

- Welcome to “How to Conduct Friendly and Productive IEP Meetings” – a presentation developed by the Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System (WSEMS) with input from parents, districts and agencies.
- The WSEMS was founded in 1996 by 3 partners: a parent (Jan Serak, WI FACETS’ CEO), a special education director (Nissan Bar-Lev, CESA 7), and a mediator. The current mediation partner since 2007 is Nina Meierding. WSEMS assists in the resolution of special education disputes through facilitated IEP meetings and mediation. WSEMS has been honored as an exemplary system by the National Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education, in part because of WSEMS’ unique core principle of maximizing stakeholder involvement on a continuing basis. WSEMS staff includes Jane Burns, Administrator & Intake Coordinator, & Nelsinia Ramos Wroblewski, Multicultural Outreach Coordinator.
- This PowerPoint is an example of how parents, teachers, administrators, advocates and attorneys can work together, to welcome, honor and connect in a collaborative way for the best interests of students in WI’ public schools.
- Through initial surveys, pilot presentations, and a review of the PowerPoint program and accompanying notes by hundreds of individuals and groups including WSPEI, WIFACETS, and WCASS, each group has given valuable feedback and perspective. The result is a presentation that brings the ideas together and models a process where parents and districts work together for the needs of the student– just like a friendly and productive IEP meeting!
- Let’s find out who is participating today with some quick introductions,
 - Or: poll the audience (as, with apps as “Kahoot” or “Poll Everywhere”).Include:
How many are: (1) Parents (2) School Staff (3) Both (4) Other
- Also, if desired, poll to rate how your recent IEP experiences have been:
(1) poor (2) fair (3) good (4) great (5) excellent

Presentation Purpose

- To provide feedback from parents and districts in Wisconsin about what worked and what didn't work in IEP meetings.
- To provide constructive and practical tips and techniques to increase the productivity of an IEP meeting.
- To support both parents and districts in developing stronger relationships.
- To remain student-focused in the IEP process.

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- The goal of the presentation is to provide feedback from parents and districts who were surveyed about their experiences with IEP meetings.
- By looking at very practical tips and techniques that can increase the productivity of an IEP meeting and reduce conflict, this presentation hopes to support both parents and districts in developing strong productive relationships and effective, forward looking conversations about the needs of students with disabilities.

TOPIC: Productive IEP Meetings

(Optional Slide)

KNOW

1....

2....

3....

4....

5....

THINK I KNOW

1....

2....

3....

4....

5....

WANT TO KNOW

1....

2....

3....

4....

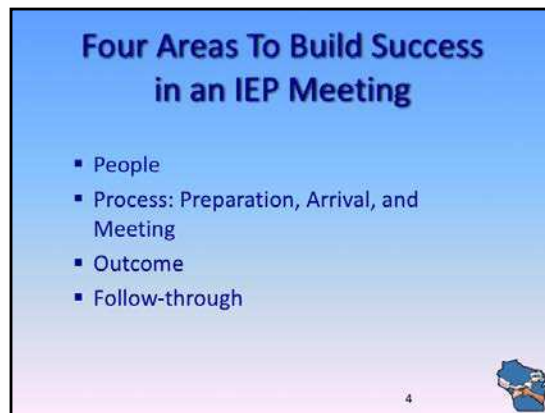
5....

3



Take a few minutes to think about and write down a few things that you are certain that you already know, what you think you know, and what you want to know about productive IEP meetings.

(If webinar, you can ask people to type a few of their thoughts into the chat box)



- In approaching the topic of productive IEP meetings, we will divide the presentation into four areas.
- The first will be “People” – getting the right people together – not just who the law mandates as far as attendance at the IEP meeting, but individuals who can help make a connection between the parent and the district and have the skills to handle potentially difficult or emotional situations.
- The second area will be “Process: Preparation and Meeting.” We will focus on how a thorough preparation for the IEP meeting can help it run more smoothly and how, during a meeting, certain techniques can build connection and lead to productive conversations.
- The third area will be “Outcome” – the importance of developing a concrete and specific IEP with a clear, on-going communication plan and measureable results.
- And the fourth area, will be “Process: Follow Through.” The first three stages will mean very little, if there is not coordinated, effective follow-through of the IEP. By building strong and trusting relationships in each of these stages, a long-term positive relationship can develop between the parents and the district.
- In each of these four areas we will give a brief introduction, share comments by both districts and parents about that area, and then provide tips and suggestions that will help create a productive and friendly IEP. Each “tip” page will be indicated by an Idea “light bulb” in the upper right hand corner.

People



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The first area we are going to focus on is “People”

Introduction People

- Building trust and a good relationship between parent, student, and district is very important in conducting a productive IEP meeting.
 - Think about who would be most helpful in building a connection or who already has a relationship with the family and/or student.
 - Have people attend who have a real knowledge of the student, the programs, the opportunities and the data.



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- Who is involved in the IEP meeting is crucial in building trust and rapport between parent and district.
- Are there people with whom the parent has an existing trusting relationship. For example,
 - A teacher who developed a special relationship with the student, or who has communicated regularly with the parent?
 - A principal who has been very effective in follow-through?
 - A friend, relative, or other support persons who also know the student?
- Always ask if there is anyone else that they would like to invite to the meeting.
- Having people attend who have a real knowledge of the student, who know the available services, who can explore the creative opportunities, and who know the data that provides information to the IEP team is an important component for an effective meeting environment.
- Given the new emphasis on accessing the grade level standards, it is important for the general education teacher to be present.

