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A Guide for Parents Acquiring the English Language-
Acting as an Advocate for Your Child Living with a Disability and Supporting Them
Academically in Their English Language Acquisition

by

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Abstract

This project addressed the issue of improving academic outcomes of ELLs with disabilities. The focus of this project was providing a clear understanding of the professional and pedagogical reasons why parent engagement is essential for effective schooling of ELLs living with a disability. Students’ needs could not be met until the parents’ needs were met and the barriers preventing immigrant parent engagement in their child’s education were eliminated. The method used was a mixed method approach using qualitative and quantitative research performed for purposes of creating the project’s parent handbook. As a result, the handbook provides the bridge to help close the gap between parents acquiring the English language and their child’s schools. The contents of the parent handbook confirm that the educational beliefs, attitudes toward education and connections of parents acquiring the English language with their child’s school render a child more susceptible to having their moral, emotional and psychological needs met. Research recommends that school communication and cultural awareness be established to allow relationships between parents and schools to develop with a student centered focus. As a result of this recommendation, EL children living with a disability feel more connected and supported through their educational process.

Key words: Parent engagement, English language learners, students with disabilities
Chapter 1

Introduction

According to the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network of New Jersey in a guide for helping parents navigate the education system, developed by Diana MTK Autin: “Parents know a lot about their children – how they learn best, what makes them happy and what makes them sad or angry, what they struggle with at home in homework, how many friends they have, whether they are experiencing bullying or harassment at school. Parents should also know through report cards, contact with their child’s teacher, and review of tests and grades, and the kind of progress their child is making – or is not making.

Because of parent involvement requirements in special education, bilingual education, No Child Left Behind (recently changed to the Common Core initiative), and discipline, they should also know the services their child is receiving and how they are working. All of this information is important for parents to know and fully understand. Parents are an integral part of their child's IEP team and their involvement, support, and opinions matter. They are ultimately the ones who are approving or disapproving their child's access to services provided through Special Education.”

Background

The central issue of this project was to identify why EL parents are not more actively engaged in their child’s education. This project is in direct correlation with the author’s observed and experienced lack of parent involvement at their school site. The goal of this project was to break down the barriers for EL parents that potentially prevent or inhibit their inquiry process and involved support in their child’s education. The aim of this project was to find ways in
which EL parents can be educated and equipped to take action as participants of their child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) team both at school and at home.

**Statement of Problem**

While some research has shown that cultural attitudes and expectations, as well as socio-economic status, are factors of interference with parents’ engagement in their child’s academic life, primary language differences continue to interfere with parents’ engagement in their child’s IEP for various reasons (e.g. parent illiteracy in their own primary language; non-proficient translators or translators who are uncomfortable with how to correctly translate the legal terminology associated with an IEP; social bias that parents might feel because of their culture/language, etc.). For an EL student living with a disability that has no academic support at home due to reasons such as language barriers, learning academic standards in their secondary language that they are still acquiring can be even more daunting. The law governing the educational services for ELLs is varied and consists of both state and federal requirements. For an EL parent with a child living with a disability, they also have an added responsibility of understanding Special Education Law. Even for parents whose primary language is English, research shows that understanding the Special Education Legal Process can be difficult and confusing, possibly leading parents to frustration and avoidance.

Part of what makes everything so confusing is the way the legal process works. For example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized by the Federal Government in 2004. Next, the U.S. Department of Education wrote regulations to help explain the law, followed by public input before actually becoming part of the federal code in 2006. Meanwhile, each state had to pass new laws to make sure that they were in compliance with IDEA which resulted in state regulations. Of course each state can offer more than the
required services required under IDEA which means that the Procedural Safeguards outlining the parents’ rights and responsibilities apply specifically to the state they live. So if you move from one state to another, you may find services and allocation of those services to be different. Therefore, it takes time for immigrant and/or EL parents to understand their rights and responsibilities in a system that is most likely foreign to them. For example, low-income families from Mexico might not prefer to question authority or make demands in U.S. schools, even though in their own country they may have been very vocal and active. Culture and its’ associated norms, religion, family dynamics, family values and practices, parent level of education, illegal citizenship, and socio-economic status are just some of the factors that may play a role in the academic lives of EL students living with a disability and affect the academic support they are given at home and provided with at school.

