Principals Want to Know

A tip sheet for principals that focuses on practical issues faced in schools.
Drawn from existing resources, these tips are designed to su...

IEP Development and Implementation: Shared Solutions

The Question:

"Sometimes conflict occurs around the development or the implementation of the Individual Education Plan (IEP). How can I prevent this?"

The Answer:

Here are five Tips for Success:

1. Create a positive school climate
2. Keep the lines of communication open
3. Be alert for warning signs of conflict
4. Determine the reason for conflict
5. Deal with conflict in the early stages

1. CREATE A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Achieving and maintaining a positive school climate requires teamwork on the part of educators, parents and students. Some hallmarks of a positive school climate include:

Everyone is treated with respect
The school is a caring and responsive environment.
Educators encourage and maintain regular interaction between schools and families.
The school culture develops a sense of community and caring relationships to provide all students with greater opportunities to achieve success.
Parents are involved in school activities.
Everyone feels safe and secure.
There is a strong focus on prevention and early intervention in conflicts.
Everyone is invited to contribute ideas and offer feedback.
See *Shared Solutions*, p. 18 for nine more hallmarks.

> "A 'culture of collaboration' can help parents and educators to work constructively together to address concerns related to programs and service before they become sources of conflict." *Shared Solutions, p. 17*

2. KEEP THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN

Develop a process of parent consultation for the development of the IEP. This may involve written input from parents, face-to-face discussions and/or telephone discussion.
Know and respect the timelines for IEP development. They must be developed (including the consultation process) within 30 school days of a student's placement.

it's worth the time spent in finding common ground. With a face-to-face meeting is always necessary, since part of the problem is that the parties have preconceived ideas about the solutions they want."

For more pointers on reaching common ground see *Shared Solutions*, p. 37

3. BE ALERT FOR WARNING SIGNS OF CONFLICT

Anticipate possible tensions and be prepared to address solutions (e.g., when sharing information about a change in personnel).
Familiarize yourself with past concerns and their solutions.
Be aware of different perspectives between

4. DETERMINE THE REASON FOR CONFLICT

Planning and implementing a student's special education program (e.g., accommodations, modifications to curriculum or alternative expectations) may be sources of conflict. (See *Shared Solutions,* p. 12 for reasons and possible solutions for conflict.) Knowing the reason(s) for a conflict may help a principal mediate the conflict in the early stages.

Planning conflicts: Clarify understanding by ensuring that both the parents and staff have the same information about the student's strengths and needs, programs and services.

Implementation conflicts: Ensure that communication between parents and the school team is clear and transparent. Ensure the implementation process has a monitoring system in place.

Relationship conflicts: Clarify individual approaches by ensuring awareness of cultural differences and communication preferences. Determine meeting schedule and communication methods early in the implementation process.

"Open dialogue can lead to mutually acceptable solutions. Differences in opinion can represent an opportunity. If everyone responds constructively, creative solutions can be found."
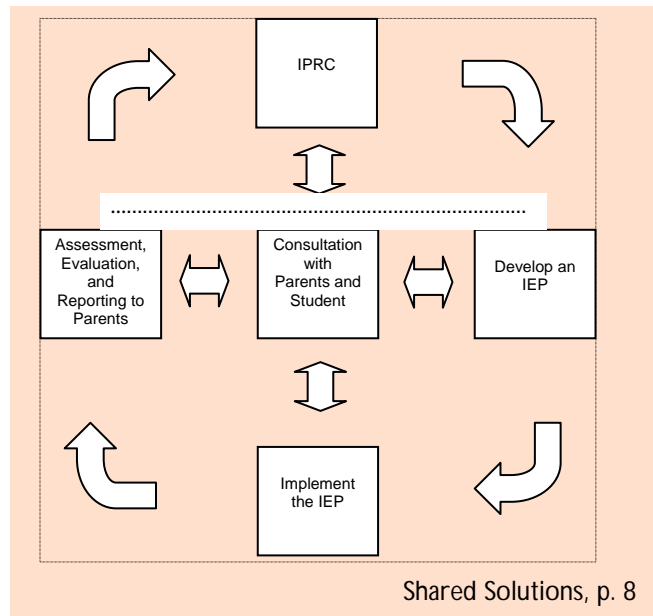
Shared Solutions, p. 14

5. DEAL WITH CONFLICT IN THE EARLY STAGES.

Provide training and professional development to help strengthen communication skills of those implementing the IEP.

Encourage the use of any communication guides the Board has developed. This may help prevent conflict and dealing with it as it comes up.

Have courageous conversations (see *Principals Want to Know* Issue #6, March 2011).

Plan for meetings thoughtfully (see *Shared Solutions,* p. 22).

Shared Solutions, p. 8

Remember that these five tips are meant to get you started on your understanding of IEP processes. You can learn more by reading the sources in the reference list. Add your own thoughts by joining the Ontario Education Leaders network: http://ontarioeducationleaders.ning.com

REFERENCES

Closing the Gap in Student Achievement PA Day Resources for *Shared Solutions*
http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/PA_Day/Shared_eng.html

Ontario Ministry of Education. *Shared Solutions* (2007).
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/speced/shared.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education. *Having Courageous Conversations* in Principals Want to Know (Issue #6, March 2011
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/leadership/pdfs/issue6.pdf

Ontario Ministry of Education (2009-Draft). Learning for All K-12
http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/L4All/L4A_en.html

"When a conflict arises about a student's special education programs and services, it is essential that the parents first speak to the person most involved in the student's education: the classroom teacher or the special education (resource) teacher. If the conflict cannot be resolved at this level, it may be necessary for the school principal to become involved."

Shared Solutions, p. 25