Participants' Comments

- *“The most help during the IEP was personnel there who could answer my questions. They knew the content of courses and could explain their significance in the big scheme of my child's education.”*
- *“It was so nice to have my child's teacher there because she is the one person who I feel I can talk to.”*
- *“There was no one that I could connect with – all the professionals took over.”*

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- As you can see, each section includes some actual comments from parents and or school staff who were surveyed about their experiences with IEP meetings
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- **PRESENTER NOTE:** You can either read the slide yourself, or invite someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

Bringing People Together



- Make certain the right people are at the meeting.
 - Encourage the student to attend the meeting.
 - If the parent and/or student has a good relationship with particular district personnel or agency representatives ensure they can be present.
- Be aware of language and special needs of parents and students prior to meeting.
- Use positive language and tone, especially when the student is present.

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- Under IDEA, certain people are required to be at the meeting. Make certain that the right people are there.
- A student can bring his or her own perspective to the meeting and may feel more empowered as to the decisions that are being made. In addition, if the student feels part of the team, the student may feel more connected to the IEP goals discussed.
- As mentioned before, it is important to have someone at the meeting, whenever possible, who has an existing positive relationship with the parent and/or the student
- Be conscious of any language needs or other special needs of the parents and the student – use terms that are understandable. Also, be aware of all the special dynamics if the student will be present – especially, the importance of positive language and tone in the conversations.
- As you will see on the next slide, a student can feel discouraged if there is a negative tone in the meeting.

Participants' Comments

- *“In front of my child, the IEP teacher said that my child is far behind academically and that her reading is at a second grade level. The teacher said that she can't teach my daughter new skills. My 16-year-old exploded into crying and refused to come back to the meeting.”*
- *“During the IEP meeting, the teacher explained to my child, in terms he understood, the progress he has made and also talked to him about goals and objectives so that he'll know what he is going to be working on during the coming year.”*

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Here are some more comments from survey participants.

PRESENTER NOTE: You can either read the slide yourself, or ask someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

Creating Connection



- Create a positive connection prior to the actual meeting. Make a special effort to reach out if the student or family are new to the district.
- Make sure that comments are directed to the student, not just about the student, if he/she is present.



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- If a student or family is new to the district, reach out to them before the meeting. If a parent has never met any member of the IEP team, it is important to create a positive connection (in person, by email, or by phone) with the parent and the student prior to the meeting.
- At the meeting, make sure to talk directly to the student and ask the student questions. Students will feel left out if the conversation is about them and not with them.

Participants' Comments

- *“Things heated up pretty quickly and no one at the meeting was really prepared to deal with it. We need more expertise in how to deal with conflict itself.”*
- *“Parents need to feel safe, and heard. Sometimes when the power or aggressiveness of one parent is strong it can be very uncomfortable. All professionals need some training in dealing with difficult conversations.”*
- *“I have knowledge in special education – I do not have knowledge in dealing with highly emotional or difficult situations. That knowledge would have helped me!”*


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Here are more comments from parents and professionals.

PRESENTER NOTE: You can either read the slide yourself, or ask someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

Understanding Conflict



- Provide practical skill development in:
 - Understanding sources of conflict
 - Effective communication techniques – both in listening and speaking
 - Problem-solving techniques
 - How to manage high stress and difficult situations
- Refer to videos/webinars/ manuals /resources on the WSEMS website.
 - Resource: <http://www.wsems.us>



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- In order to feel safe and comfortable in an IEP meeting, having skills in understanding sources of conflict, effective communication techniques, problem solving techniques, and managing difficult conversations is very helpful.
- Understanding why someone is frustrated or angry, learning to actively listen without judgment and to speak in a way where your ideas can be heard, understanding how to productively brainstorm, and feeling comfortable when things get difficult, can help people focus on the student, rather than getting lost in personal emotions, animosity or distrust.
- Further training for parents and staff is always recommended, as these skills have practical purposes not just for IEP meetings, but for many situations in both our personal and professional lives.
- The WI Special Education Mediation System website (link is on slide) includes many great resources.
- There is a Mediation Training Manual and also many videos and recorded trainings that include ideas and suggestions in these important skills.
- The site also links to the many resources of CADRE (the National Center for Alternate Dispute Resolution in Special Education).

Understanding Emotion



- Be aware of any existing difficult relationships or highly emotional topics.
- Identify staff members who are the most effective at re-directing high emotion and who work well with the parents.
- Have a plan to deal with difficult emotions or situations.

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- Be aware of any positive or negative relationships that already exist between the parent and the district, as well as any topics that seem to trigger high emotions by any member of the IEP team.
- By planning ahead and thinking about how to handle these difficult situations before they happen, particular IEP team members who are highly effective at managing either difficult conversations or emotional hot spots can be ready if needed, to bring the focus of the meeting back to the student.
- Spending time in an IEP meeting on anger or distrust issues usually means that there are issues beyond the focus of an IEP meeting which could be better dealt with in a separate meeting such as IEP facilitation or mediation.
- Sometimes you can suspend the IEP meeting in order to have a mediation to deal with the issues. If you are in a time-sensitive situation and need to complete the IEP, you can finish the IEP meeting and schedule the mediation to deal with the communication or trust issues.

Your Thoughts?

(Optional Slide)

1. What specific techniques can be used to build rapport and connection in an IEP meeting?
2. How can difficult or emotional situations be handled in an IEP meeting?
3. What do you think are the most important points in this section?
4. What have been your IEP experiences related to this section?
5. Are there particular challenges you anticipate?
6. How will you address these challenges?
7. What specific techniques will you try in your next IEP meeting?



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PRESENTER NOTE: Qs 1 & 2 specifically relate to this focus area of “People.” Qs 3-7 are more general & the same questions will also be included after each focus area section.

If limited time, you can suggest that people think about these questions on their own. If more time, you can use Qs 1 & 2 and a few from the general questions, 3-7. If webinar, you can suggest typing some answers into the chat box.

Some comments provided so far:

Q1. Techniques to build rapport: invite trusted people; connect before the meeting; use language everyone can understand; have knowledgeable people attending who really know the student and resources available; use positive language

Q2. Handling tough situations: have a team member ready to handle who is comfortable with emotion; suggest a separate meeting to deal with more difficult topics.