At the school site in study for this project, yearly numbers average about 75% socioeconomically disadvantaged students, 65.5% English Language Learners with their primary language being Spanish, and just over 18% of students receiving Special Education services. Educators, primarily Education Specialists, are concerned with the lack of parent engagement by parents of EL children who live with a disability. For many of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams organized to support students in Special Education at this site, the EL parents who are part of these teams are observed by and large to lack the necessary participation despite efforts made by the Education Specialists and/or case managers specifically for the EL children with an active IEP.

There are roughly 131 English Language Learner students at this school site this year who receive Special Education Services as defined through their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Many of the parents from this population do not fully understand what an IEP
is or why their child has one. Many of these parents have been attending IEP meetings for their child for several years now but remain as “inactive” members. Despite the resources available to the parents of an ELL student living with a disability, many are unaware or lack the understanding of how to successfully access and engage their child in the services and resources available to them.

This chapter outlines the purpose of this project, previews the literature and methodology used to support the hypothesis and claim this project is based upon, provides an explanation of the significance of the project, and concludes with definitions of terms found in this project.

**The Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of the project is to create a handbook that is both accessible and culturally responsive to the EL parents who have an EL child living with a disability. The handbook provides parents with essential information that specifically addresses parents’ expressed concerns about being involved in the IEP team. The goal of this project is to break down the barriers for EL parents that potentially prevent or inhibit their inquiry process and involved support in their child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). The handbook aims to help immigrant and/or EL parents be educated and equipped to take action as participants of their child’s IEP team both directly and indirectly at school and at home.

**Preview of Literature and Methodology**

Research suggests that knowledge is power. If the parents are confident in their understanding of their child’s educational process and program established for them through an IEP, perhaps they might engage more effectively in their child’s academic life. Currently, no handbook exists that is accessible to these parents to provide them with the knowledge and understanding that they need. None of the available translated materials in Southern California
provide parents with a streamlined, comprehensive book of the information, simple strategies, and school/community resources that parents’ desire in their primary language and most importantly at a readability level easy for them to comprehend. None are culturally responsive and thus fail to respond to the expressed needs of the parents. The lack of an accessible and culturally responsive handbook makes it virtually impossible for educators to provide the parents the information that they need to participate fully on the IEP team. As a result, bias are formed and uniformed parents lead to frustrated teachers and struggling students.

As a result of the aforementioned underlying issues to EL parent engagement, this project relied on a Mixed Methods research process involving the gathering of qualitative data from peer reviewed articles in addition to quantitative data from a parent survey. This Mixed Methods research approach allowed for a variety of viewpoints that address the following common themes: minority student overrepresentation in Special Education and how preventative questions parents might ask in the assessment/qualification process could help prevent overrepresentation of their child in Special Education; the need for culturally responsive practice; the barriers immigrant parents face; and the cultural biases regarding children with disabilities, parent roles and education. The data allowed for comparisons and trends over a period of time to be drawn in an effort to analyze the consistent, underlying issues mentioned and solutions to improving the status of those current issues.

**The Significance of the Project**

This handbook gives parents of English learners what they need to be fully engaged in supporting their children as a fully participating member of the IEP team. This handbook is intended to assist immigrant parents fully understand the process and purpose of their
involvement and support in their child's education as defined in the United States and what that looks like on a daily basis at home and through the supports provided to them at school.

**Definitions of Key Terms**

**Accommodations:** Changes that allow a person with a disability to participate fully in an activity. Examples include, extended time, different test format, and alterations to a classroom.

**ADD/ADHD:** Attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are medical conditions characterized by a child's inability to focus, while possessing impulsivity, fidgeting and inattention.

**Assessment or Evaluation:** Term used to describe the testing and diagnostic processes leading up to the development of an appropriate IEP for a student with special education needs.

**Asperger's Syndrome:** A type of pervasive developmental disorder (PDD) that involves delays in the development of basic skills, including socializing, coordination and the ability to communicate.

**Autism:** A brain development disorder characterized by impaired social interaction, communication and by restricted and repetitive behavior. Signs usually begin before a child is 3 years old.

**Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP):** Special education term used to describe the written plan used to address problem behavior that includes positive behavioral interventions, strategies and support. May include program modifications and supplementary aids and services.

