



# DIRECTIONS

## *Technology in Special Education*

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## Parents as Equal Partners: Balancing the Scales in IEP Development

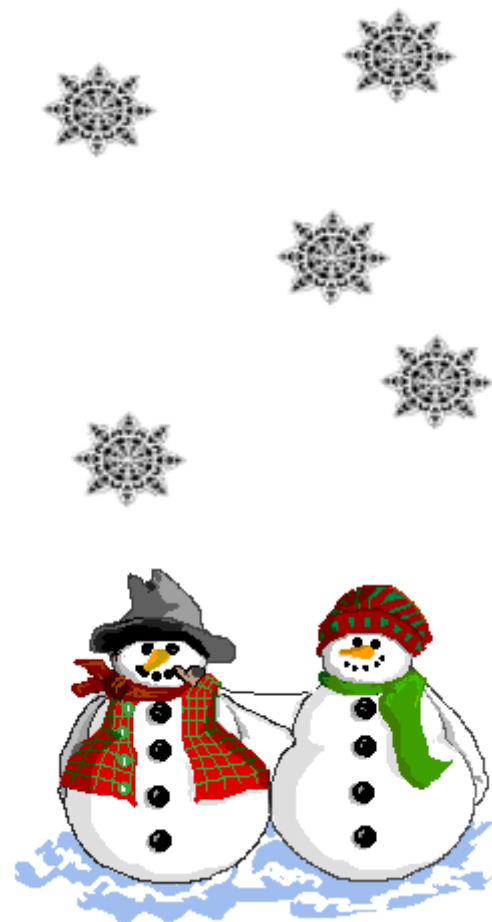
by Marcia L. Rock

*Source: Teaching Exceptional Children, Vol. 32, No. 6, July/Aug 2000*

Fifteen years ago, as a beginning special education teacher, I was proud of the preparation I had received in developing individualized education programs (IEPs). I was confident in my knowledge and skills and spent long hours after school and on weekends creating detailed IEPs for my students. I conferenced extensively with parents regarding the wonderful educational programs I had created for their children. The parents nodded and smiled in agreement. In fact, they were quite appreciative. Yet they said little about their child. At the time, I was perplexed and often bewildered about their reluctance to contribute to the dialogue. In retrospect, how could they have responded any differently? I was the one monopolizing the discourse.

Unfortunately, what I failed to realize for a number of years was that the IEP was not about ME or the curriculum I had created for the classroom. This called for a radical paradigm shift. Transforming the IEP process to empower parents was a necessary, difficult, time-consuming, and rewarding journey. It was grounded in a review of the literature and complicated by the translation difficulties that often emerge between theory and practice—that is, the limitations imposed by the system's needs. The process described here is a story of discovery and a description of the activities that are essential in generating parental partnerships that are truly meaningful and equitable.

For more than 25 years, the IEP has been paramount to the provision of a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities (Baseman & Linden, 1998). Parents and teachers are the key stakeholders in the development of the IEP. Yet some parents feel ill equipped to address the special learning needs of their own children (Yanok & Derubertis, 1989). Out of frustration, despair, or ignorance, parents may simply choose to relinquish their active decision-making responsibility or their child's education. Parents need to become more aware of procedures involved in obtaining necessary educational services and



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need to understand the nature of a collaborative relationship. Teachers can play a critical role in preparing parents for their role as active, educational participants and decision makers.

### What the Laws Say About Parental Participation and Decision Making

The historic enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, Public Law 94-142, revolutionized special education. Many new aspects to service provision emerged. Perhaps, as Turnbull, Turnbull, and Wheat (1982) asserted, the most radical was the provision of parent participation as a right enforceable by law. The lawmakers based the parental participation provisions on at least two assumptions:

\*Parental participation is beneficial to students, parents, and professionals alike and is best educational practice.

\*Parental participation is a vehicle to enhance the accountability of schools to both parents and students, and thus, to assist in assuring students' rights (assigning to parents a role similar to the checks-and-balances system in government; Turnbull et al., 1982).

The U.S. Congress upheld these assumptions in two landmark reauthorizations of P.L. 94-142: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P.L. 101-476) passed in the early 1990s, and more recently the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 1997, P.L. 10517). Congress intended the latter of the two mandates to strengthen the role of parents and encourage parents

and teachers to resolve their differences, using nonadversarial venues (Baseman & Linden, 1998). IDEA 1997 increases active parental representation by expanding the preexisting IEP participation mandate. The new law specifies that parents are also to be participants in the eligibility decision, the placement decision, and the membership decisions associated with the State Advisory Panel (National Information Center, 1998).