Process



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The second focus area is “Process – Preparation and Meeting.”

Introduction Process

- Always remember “the beginning impacts the end.”
- Establishing a positive relationship in the beginning of the parent/district relationship is essential.
 - Separate people from the problem/disagreement.
 - Focus on interests, not positions.
 - Treat everyone with respect.
 - Stay focused on the student throughout the process.
 - Be open and creative in exploring ways to meet the student’s educational needs.

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- Sometimes IEP team members can be so focused on the outcome, that they forget or ignore some very basic guidelines that can lead to a more productive meeting and a better outcome.
- Remember that the beginning of the meeting will impact the end – so care needs to be taken at every stage. **Separating people from the problem** means that IEP team members should focus together on solving what is best for the student. It is not about us vs. them, or parent against the district. **Bringing people together as a team is an essential component of the IEP meeting.** Setting the tone of the meeting from the very first moment is important.
- Everyone should be treated with respect as an important member of the team – all of whom are dedicated to focusing on the student’s educational needs in an open, creative, and non-judgmental way.
- Sometimes in a meeting, the center of attention can drift away from the student and focus instead on the relationship of the parents and the district, and things that have happened in the past. It is essential that the team stay focused on the student’s needs and educational goals, and what the team can do to provide for that particular student.
- Find what is important and the goals behind the position or requests. Understanding **why** someone is expressing what they are expressing will give **more insight** into how to creatively solve the questions.

PRESENTER NOTES: After the last bullet, if time permits, to further illustrate the difference between positions & interests:

- Show 6 ½ minute CADRE video, *Understanding Positions & Interests*.
http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/flashtours/positions_demonew.htm
- Or, give “**The Orange**” example- There are 2 kids fighting over last orange in refrig. Their position is they both want the orange. Their mom cuts it in ½- 1 for each. Neither kid is very happy. Had the mom sought to find their “interest” in having the orange, she would have found that one the orange rind for a cake & the other was just looking to squeeze the orange to drink. Both interests could have been met.

2014 Survey

- In a 2014 survey of Wisconsin parents:
 - 55% indicated that they had been given a least a month's notice of the IEP meeting,
 - 76% said they were asked to suggest convenient times and dates,
 - 65% stated they were asked if there was anything special about their child's academic or functional performance that they would like to discuss at the meeting.



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In 2014, as part of the request of WSEMS to districts and parents, parents gave WSEMS valuable feedback as far as their own experiences in IEP meetings. There were over 70 responses by parents who shared the following information.

- **Over half** of the parents stated they had been given at least a month's notice of the IEP meeting which allowed them to come to the meeting more focused and prepared.
- **76%** were asked for their suggestions as to the time of day and the possible dates which gave the parents a sense of their importance as a member of the IEP team.
- and **65%** were asked if there was anything special about their child's academic or functional performance that they would like to discuss at the meeting.

Participants' Comments Process - Preparation

- *“I appreciated that the district contacted me prior to the meeting and really stressed that I was an important part of the team. It felt like they really wanted my input.”*
- *“By far the most helpful thing has been to meet with teachers and providers ahead of time so we are not bogged down with minutiae and can focus on longer term goals and broader perspective.”*
- *“I felt the district already had the entire IEP written in their heads before I got there.”*



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Here are some comments from our survey related to Process.

PRESENTER NOTE: You can either read the slide yourself, or ask someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

Participants' Comments

Process- Preparation

- *“I always ask for a brief meeting and an IEP draft before the meeting to kind of “pre-plan.” Staff is usually willing to do this, but wouldn't if I didn't ask.”*
- *“We did not receive timely information as to who would be at the meeting. The district brought a therapist that we did not know about.”*
- *“We received written notification that several staff that worked with our child were going to be present at the IEP. In actuality, only the lead special-education teacher was present. This was misleading in our opinion.”*

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Here are some comments related to Process – preparation for the meeting.

PRESENTER NOTE: You can either read the slide yourself, or ask someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

Participants' Comments Process- Preparation

- *"I was notified about the IEP meeting the day before."*
- *"We have never finished a meeting in the time allotted. It would be very helpful to have team meetings in advance of the actual IEP meetings to begin developing the present level and goals, so we are not always forced to have another meeting, which inevitably is not a good time for us."*


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- **PRESENTER NOTE: read the slide or ask someone from the audience read the slide**


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- As you can see by the last three slides of comments, there is a wide range of feedback from parents regarding preparation for the IEP meeting:
 - Some parents believe districts come to the IEP meeting with completed IEPs.
 - Some parents said that they were invited by the district to a preparation meeting before the actual IEP meeting.
 - Some said that they had no knowledge as to who would be at the meeting or what was to be discussed.
 - Others said the district contacted them in advance to stress the importance of their participation in the IEP meeting.

Prior to the Meeting



- Be prepared.
- Prepare a **draft agenda** and ask for staff and parents' input. Give them sufficient time to respond.
- Consider sending a form to staff and parents asking for ideas about the meeting.
- Consider sending parents a questionnaire (concerns, strengths, thoughts) to better understand their potential issues.

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- So, what works best as far as establishing the trust and connection that leads to a productive meeting? Districts gave us many examples and techniques that have proven successful throughout the IEP process in establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with the parents.
- First, be prepared.
- Consider sending parents a questionnaire about their child (asking for concerns, strengths, thoughts) or a student profile. Ask them if they have any questions or thoughts about the IEP meeting. This will help the district understand potential issues that could arise.
- The **Positive Student Profile** form, one of your **HANDOUTS** for this presentation, is an example of how districts and parents can share information in advance about a student.

PRESENTER NOTE: If time permits, ask participants if they have used similar forms & how they helped.
(If webinar, can type in chat box)

Contact Prior to the Meeting



- The case manager can contact IEP team members to go over logistics (agenda, location, date & time, accommodations needed).
- The case manager should stress to the parents, student and staff how important their presence will be at the meeting.

