin RtI Center with a specific focus on behavior.

The first part of this report is a summary of what the Wisconsin RtI Center accomplished in 2019-20 to help schools begin implementation and the ripple effect of the center since its inception.

In the second part, the report digs deeper into why self-assessment is important and what one can learn about schools who completed a self-assessment which indicates implementation.

Finally, the report examines the impact that implementation has had on Wisconsin students in two different ways. One, by analysis of statistically significant student outcome data; and two, through sharing five stories from Wisconsin schools and one story about an organization who is partnering with the center in this work. These short features reveal how Wisconsin's vision is being realized in each school's unique environment.



[Research to Read](#)

[Creating Collaborative Home-School Partnerships through Literacy](#)

Virgil, Maria, Department of Advanced Studies in Education, California State University, 2020 May

[Article Link](#)

The purpose of this project was to identify barriers that limit parents from becoming involved in school settings thus impacting student achievement. Common beliefs shared and important perceptions made by parents and teachers that influence home-school relationships are also discussed as a way to enhance such partnership. Focusing on the six components of parent involvement explained in Epstein's framework, workshops were developed with the goal of providing parents with the tools needed to increase their self-efficacy and recognize the crucial role they hold at home and within school settings while emphasizing the importance of developing strong literacy skills. A teacher-targeted workshop was also included to encourage diverse methods used to communicate with parents in an effort to bridge any gaps and strengthen the relationship. Further ideas and suggestions to reinforce a collaborative partnership are added with student academic achievement being the objective.

This monthly update is provided by the Wisconsin Family Assistance Center for Education, Training & Support (WI FACETS) to share statewide information regarding parent leadership and family involvement. *If you would like to receive this monthly update or if you would like to have your name removed from the distribution list, contact: Wendy Overturf at woverturf@wifacets.org.*



Contributions to the Newsletter

Upcoming newsletter topics: January: Transition

February: Intellectual Disabilities

March: Early Childhood

To submit contributions of articles, events, or resources, you may use the attached word document. Send submissions to woverturf@wifacets.org. If you are unable to access the form, you may send the information in an email.

Material appropriate for the monthly newsletter include web links to sources of family involvement/parent leadership resources, advertisements for statewide trainings for parents, youth or parent/educator audiences, information about statewide parent agencies, recent research pertaining to family engagement, and family engagement success articles.

***The WI FACETS Family Engagement E-Newsletter
can be found online at:***

<https://servingongroups.org/resources>



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