### What the Research Says About Parental Participation and Decision Making

Although the federal mandates have clearly presented the legal nature or status of parental participation and decision making, the translation from statutory and regulatory provisions to everyday practice has been plagued with difficulties. For more than 2 decades, educational researchers have investigated this topic. The results of many of these investigations have revealed that many parents view themselves as "uninvolved" in their child's education (Gilliam & Coleman, 1981; Lynch & Stein, 1982). Typically, teachers are the educational decision makers, and parents are the consent givers (Harry, 1992). Further, parents who are Hispanic or African American experience lower levels of participation and decision making than Anglo parents (Harry, 1992; Lynch & Stein, 1987; Stein, 1983). Due to ignorance and preexisting educational rituals, many teachers and systems engage in culturally insensitive practices that serve to further alienate parents, rather than to empower their participation (Harry; Quiroz, Greenfield, & Altchech, 1999; Sileo, Sileo, & Prater, 1996; Voltz, 1994).

# DIRECTIONS

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Without question, professionals and legislators have held high expectations for parental participation and decision making, but have had little regard for cultural differences and preferences. Consequently, prejudice toward parents and barriers to the promotion of active parental participation and decision making have emerged.

### **Barriers to Active Parental Participation and Decision Making**

Investigations in the mid-1980s indicated that barriers to productive parent teacher interactions could be grouped into four general categories (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1986):

- Psychological
- Attitudinal
- Cultural/ideological
- Logistical

Other researchers organized barriers slightly differently into the following categories: work, time conflicts, transportation problems, and child care needs (Lynch & Stein, 1987). Around the same time frame, Leyser (1985) and Stein (1983) identified work and language/communication difficulties as barriers that prevented parents from participating in their children's special education programs.

More recently, researchers have focused on the cultural insensitivity, ignorance, and miscommunication that exacerbate traditional barriers that impede parental participation. Investigators have identified the following as barriers that sabotage parental participation (Harry, 1992; Quiroz et al., 1999; Sileo et al., 1996; Voltz, 1994):

- Menu-driven district approaches.

- Parental "tracking" practices.
- Reluctance to explore culturally diverse values.
- "Teachers know best" mindsets.
- Lack of sociocultural diversity in the teacher work force.
- Parental mistrust due to minority overrepresentation rates in special education programs.

These researchers have focused on the need for teachers to recognize and adapt to cultural diversity and develop effective strategies for promoting collaborative parental partnerships in an effort to erode the existing barriers (Harry, 1992; Quiroz et al., 1999; Sileo et al., 1996; Voltz, 1994). Indeed, the barriers to parental involvement are complex, numerous, and varied. Clearly, the barriers include ethnic and cultural differences (Harry; Lynch & Stein; 1987; Stein, 1983). Teachers, however, can adopt meaningful and ongoing practices that surmount the barriers.

### **Balancing the Scales: What Teachers Can Do to Create Meaningful Parental Participation and Decision Making**

One of the major effects of the lack of active parental participation and decision making has been in the development of legally inappropriate and educationally unsound IEPs for students receiving special education services. Many students' IEPs lack procedural compliance and educational usefulness (Baseman & Linden, 1998). By facilitating meaningful parental participation and decision making, teachers can improve their IEP process and product practices. Teachers can use

the tools and strategies presented in this article before, during, and after the development of the IEP to promote active parental participation and decision making.

Creating opportunities for increases in parental participation and decision making begins long before the actual IEP conference is held. It begins by laying a foundation built on teachers' engaging in activities that communicate sensitivity, trust, respect, and acceptance to parents. Teachers can initiate many actions to build collaborative parental partnerships before the IEP conference (see box, "Pre-IEP Conference"). Figure 1, page 34, presents suggested parent survey questions, and Figure 2, page 34, shows a sample IEP conference agenda.

More than 5 million IEP conferences are held annually (Baseman & Linden, 1998). The actual IEP conference provides a variety of opportunities for teachers to facilitate active parental participation and decision making. Again, we need to radically change our IEP procedures if we are to encourage truly meaningful parent participation. Traditionally, the IEP meeting has become a meaningless ritual in which teachers dictate the prescribed educational program and then pass the ceremonial pen to parents to secure their signatures.

In contrast, the purpose of the IEP is to brainstorm (Baseman & Linden, 1998). All participants should collaborate to determine the student's strengths, needs, present levels of performance, special education and related services, and goals/benchmarks for the upcoming year. Participants should recommend placement after they have collaboratively determined the contents

of the IEP (Baseman & Linden). Educators can find many ways to transform the IEP conference from ceremonial symbolism to educational substance (see box page 35, "IEP Conference").