**Blindness:** Condition defined by lacking visual perception due to physiological or neurological factors.

**Cerebral Palsy:** A series of motor problems and physical disorders related to brain injury. CP causes uncontrollable reflex movements and muscle tightness and may cause problems in
balance and depth perception. Severe cases can result in mental retardation, seizures or vision and hearing problems.

**Community Advisory Committee (CAC):** A committee whose membership includes parents of school children, school personnel and representatives of the public. This committee advises school administration and local school boards regarding the plan for special education, assists with parent education and promotes public awareness of individuals with special needs.

**Complaint Procedure:** A formal complaint filed with the County or State Board of Education if a district violates a legal duty or fails to follow a requirement under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (IDEA)

**Cumulative File:** The records maintained by the local school district for any child enrolled in school. The file may contain evaluations and information about a child’s disability and placement. It also contains grades and the results of standardized assessments. Parents have the right to inspect these files at any time.

**Deafness:** Hearing impairment so severe that a child is impaired in possessing any linguistic information through hearing.

**Designated Instruction Services (DIS):** Instruction and services not normally provided by regular classes, resource specialist programs or special day classes. They include speech therapy and adaptive physical education.

**Disability:** Physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

**Due Process:** Special education term used to describe the process where parents may disagree with the program recommendations of the school district. The notice must be given in writing within 30 days. IDEA provides two methods for resolving disputes, mediation or fair hearing.
Early Intervention: Programs for developmentally delayed infants and toddlers through 35 months of age; designed to help prevent problems as the child matures.

Emotional Disturbance (ED): Term used to describe a diagnosable mental, behavioral or emotional disorder that lasts for a significant duration that meets the criteria within the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

Engagement:

Extended School Year Services (ESY): An extended school year is a component of special education services for students with unique needs who require services in excess of the regular academic year. Extended year often refers to summer school.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Special education and related services are provided at public expense, without charge to the parents.

Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA): A problem solving process for addressing inappropriate behavior.

Hearing Impairment: Full or partial decrease in the ability to detect or understand sounds.

Home/Hospital Instruction: Students with verified medical conditions, which prevent them from attending school, may receive services on a temporary basis in the home or hospital with a physician’s referral.

Inclusion: Term used to describe services that place students with disabilities in general education classrooms with appropriate support services. Student may receive instruction from both a general education teacher and a special education teacher.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004): The original legislation was written in 1975 guaranteeing students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education and the
right to be educated with their non-disabled peers. Congress has reauthorized this federal law. The most recent revision occurred in 2004.

**Individualized Education Plan (IEP):** Special education term outlined by IDEA to define the written document that states the disabled child's goals, objectives and services for students receiving special education.

**Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE):** A school district is required by law to conduct assessments for students who may be eligible for special education. If the parent disagrees with the results of a school district's evaluation conducted on their child, they have the right to request an independent educational evaluation. The district must provide parents with information about how to obtain an IEE. An independent educational evaluation means an evaluation conducted by a qualified examiner who is not employed by the school district. Public expense means the school district pays for the full cost of the evaluation and that it is provided at no cost to the parent.

**Individualized Education Program Team:** Term used to describe the committee of parents, teachers, administrators and school personnel that provides services to the student. The committee may also include medical professional and other relevant parties. The team reviews assessment results, determines goals and objectives and program placement for the child needing services.

**Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP):** A process of providing early intervention services for children ages 0-3 with special needs. Family based needs are identified and a written plan is developed and reviewed periodically.

**Individualized Transition Plan (ITP):** This plan starts at age 14 and addresses areas of post-school activities, post-secondary education, employment, community experiences and daily
living skills.

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** The placement of a special needs student in a manner promoting the maximum possible interaction with the general school population. Placement options are offered on a continuum including regular classroom with no support services, regular classroom with support services, designated instruction services, special day classes and private special education programs.

**Local Education Agency (LEA):** Term used to describe a school district participating in a SELPA.

**Local Plan:** A plan developed by a SELPA and submitted to the State Department of Education for approval. The document outlines the plan for delivery of support services to eligible students living within the geographic boundaries of the plan.

**Mainstreaming:** Term used to describe the integration of children with special needs into regular classrooms for part of the school day. The remainder of the day is in a special education classroom.