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- The case manager can contact the IEP team members to go over the agenda, the meeting location, date & time, and any needed accommodations.
- The IEP Team meeting needs to be scheduled at a convenient time for all members of the IEP team.
- Schedule the meeting in a timeframe that is not close to the statutory deadline so that there can be a second meeting if everything can not be accomplished in one meeting.
- While most IEP meetings do complete an IEP in one meeting, it is important that the statutory timelines for completing the IEP are not adding pressure to either the parent or district personnel to come up with a document that is not the best it can be due to a hurried or rushed atmosphere.
- All IEP members are an important part of the team. Stress to the parents their importance – and the value of their knowledge and input about the student at the meeting.

Understanding the IEP




- If the parents have never seen an IEP form, offer to send them a blank IEP form.
- It may be helpful to share a draft IEP in advance (if available) with all IEP team members.
- Express to all members of the IEP team that everyone's input is essential to fully develop the IEP. A draft IEP is a working document.

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- If parents are unfamiliar with the IEP form itself, send them a copy. Offering to explain the form and IEP process fully to parents before the meeting can be very helpful, including the new I-7 forms (statewide assessment) and the Post Secondary Transition Planning (PTP) on line.
- There are also some helpful DPI resources, including the *Intro to Special Education*; *Special Education in Plain Language*, publications and trainings.
- Most school districts develop the agenda and the IEP during the IEP meeting. Some districts, in addition to sharing an agenda in advance, may also develop a draft IEP. If developed, the draft should be shared with all IEP team members in advance. Stress that it is ONLY a draft – and a suggested starting place for discussion among all team members as to the goals and services for the student.
- To avoid the perception that the district has made up its mind as to the content of the IEP, tell all IEP team members that their input is absolutely essential to development of the IEP and that any written documents (agenda or draft IEP) are drafts for discussion.

Exchanging Information Prior to the Meeting



- In order for everyone to be prepared, districts and parents are encouraged to share IEP-related reports before the meeting
 - Reports should be read by all team members before the meeting whenever possible.
 - Consider a short informal meeting with the parents before the IEP meeting to go over new data and recent test results.

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- It is important for the district and parents to provide IEP reports and any other critical documents before the meeting so that no one has to read a lengthy report during the meeting.
- If it is not possible to provide the reports before the meeting, then bring enough copies for all IEP team members to the meeting and also be prepared to provide a summary of the report at the meeting.
- Parents are also encouraged to provide their information to the districts. The goal should be to minimize surprises for all IEP team members whenever possible.
- If there is a lot of data or complicated or conflicting information, it may be useful to have a short informal meeting before the IEP meeting, to go over data and recent test results.

Ensuring the Right People are Present



- Have a copy of the current IEP for reference – make sure the parent has a copy.
- The IEP invitation should list all the people who will be attending the meeting.
- The parents should notify the district also if they plan to bring someone with them.
- If a team member is not able to attend, the district must notify the parent and give them an option to re-schedule the IEP meeting if the parent would like the person there.

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- The district must notify the parents as to who will attend and the parents should notify the district who will attend as well.
- It is very disconcerting to be counting on the attendance of a particular person – and they don't show up.
- It is also equally surprising to come to a meeting and be faced with people you did not expect to be there.
- If an essential person of the team cannot be there, the parents have the option for re-scheduling in order for the person who is currently unavailable to attend.

Participants' Comments Process - Arrival

- According to the 2014 parent survey, only 21% were met and welcomed outside of the meeting room by the district.
- Less than 6% of parents were provided water in the meeting.
- Some parents indicated that the first time they met some of the district personnel was sitting across the table in the meeting.

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- In the survey, parents indicated that only 21% had actually been met and welcomed outside the meeting room and less than 6% were offered water. Some districts indicated they provided beverages and light snacks (crackers, candy.)
- Some parents indicated that they had never met some of the district personnel until they were sitting across the table in the meeting.

PRESENTER NOTE:

- You may choose to conduct a poll:

What did you experience coming to the meeting (check all that apply):

- Welcomed Water Snacks Introduced to everyone
 None of these

Creating a Comfortable Environment



- Insure comfortable waiting area and meeting space.
- Provide easy access to restrooms, outside area, water and/or snacks, and a a space for the parents (and their advocate, if they have one) to take a break or have private conversations.
- Have pens, paper, tissues, water in the room.
- Create seating arrangement that is customized to the particular situation (relaxed/formal, location of specific personnel and parents, etc.)

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- Meetings can be scary or intimidating – especially if it is someone’s first IEP meeting. Have a comfortable waiting area for parents and arrange the meeting space in a welcoming way.
- No little student chairs that cause people’s knees to be up to their chin.
- No extremely cold or hot environments.
- No noisy areas where you can’t hear the person across the table. Provide easy access to restrooms (show the parent where these are prior to the meeting).
- Have water and, if possible, snacks in the room. Provide pens and paper and tissues.
- Create a seating arrangement that is customized to the meeting – many people prefer a more relaxed environment with a large white board or pad of paper that the team members can all see. You can put the draft IEP up on a smart board or computer screen for immediate revisions/additions that all can see.

First Impressions



- Promptly meet parents in the school office and introduce yourself.
- Once inside the room, go around the table and have everyone introduce themselves and their roles on the team.
- If members of the team are not all familiar with each other, have name cards (easier to read than name tags).

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- Someone from the district should welcome the parents in the office. Preferably, it should be someone that the parents already know and with whom they have a positive relationship. If the district representative does not know the parents, he or she should introduce him or herself and their role. This will usually immediately reduce anxiety and nervousness about the meeting.
- Once in the room, go around the table and have everyone re-introduce themselves and their role on the team. Try to create a personal, as well as professional connection.
- Have name cards that are easy to read, instead of or in addition to, name tags.
- In some cultures that are more formal, people prefer to be addressed as Mr. and Mrs. So-and-So. In others, people may prefer their first names.
- People should be addressed by their names not their role. for example, “Susan” instead of “the parent.” Avoid use of acronyms, for example, introduce yourself as “Joe Smith, Speech and Language Pathologist” not “SLP.”