After the IEP meeting has occurred, opportunities for active parental participation and decision making remain. Teachers need to complete paperwork for the district—and parents need to review them for accuracy and agreement. Teachers can also use feedback collected from parents during the meeting to establish continued goals in this area. Following the IEP conference, educators and other professionals can find many ways to embrace the development of ongoing parental partnerships (see box page 36, "Post-IEP Conference").

Many teachers feel overburdened, devalued, and undercompensated. To effectively employ the tools and strategies discussed here, school district administrators must rally to the assistance of their teachers. Here are effective administrative supports:

- release time
- special recognition
- compensatory funding
- scheduling accommodations
- moral support (Gable, Korinek, & Laycock, 1993).

Without these supports, the parental participation and decision-making provisions of special education law may never be realized.

### Final Thoughts

Parental participation was assumed by Congress to result in benefits for the

child by "creating a climate of cooperation between the child's parents and the school" (Morgan, 1982, p. 37). Consequently, many schools and districts have developed and disseminated how-to manuals, workshops, and other training programs.

Unfortunately, these traditional attempts to increase parental participation and decision making have often resulted in a "professionalization" process. Frequently, this has been an ineffective and inefficient strategy to address parent needs. Some professionals argue that the effect of the federal mandates has been limited to increasing communication between home and school, rather than enhancing active parent participation and decision making (Yanok & Derubertis, 1989).

Regardless of which role or to what extent parents choose to participate and make decisions, they often lack the terminology, expertise, and finances that their professional counterparts possess. Parents enter the decision-making partnership with a distinct disadvantage. One solution may be to balance the scales by providing teachers with the tools and supports to create opportunities for active parental participation and decision making during the development of the IEP. This, in turn, may strengthen the bond between parents and educators, and aid in the establishment of equal partnerships, meaningful IEPs, and better services to students. §

*All tables and figures mentioned in this article can be obtained by contacting DREAMMS For Kids, Inc.*

## Conferences

**Date: March 2 - 3, 2001**  
**28th Annual Conference on Dyslexia & Related Learning Disabilities**

New York, NY  
 Phone: (212) 691-1930

**Date: March 19 - 24, 2001**  
**16th Annual International Conference: Technology and Persons with Disabilities**

Los Angeles, California  
 Phone: (818) 677-2578  
 Fax: (818) 677-4929  
[www.csun.edu/cod/](http://www.csun.edu/cod/)

**Date: April 18 - 21, 2001**  
**CEC Annual Convention and Expo**

Kansas City, MO  
 Phone: (888) CEC-SPED or (703) 620-3660  
 Fax: (703) 264-9494  
 E-mail: [conteduc@cec.sped.org](mailto:conteduc@cec.sped.org)  
[www.cec.sped.org](http://www.cec.sped.org)

**Date: April 30 - May 4, 2001**  
**YAI International Conference on Developmental and Learning Disabilities**

New York, NY  
 Phone: (212) 273-6193  
 Fax: (212) 629-4113  
 e-mail: [amatza@yai.org](mailto:amatza@yai.org)  
[www.yai.org](http://www.yai.org)

**Date: June 25 - 27, 2001**  
**NECC 2001**

Chicago, IL  
[www.neccsite.org](http://www.neccsite.org)

# Special Education News

A free weekly Internet service

Source: *The Catalyst*, Fall 2000, Volume 17, #1

## **SURVEY: LIFE FOR SOME WITH DISABILITIES IS IMPROVING, SLOWLY - July 28, 2000**

WASHINGTON—Among younger people with disabilities and those with less severe disabilities, the United States appears to be making progress toward more equitable opportunities in education, the workforce and the community, according to the 2000 N.O.D./Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities, published earlier this month by the National Organization on Disability. Releasing the poll for the 10th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the NOD said, “Large numbers of people with disabilities reported that conditions had improved for them during the past four years.”

The survey, sponsored by Aetna U.S. Healthcare and The JM Foundation and conducted by Harris and Associates, revealed a mix of encouraging and disheartening data. Harris conducted telephone surveys in late May and early June with 979 people with disabilities and 958 people without, including interviewing 13 percent of the disabled group by proxy because they were not able to respond to a phone survey.

Compared to people without disabilities, less than half as many people with disabilities said they are satisfied with their lives. In addition, the number of people with disabilities who are “very satisfied” has dropped over the past 14 years, from 39 percent in 1986 to 33 percent this year. Harris conducted the same surveys in 1986, 1994 and 1998.

