

Shifting the Culture; A Story of Collaboration

There are often many challenges in our everyday work! We all have many successes to talk about and at the same time we, as professionals, have barriers and obstacles that cross our path on a regular basis. What we know is that educators do not go into the field of education to become millionaires, they typically come into the field of education because they love working with children and young adults and wholeheartedly believe in our education system. We also know whether coming to the table as an educator or as a parent, we all have the same goal which is to educate our students to achieve success academically and socially, both in school and in their post-secondary experiences. Research that has been done for decades indicates that positive relationships between parents and educators will lead to better outcomes, including higher grades, better attendance, improved behavior at home and at school, better social skills and adaptation to school. (Epstein, J.L., 2007).

Recently, Bill East, the Executive Director of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education made a profound statement to a large group of stakeholders who had come together to improve outcomes for students identified as needing special education services. This statement is really the cornerstone of our work. - “As a State Director of Special Education for a number of years, I worked hard with stakeholders but I didn’t work smart. More times than not, I didn’t involve them up front in the decision making process. Thinking deeply about community building has led me to understand just how important it is to have stakeholder involvement from the very beginning. (Bill East, Executive Director; NASDSE).

The Long Island and Hudson Valley Parent Centers (funded by the NYS Education Department) partnered with the Long Island Association of Special Education Administrators (LIASEA), Council of NY Special Education Administrators (CNYSEA), the National Council of Administrators of Special Education (CASE) and the IDEA Partnership; National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) at the US Department of Education; Office of Special Education Leadership Conference.

Together, we presented a workshop identifying the key aspects of collaboration and effective communication. It focused on essential elements of team-building while identifying research based strategies and promising practices that have been successful in educational teams working together and greatly improving outcomes for students with disabilities.

Our team, which included Helene Fallon, Naomi Brickel, Yvette Goorevitch, Debi Kienke, Luann Purcell and Patrice Linehan, offered examples on how a cutting edge strategy incorporates explicit instruction to support the data that shows the positive impact that effective collaboration has on student performance and outcomes. Participants explored the nationally recognized framework of Leading by Convening that invites all stakeholders to collaborate effectively and meaningfully, and models evidence based practices on authentic engagement in education. According to our evaluations, educators and administrators left this presentation with the knowledge, skills and philosophy on how to develop meaningful, low cost-high impact partnerships with all stakeholders. A special focus was on engaging parents with children with special needs; and the positive impact parent engagement can have on increasing opportunities for inclusion and improving the performance of students with academic, emotional, physical, and behavioral challenges. Research that continuously shows that collaboration is a primary key to better outcomes in student achievement was discussed.

Leading by convening is an evidence based strategy that moves away from traditional expected behavior for interacting in collaborative practice. The framework provides strategies to help stakeholder engagement become more comprehensive, holistic, result in long term sustainability and establish a foundation for authentic engagement in supporting the State Systemic Improvement Plans. Participants were provided with strategies, resources, knowledge, tools, information, and skills that can assist them in understanding and implementing collaborative partnerships that build connections and foster authentic engagement through leading by convening. The workshop provided inspiration and motivation to enhance current plans for meaningful stakeholder engagement in all aspects of the educational process.

There will never be enough laws, policies, processes, documents, etc. to force change. Change is best realized through the relationships we build with those people and groups that have a common interest toward solving a persistent problem or seizing an opportunity. (Bill East 2012). There is nothing more important than implementing practice where all stakeholders in education work together collaboratively in a meaningful, authentic way. The best way to bring out the wisdom of practitioners for collective learning is to engage them in doing some real work that builds on and enhances their own practice—something meaningful that engages their identity as practitioners. All involved must learn to do their own work as well as learning to work together. Each stakeholder brings a certain expertise to the table, it is imperative that professionals, families and students see the value of their meaningful input in educational practices.

The NYSED funded Parent Centers together with CNYSEA and LIASEA are “shifting the culture” in our regions to improve outcomes for all students. Collaboration is the key!

Here are some discussion questions we asked the audience to ponder on:

1. How do you define stakeholder engagement?
2. What does it look like in your practice or educational planning in your district school?
3. Do you have tools to use improve collaborative practice with your educational teams?

Let’s continue the conversation and work on this shift of culture together, we in NYS are setting a shining example of collaborative practice!



***Helene Fallon, Arne Duncan, Debi Kienke,
Faith Kappenberg
Sharing our story of collaboration with US
Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan!***

<http://www.ideapartnership.org/building-connections/the-partnership-way.html>

Respectively submitted by: Helene Fallon