PRESENTER NOTE:

- If time permits, ask ,“What made you feel welcomed to the IEP meeting?”

Participants' Comments Process - The Meeting

- *“The parent used the IEP meeting as an opportunity to vent about the district. We didn't talk about the IEP itself until two hours into our meeting.”*
- *“I appreciate that the case manager kept the meeting focused on the goals.”*
- *“Higher level personnel who did not know my child seemed to be making the decisions. The teacher, who was the most knowledgeable, did not seem to have much power.”*

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- Here are some more parent and district comments related to the Process.

PRESENTER NOTE:

You can either read the slide yourself, or ask someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

Beginning the Meeting



- The case manager should summarize the goals at the beginning of the meeting.
 - Focus on the student's educational needs.
 - Refer to the agenda for time-frames, as well as reinforcing commitment to attend entire meeting.
 - State that a second meeting can be scheduled if unable to finish everything in one meeting.
 - Non-IEP-related issues will be written down for discussion at another time (large whiteboard or easel).

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- Keeping a meeting focused on the student's educational needs can sometimes be difficult if the relationship between the district and the parent is stressful.
- The case manager should summarize the goals at the beginning of the meeting and refer to the agenda. The case manager should refer to the agenda for time-frames, indicating that there is structure, as well as flexibility, in the process.
- State that most IEPs can be developed in one meeting, however a second meeting can be scheduled if necessary.
- If issues are raised that are not specific to the IEP and the IEP meeting, the case manager can keep track of those issues so that they can be dealt with in another meeting.

Beginning the Meeting (Continued)



- Guidelines can be developed as a group, or the case manager can share suggested rules for the meeting.
- Some possible ideas are
 - Stress that everyone's ideas will be respected.
 - Everyone will have a chance to speak.
 - Plain language will be used.
 - Put phones on vibrate or silent.
- Have a clock on the wall so all can see it clearly.



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- Most people do not like to be told how to behave. On the other hand, guidelines that apply to all members of the IEP team can make a meeting more productive.
- The case manager can indicate that there are some guidelines that are routinely used in IEP meetings, state what those are, and ask if they are acceptable to everyone. Or the case manager can ask the team members to suggest guidelines themselves.
- Some popular guidelines are to listen without judgment and be respectful to all ideas, to talk one at a time, that everyone will have a chance to speak, that plain language will be used and that technical language will be explained.
- Tell the team members that in order to focus on the student, all distractions should be kept at an absolute minimum – including the use of cell phones which should be put on vibrate or silent.
- It can be very distracting to have people checking their watches or cell phones for the time. So, having a clearly visible wall clock will allow everyone to pace themselves & follow the timelines in the agenda.

Participants' Comments

The Meeting

- *“It was nice that the district talked about my child’s strengths, as well as his challenges. It made me feel that my child was a student – not a problem.”*
- *“Our IEP meeting was a positive experience. We were in a half circle facing white pads on easels. The strengths of my son were listed in big bright colors. True strengths, not just what he enjoyed doing. This set the tone for the entire meeting. They saw him for who he was, and not for the challenges he had. This also allowed the team to focus on how to best use those strengths to problem-solve other areas of concern. The chairs facing the boards also felt to me that the entire team were focused on him, not on disagreements among the team.”*

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- Here are more comments related to positive experiences during the meeting.

PRESENTER NOTE:

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Working Together at the Meeting



- Participatory Exercise at IEP Meeting
 - Put up two sheets of flip chart paper with one sheet titled “Strengths” and one sheet titled “Challenges.”
 - Starting with “Strengths,” ask each participant to identify one or two of the student's strengths as a learner and then go around again and list “Challenges.”
 - Participants then review the lists and indicate how the data informs them about the student.
 - This should be a quick, introductory activity to focus on the student and show a balance between strengths and challenges.



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- Here is an example of a possible exercise to do at the meeting that involves all members of team working together to identify both strengths and challenges of the student. (Read slide.)

Participants' Comments Process - The Meeting

- *“The district had so many people there that I felt I had very little time to talk. They were nice to me, but I felt as though I hardly got to say anything.”*
- *“We appreciated it when we were asked to speak early in the IEP meeting about our concerns and new goals without having to demand to do so.”*

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Here are more quotes about experiences during the meeting.

PRESENTER NOTE: You can either read the slide yourself, or ask someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

Communication at the Meeting



- The case manager should:
 - Start with open-ended questions.
 - Balance “talk time” of district and parents, even though there may be more district personnel.
 - Record the discussion points/options/agreements/disagreements. Have a scribe so that the case manager can focus on the parents and not be writing notes.
 - Have a list of “parking lot” issues – i.e., things that need to be talked about but may not fit in the IEP meeting format.

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- The beginning of the meeting should be the time to ask exploratory questions - finding out the interests, issues, and particular goals for this meeting.
- All members should have the chance to talk uninterrupted, however it is good to keep the time balanced and focused on the student.
- Keep track of the points, the options, the agreements and disagreements, as well as a page that deals with non-IEP issues that are still important.
- The term “parking lot” is used to describe the process of listing issues that are either to be discussed at another meeting or in a mediation – usually broader than the goals of an IEP meeting.

Participants' Comments The Meeting

- *“The issues in the IEP meeting were more appropriate for mediation. The issues were broader and came from the bad relationship between the district and the parent.”*
- *“Trust could only be developed through a neutral third party. Glad we decided to go to mediation.”*

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Here are more comments.