Among the younger generation, however, satisfaction levels are higher. About 44 percent of people with disabilities ages 18 to 29, compared to 57 percent of people without disabilities, say they are “very satisfied with life,” while the gap between disabled and nondisabled people of all ages is 34 points.

In 10 more specific measures of quality of life, people with disabilities consistently lagged behind their nondisabled peers. For most of these measures, the more severe the disability, the greater the gap. People with disabilities are three times as likely to live in poverty, twice as likely to live secluded lives that do not involve socializing with friends or neighbors at least once a week and three times as likely to say they lack access to adequate transportation to get around. While 6 percent of the people surveyed without disabilities said they lack adequate healthcare, 19 percent of those with disabilities did.

Education levels and employment rates, two key indicators of economic improvement, are also lower for people with disabilities, but they are both on the rise. This year, 22 percent of the people with disabilities surveyed had not finished high school, compared to 9 percent of people without disabilities. In the 1986 survey, however, only 61 percent of those with disabilities had a high school diploma. This education gap provides some explanation for similar discrepancies in income and employment level, the Harris report says. “Since education, employment and income are inextricably linked together, it is not surprising that people with disabilities who are more likely to lack a basic education are less

likely to be employed and less likely to have high incomes,” the report notes.

Employment, viewed by many economists as the most important indicator of economic stability for any American, is still far too low, particularly in the midst of the prolonged economic upswing the United States has seen over the past decade, Harris Chairman Humphrey Taylor said. Of the total population of working-age people with disabilities, only 32 percent work at least part-time, compared to 81 percent of the non-disabled population, the Harris survey says. More than two-thirds of those not employed say they would prefer to be working.

On the up side, among those who say they are able to work despite their disability or other health problems, the employment rate has gone up, from 46 percent in 1986 to 56 percent this year. “The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is undoubtedly responsible for at least part of this progress,” the Harris report said.

Between young people ages 18 to 29 with and without disabilities, the employment gap is only 25 percent, and it is getting smaller. “Large numbers of people with disabilities reported that conditions had improved for them during the past four years,” the NOD said.

“This reflects intensive efforts by the disability community, employers

and community leaders, as well as advances in technology and greater accessibility,” NOD President Alan Reich said.

However, the unemployment rate for people with severe disabilities remains dramatically high. Only 19 percent of those who described their own disabilities as “severe” work at least part-time, a 62 percentage point gap between them and people without disabilities.

Despite the discrepancies in various quality of life indicators, perceptions of the current situation for people with disabilities appear to be improving. More than 60 percent of people with disabilities surveyed by Harris said their lives have gotten better in the 10 years since the ADA was enacted.

“Clear majorities feel that overall quality of life, access to public facilities, advertising, media portrayals of people with disabilities and public attitudes toward people with disabilities have gotten better over the past four years,” according to the report, and no more than 16 percent said any of those factors has gotten worse. “While it is likely that these improvements stem from a variety of factors such as a strong economy and substantial growth in technology, it is reasonable to attribute at least some of this progress to the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990,” the report says.

Reich is among the believers, saying he is “delighted” with the impact the ADA has had. “The ADA, it’s dear, is making a fantastic difference,” he said. “I’m optimistic about the future.” Awareness of the ADA and its powers and prohibitions may still be so

low that, 10 years after its enactment, it has not garnered the support it could from both within and outside the disability community, Humphrey noted. “Giving people rights is necessary, but it’s not sufficient if they don’t know that they have them and don’t demand that they’re protected,” he said.

“America must do more to release the talents and abilities of our citizens with disabilities who want to work, participate and contribute to the nation,” Sen. Max Cleland (D-Ga.) argued at a Capitol Hill event to release the new report. Cleland, a Vietnam Veteran who lost three limbs in combat and uses a wheelchair, called on his Congressional colleagues to continue supporting the ADA’s principles.

In addition, Reich argued, people without disabilities must be made more aware of both the power of people with disabilities and the challenges they face. Though he noted empathy comes most quickly from firsthand experience, as was the case with him after breaking his neck in the 1960s, Reich said people without disabilities can and must still be mobilized to help in the cause. “We all, in a sense, live in the antechamber of disability, and we could be there in no time flat,” he said.

The Special Education News is published independently in Washington, DC, and provides a frequent update on legislation and other current matters of interest.