PRESENTER NOTE:

You can either read the slide yourself, or ask someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

- Sometimes IEP meetings can lose their focus and start to stray into areas that are broader than the IEP meeting.
- Rather than have the meeting fall apart, or have people be frustrated or angry, it is better to acknowledge that another type of meeting might be the place to handle the additional issues or problems.
- Sometimes an IEP facilitator from WSEMS can come in and help the meeting stay focused; other times a mediation is the more appropriate forum to address the bigger issues.

Referral to WSEMS for IEP Facilitation



- While the case manager is still responsible for the IEP content, sometimes a neutral person who is not directly involved in the outcome can assist the parties in having a productive meeting.
- This is especially true when there is a difficult relationship between the district and the parent or there is a lack of trust.
- The facilitated meeting is still focused on the IEP, not on the broader issues that would be appropriate for mediation.

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- WSEMS provides neutral, trained facilitators to help in IEP meetings.
- A facilitated IEP is a free option for early conflict prevention that is not required by IDEA to be available, but is available in WI)
- While the case manager is still responsible for the IEP content, the IEP facilitator is there to help. The facilitator is not an IEP team member.
- When there is a difficult relationship between the district and a parent, or members of the IEP team do not listen well to each other, a WSEMS facilitator can assist in keeping the meeting focused on the student, establishing a more workable framework to talk about the IEP goals, help brainstorm options, and move the process forward to completion of the IEP.

PRESENTER NOTE:


- Provide the audience with the **WSEMS brochure HANDOUT** and point out the IEP Facilitation tab on the brochure.
- **HANDOUTS** also include a **Facilitated IEP Request form**.

**Referral to WSEMS
for Mediation**



- Either the parent or the district (or both together) can request mediation with WSEMS – although both need to agree.
- Mediation provides a place where disputes about IEP issues, eligibility, placement and denial of Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) are addressed.

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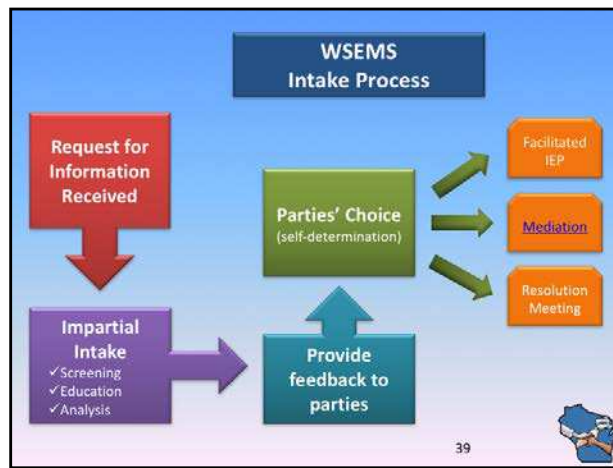


- When parties reach impasse or the bigger issues threaten to derail the IEP, mediation may be appropriate. WSEMS provides trained mediators who can help address the broader issues, the sources of resistance, the issues of trust and lack of communication. This service is free to parents & schools in WI.
- A mediation session is separate from the IEP meeting. While either the parent or the district can request mediation through WSEMS, both parties need to agree in order for mediation to go forward.
- There is no such thing as a “mediated IEP.” There is IEP facilitation and there is mediation. Each follows their own process and their own goals.
- An IEP facilitation is focused on developing the IEP, a mediation is focused on resolving a specific dispute, or multiple disputes.

PRESENTER NOTE:

- Refer to *WSEMS Training Manual: Effective Participation in the Special Education Mediation Process* (located on wsems.us/publications)
- Point out the Mediation tab on the WSEMS brochure.

- HANDOUTS also include a **Request for Mediation form**.



Here is a visual picture of the intake process at WSEMS.

- As you can see a request for information is received and the case is screened and analyzed by the intake coordinator with the potential users to help determine the appropriate process.
- The intake coordinator helps people understand the different choices and provides feedback to the parents and the district about how each option might meet their needs.
- The choice of which process and mediator or facilitator to use is up to the parents and the school district.

PRESENTER NOTE:

- Link to WSEMS Video on *Effective Participation in Mediation and IEP Facilitation*. (link is on the slide's Mediation box)

<http://www.wsems.us/multimedia/training-videos/>

Your Thoughts?

(Optional Slide)

1. What strategies should be used in the meeting to make all parties feel involved?
2. How can parents become more involved in the IEP meeting?
3. How can students become more involved in the IEP meeting?
4. What do you think are the most important points in this section?
5. What have been your IEP experiences related to this section?
6. Are there particular challenges you anticipate?
7. How will you address these challenges?
8. What specific techniques will you try in your next IEP meeting?

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PRESENTER NOTE: Qs 1, 2 & 3 specifically relate to this focus area of “Process.” Qs 4-8 are the more general questions included after each focus area section.

If limited time, you can suggest that people think about these questions on their own. If more time, you can use Qs 1-3 and a few from the general questions, 4-8. If webinar, you can suggest typing some answers into the chat box.

Outcome



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Our third focus area is Outcome.

Introduction

Outcome

- Develop an IEP with specific, measureable goals.
- Have clear, understandable language.
- Summarize how parents assisted in developing the goal(s) in IEP.
- Note parents' concerns on the IEP I-4 Linking form in the "concerns of the parents/Family" section.
- If there are remaining areas of disagreement, discuss steps in going forward - for example, acquiring more information. If disagreements remain, refer the parties to the special education director.

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- The primary goal of the IEP meeting is to complete an understandable and workable IEP.
- The IEP should have specific and measureable annual goals with clear language that is understandable to all team members, as well as to anyone who may be responsible for implementing the IEP who is not at the meeting (apply the 'strangers' test).
- Describe or summarize how parents assisted in developing the goal(s) in IEP
- If the parent has concerns, it is important to note them on the LF IEP form (Linking Present Levels, Needs, Goals and Services Form) .
- If the parent disagrees with the IEP, it is still the district's responsibility to complete it. But it might be helpful for parents if the district took time to provide additional information about services and supports being suggested.
- If the parent still disagrees with the IEP, the parent should be referred to the special education director who can discuss next steps with the parent – perhaps an IEP facilitation, mediation, IDEA complaint or ultimately a due process hearing if the parents and the district still can not reach agreement.

Participants' Comments Outcome

- *“It is two weeks since the meeting and the IEP is still in draft form. We have not heard from the district since the meeting. Not sure if they are going to follow through.”*
- *“I did not get a rough copy of what was discussed so I could compare with the final copy. I did not get a follow-up call/ email to go over the IEP to make sure I understood.”*

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Here are some comments about outcome.

PRESENTER NOTE: You can either read the slide yourself, or ask someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

If IEP Not Completed



- If the IEP has not been fully developed, a date for completing the IEP must be determined by the participants. The case manager should:
 - Review the team's accomplishments for that day.
 - Check in with all team members about agenda items not completed, follow-up that might be needed, and the timeline for the next meeting.
 - The case manager confirms how copies of reports will be provided to everyone after the meeting, and by when.

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- If the IEP was not completed at the meeting, the case manager should review what was completed so far by the team, and schedule the next IEP team meeting within the statutory timelines.
- Check in with all the team members about any unfinished agenda items; follow-up that might be helpful before the next meeting.
- If copies of the reports had not been provided prior to or at the meeting, the case manager confirms how copies of the reports will be provided after the meeting and a specific timeframe where everyone will receive the copies.

If IEP Completed



- If an IEP has been developed, make sure that a communication plan between parent and district is developed and agreed upon.
 - Type of communication
 - Emails, phone calls, home/school notebooks , parent-teacher meetings
 - Frequency of communication
 - Once a week? (Progress report on short-term goals - for example, safety issues, effects positive behavioral supports in classroom)
 - Once a month? (Longer-term goals)

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- A key part of the IEP when it is developed is to establish a concrete and specific communication plan.
- What type of communication works best in this specific situation? Do the parents have easy access to a computer in order to receive emails? If not, or it is only available at their worksite, phone calls are usually preferable. Discuss how frequently there will be communication between the parents and the district. Some goals may need more frequent follow-up.
- As you can see by the parent comments in the preceding slides, some parents received minimal follow-up after the IEP meeting.
- Remember that a positive relationship with all team members is important and that having regular and consistent communication is a key ingredient to building and maintaining that relationship.

If IEP Completed (Continued)



- If an IEP has been developed make sure that:
 - The goals are easily understood in plain language.
 - Use data and facts for measuring progress.
 - If possible, give parent a draft of the IEP at the meeting.
 - Discuss the importance of the I-4 form (linking form).
 - Establish the specific timeline for completion of the IEP and when it will be sent to parent.
 - Provide specific dates/timelines throughout the year for review of goals.

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- If an IEP has been developed, use easy to understand language and make sure to use objective criteria in measuring progress.
 - How will you measure each goal? Who will measure the goals? When will you measure the goals?
- If possible, give the parent a copy of the IEP at the meeting. If it is not ready, give a specific date on which they will receive it and how. For example, mailed by the district to the parent by November 13th.
- In the meeting, provide for dates and timelines for review of the goals and coordinate it with the communication plan mentioned on the previous slide.

IEP Provisions

- Make sure the IEP language is clear and specific.
 - EX: When including Positive Behavioral Supports in the IEP, describe how the supports will be implemented in the classroom.

 - EX: When describing school services as Speech and Language or Special Education Reading Instruction, be clear on the **amount, frequency and location** of these services. If these services cannot be described in daily or weekly allotment of time, make sure to describe the **circumstances** under which these services will be provided.

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- Here are some examples of what to consider when writing the IEP.
- Read slide
- *Refer to DPI Bulletin 10.07 Describing Special Education, Related Services, Supplementary Aids and Services, and Program Modifications or Supports*

IEP Provisions (Continued)



- Make sure to consider IEP participants' underlying interests.
 - EX: In discussing the need for a one-to-one paraprofessional, consider such interests as the student's independence and safety.
 - EX: In transportation issues, consider such interests as the student's safety issues and district's required versus permissible services.



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PRESENTER NOTE:

Read the slide.

IEP Provisions (Continued)



- Make sure to consider both long term and short term needs.
 - EX: In discussing potential graduation, consider the student's academic credits and transition skills. Will another school year provide the student with additional employability skills necessary for competing in the job market?


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PRESENTER NOTE:


Read slide.

IEP Provisions (Continued)



- Consider including a plan to “connect” parents with their child’s learning at home
- Teacher demonstrates to parents ‘fun’ learning activities associated with the IEP annual goal(s) in Math & Reading
- Parents may choose to use these activities at home





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- It is often helpful for parents and teachers to work together on ‘fun learning activities’ that the parent(s) can do at home with their child. The teacher can show and provide to the the parent easy and fun activities and games that are geared to the child’s specific IEP goals and learning styles. This can build a strong parent/teacher team approach to helping the child do their best and also helps creates a positive parent/teacher relationship.
- Recent research conducted by the Harvard Graduate School of Education* shows that school districts using Karen Mapp’s Family Engagement Framework “linking families to student’s learning” increased students’ reading & math achievement between 10 – 20 percentage points.
- **For example (directions for letter sound bingo) :**
 1. Give the child the bingo card
 2. Parent will call a letter sound for the child to find on the card
 3. The child will find the letter that matches the sound then will use a coin/bean/paper scrap as a cover up for that letter on the bingo card.

* *A dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, 2013. Published by SEDL and the U.S. Department of Education*

IEP Provisions (Continued)



- Consider student's self-advocacy skills vs. district's commitment of resources.
 - EX: When describing services on the IEP (I-9) summary:
 - "Supplementary Aids and Services," such as calculator-use, should not be up to the student to request its use. The calculator should be available for the student's use for all activities that necessitate the use of a calculator.
 - On the other hand, an annual goal may be developed that the student should be encouraged to ask for the calculator in order to address the student's self-advocacy skills.