For more information contact: SPECIAL EDUCATION NEWS, 3430 Connecticut Ave. NW, Box 11168, Washington, DC 20008-1168, Phone: 202-320-0521, Fax: 413-473-1410, [www.specialednews.com](http://www.specialednews.com)

# The Catalyst

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# About One Hand Typing and Keyboarding

By Lilly Walters

Source: *About One Hand Typing and Keyboarding Monthly Newsletter - December*

## BEFORE DECIDING TO BECOME A ONE HAND TYPIST

Before the one handed person makes a decision which choice is best for them, ask:

1) Is the "good" hand strong? Can it take the burden normally shared by two hands?

If one hand has good usage, then, although harder on the hands, the standard ONE HAND QWERTY is perhaps the best choice for two reasons. One: sell-ability in the job market. The reality is, the easier it is to bring someone into the workplace, the more appealing they are as an employee. If the prospective employee can use the same equipment

as the fully-abled employees, with just as much skill (often more!) they are easier to employ. Two: selecting an alternative keyboard makes a child feel apart from their peer group.

2) Will the reason the hand/arm is disabled go away with time? Perhaps an injury that will heal?

As in stroke, sometimes full use is regained after therapy. Only learn the one hand method if you are sure there will never again be enough coordination with the affected hand to type in the standard two handed method. Although, very often the injured hand can be encouraged by having it operate the mouse (see more later at "Mouse: Adapt To The Circumstance").

3) Does this person work on their own - perhaps they are retired or an entrepreneur? Will they need to use other people's computers, or will others need to use their computer?

If not, adaptive devices and alternative keyboard layouts can be suggested. However, if possible to the circumstances of the one handed typist, avoid alternatives if they plan share a computer at work or at play.

For more on one hand typing and for more resources and strategies for those with a disability of the hand, especially regarding keyboarding and typing, contact Lilly Walters at 626-335-8069, Fax: 626-335-6127, E-mail: Lilly@aboutonehandtyping.com <http://www.aboutonehandtyping.com>

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# ACCESSIBLE LEARNING

by Lorianne Hoenninger

As the new millennium begins, and the holiday season draws to a close, many of us, parents and professionals alike, find ourselves high on enthusiasm, and low on cash. So this month's column will focus on inexpensive, low tech materials to enhance learning.

<http://www.ReallyGoodStuff.com> is a fun website filled with, well really good stuff. One item in particular that students struggling with reading will want to explore is the EZC Reader. This bookmark has a simple adaptation to guide left to right visual tracking, a transparent, plastic strip mounted to the top of the bookmark. A reader places the EZC Reader on the page so that the yellow or blue plastic edge highlights the line of print the student is reading. The EZC Reader is available in both primary and intermediate sizes, to accommodate different text sizes. At \$5.00 for 12 of these reading guides, the EZC Reader is a bargain!

Another inexpensive tool to guide focus is Highlighter Tape from Lee Products. This removable, transparent

tape can be used in books to highlight important text, without permanently altering the book. Highlighter tape is made in different widths, and is available on line at Crystal Books Books website at <http://www.crystalsprings.com>, in the teaching tools section.

Net Cards at <http://hometown.aol.com/jham5325/sampler.html> are sets of printed cards (\$25.00) that contain an internet address (URL), a short description of the internet site and a guide to links and activities to complete. Designed to offer a focused, multisensory internet experience, the Net Cards are available on a variety of high interest topics, to stimulate curricular comprehension and creative writing. Links to the various Net Card activities are available at the web site. Visit to see for yourself how New Cards can enrich learning for your students. Take a look at the \$12.00 Casio Fraction Mate at <http://www.calculatorsinc.com>. True fraction display shows numerator over denominator just as it is written in textbooks. It converts between decimal values and fractions and between mixed

and improper fractions. The simplification key reduces fractions, step-by-step, to their lowest common denominator and displays the reduction factor, too.

Finally, Academic Flashcards from Rose City Software at <http://www.rosecitysoftware.com> is a simple, \$20.00, talking, Windows platform, flashcard program. Use one of the free, downloadable databases, or create your own flash cards. Sets are fully customizable, with options for text or graphics, fonts and colors. They can be studied by manually clicking through the cards or using an automatic timer, in alphabetical or random order, and read aloud by one of four Microsoft Agent characters.

I hope you find these programs as fun and useful as I do. As always, if you have questions, do not hesitate to e-mail me at [lorianne@erols.com](mailto:lorianne@erols.com), visit my website at <http://members.nbci.com/ALTA.1> or write c/o: Accessible Learning Technology Alternatives, P.O. Box 597, Shirley NY, 11967.§



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