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PRESENTER NOTE:

Read slide.

Your Thoughts?

(Optional Slide)

1. What tips do you have in writing specific, understandable IEPs ?
2. How can we ensure that everyone understands the language of the IEP?
3. What do you think are the most important points in this section?
4. What have been your IEP experiences related to this section?
5. Are there particular challenges you anticipate?
6. How will you address these challenges?
7. What specific techniques will you try in your next IEP meeting?

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PRESENTER NOTE:

Qs 1 & 2 specifically relate to this focus area of “Outcome.” Qs 3-7 are more general & also included after each focus area section.

If limited time, you can suggest that people think about these questions on their own.

If more time, you can use Qs 1 & 2 and a few from the general questions, 3-7. If webinar, you can suggest typing some answers into the chat box.

Follow-through

A checklist or form with many rows and columns. The text is small and difficult to read, but it appears to be a list of items with checkboxes or small boxes next to them.

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Our fourth and final focus area is “Follow-through”.

Introduction Follow-through

- Follow-through is an essential part of the IEP process as trust can dissolve if promises are made and then broken.
- The district has a legal obligation to implement the terms of the IEP.
- Have positive contact throughout the year to foster the continuing relationship between parent and district.



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- Everyone has worked hard to have a completed IEP.
- The team members have hopefully built trust in the process and there is a sense of commitment and completion when the IEP is finished.
- All of that can be destroyed if there is limited follow-through. In addition to destroying the trust and rapport, the district has a legal obligation to implement the terms of the IEP.
- If the goals turn out to be unrealistic, communication with the IEP team is essential. The IEP team may decide to review/revise the IEP.
- Keep the positive contact throughout the year – a yearly meeting is not enough to sustain a relationship.

Participants' Comments

Follow-through

- *“Do what the team has agreed to and what is in the IEP - if you can't, then let me know. It becomes very difficult to trust the people entrusted with my child's learning when the IEP is not followed.”*
- *“There was no follow-up from school staff after the meeting. Each year I have to request a copy of the IEP. I ask for a progress report on IEP goals and am told the IEP satisfies that progress report. My child's report card does not list progress notes on any IEP goals. I received one email, no text - just an attachment with a complete negative overview from the case manager and it did not address specific goals.”*

55



Here are some comments about “Follow-through”.

PRESENTER NOTE:

You can either read the slide yourself, or ask someone from the audience to read the slide. Each comment comes up separately, so you can click through quickly to have them all appear at once if you wish.

Communication



- If the IEP can not be sent to parent within the promised timeframe, contact the parent to explain the reason for the delay.
- Contact parent after the IEP is sent to see if there are any questions.
- Reinforce the communication plan in the IEP with the parent and remind them of the schedule to discuss progress on goals.



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- Sometimes IEPs are not sent to the parent in the timeframe that was promised.
- The district should contact the parent and explain the reason for the delay. Do not assume that the parent will simply understand that something has “come up” or that there must be a reasonable reason for the delay.
- Let them know when to expect the IEP.
- About a week after the IEP is sent to the parent, the case manager should call and see if the parents have any questions and talk about the communication plan for the future – reminding them about that portion of the IEP.

Your Thoughts?

(Optional Slide)

1. What specific techniques or procedures can ensure good follow through in implementing the IEP?
2. What do you think are the most important points in this section?
3. What have been your IEP experiences related to this section?
4. Are there particular challenges you anticipate?
5. How will you address these challenges?
6. What specific techniques will you try in your next IEP meeting?

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PRESENTER NOTE:

Qs 1 specifically relates to this focus area of “Follow-through.” Qs 2-6 are more general.

If limited time, you can suggest that people think about these questions on their own.

If more time, you can use Q 1 and a few from the general questions, 2-6.

If webinar, you can suggest typing some answers into the chat box.

Conclusion

- An IEP meeting should be a chance for parties to collaborate, share expertise, be student-focused, encourage creativity, and utilize problem-solving skills.
- Thoughtful pre-planning, inclusive and constructive meetings, and consistent follow-through strengthen the parent/district relationship.

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Read slide

- We hope that this presentation has helped provide a solid base for developing more productive and friendlier IEP meetings.
- We know that the suggestions may involve more work and may also involve spending more time in the preparation and planning stages. However, thoughtful planning, solid communication, and positive contacts will ultimately save time.
- When districts and parents have good relationships, everything runs more smoothly and with less conflict.
- Many of the parent/school relationships will last for years. Remember in one slide we said “the beginning impacts the ending.” The beginning and planning stages of a relationship and the very first IEP meeting will set the stage for years to come. Investing time and energy in making a productive IEP benefits everyone.

Let's Traffic Light the Day

(Optional Slide)

- **Red light:** I am going to STOP doing...
- **Yellow light:** I'm going to CONTINUE doing...
- **Green light:** I'm going to START doing...



59

Please take a few minutes to complete each sentence....

I am going to STOP doing...

I am going to CONTINUE doing...

I am going to START doing...

PRESENTER NOTE:

If webinar, ask participants to type answers into the chat box.

If time permits, you can solicit ask a few participants to share things that they are going to Stop, Continue, or Start doing..

Resources

- Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System (WSEMS) <http://www.wsems.us>
 - Jane Burns (Intake Coordinator and System Administrator)
 - jane@wsems.us; 888-298-3857 (Toll Free)
- Department of Public Instruction (DPI on WSEMS) http://sped.dpi.wi.gov/sped_wsems
- CADRE – Wisconsin Exemplary Special Education Mediation Program
 - <http://www.directionservice.org/cadre/pdf/Profile%20Wisconsin.pdf>



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Here are some resources. Also, see additional **HANDOUT** of ***Resources*** available to support your efforts in achieving productive and friendly IEP meetings.

EVALUATION

Please complete an evaluation
of this presentation

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PrdctvFrdlyIEPMtgs>