**Manifestation Determination:** Within 10 school days of any decision to change the placement of a child with a disability because of violation of school code, the IEP team must review all relevant information in the student's file to determine if the conduct in question was caused by the child's disability or if the conduct was a direct result of the school district's failure to implement the child's IEP.

**Mental Retardation (now referred to as Intellectually Disabled):** This term has recently been changed. This disorder is characterized by below average cognitive functioning in two or more adaptive behaviors with onset before age 18.
**Multiple Disabilities:** An IEP term used to define a combination of disabilities that causes severe educational needs that require multiple special education programs such as mental retardation with blindness.

**Non-public School (NPS)** Districts contract with non-public schools when an appropriate placement cannot be found within the scope of the public education setting. Non-public school placement is sought only after efforts to find appropriate placement in public schools have been exhausted.

**Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD):** OCD is an anxiety disorder that presents itself as recurrent, persistent obsessions or compulsions. Obsessions are intrusive ideas, thoughts or images while compulsions are repetitive behaviors or mental acts that the child feels they must perform.

**Occupational Therapists:** Provide consultation and support to staff to improve a student’s educational performance related to fine motor, gross motor and sensory integration development.

**Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD):** A child who defies authority by disobeying, talking back, arguing or being hostile in a way that is excessive compared to other children and this pattern continues for more than six months may be determined to have ODD. ODD often occurs with other behavioral problems such as ADHD, learning disabilities and anxiety disorders.

**Orthopedic Impairment:** Term used to define impairments caused by congenital anomaly, impairments by diseases and impairments by other causes.

**Other Health Impaired:** Term used to describe limited strength, vitality and alertness that results in limited ability in the educational environment. Impairment could be a result of chronic health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder, epilepsy, heart condition, hemophilia, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever and sickle cell anemia.
Parent Consent: Special education term used by IDEA that states you have been fully informed in your native language or other mode of communication of all the information about the action for which you are giving consent and that you understand and agree in writing to that action.

Physical Therapists: Provide consultation and support to staff to improve a student’s educational performance related to functional gross motor development.

Private School: There are new laws regulating the rights of students with disabilities whose parents place them in private schools. When a student is enrolled in private school and has academic difficulties, the school where the student attends needs to inform the parent and the local public school district of the student’s difficulties. The district of residence may assess the student to determine if the student qualifies for special education. If they do qualify, the district of residence is responsible for writing an Individualized Education Plan.

Residential and Private Placements: Part B of IDEA does not require a school district to pay for the cost of education for your disabled child at a private school or facility if the school district made free appropriate public education available to your child and you chose to place your child in private placement.

Specialized Academic Instruction teacher (SAI teacher): Provide instructional planning and support and direct services to students who needs have been identified in an IEP and are assigned to general education classrooms for more than half of their school day.

Resource Specialist Program (RSP): Term used to describe a program that provides Specialized Academic Instruction, materials and support services to students with identified disabilities who are assigned to general classroom(s) for more than 50% of their school day.

School Psychologist: Assist in the identification of intellectual, social and emotional needs of students. They provide consultation and support to families and staff regarding behavior and
conditions related to learning. They plan programs to meet the special needs of children and often serve as a facilitator during an IEP meeting.

**Sensory Processing Disorder:** A complex brain disorder that causes a child to misinterpret everyday sensory information like movement, sound and touch. Children with SPD may seek out intense sensory experiences or feel overwhelmed with information.

**Specific Learning Disability:** Special education term used to define a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language spoken or written that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell or do mathematical equations.

**Speech and Language Impairments:** Communication disorders such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment or voice impairment.

**Speech and Language Specialists:** Assesses students for possible delayed speech and language skills and provides direct services in the area of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics. They are also available regarding hearing impairments and amplification.

**Special Day Class (SDC):** Term used to describe a self-contained special education class which provides services to students with intensive needs that cannot be met solely by the general education program, RSP or DIS program. Although this term is not being used as frequently anymore, especially at the Middle School level, students who are enrolled in an SDC class at the secondary level generally spend 50% or more of their day receiving Specialized Academic Instruction to support them in their learning process.

**State Schools:** Most states operate state run residential schools for deaf and blind students.

**Student Study Team (SST):** A group that evaluates a child’s performance, makes recommendations for success and develops a formal plan. The team includes the classroom
teacher, parents, and educational specialists. They may make a recommendation for a special education evaluation.

**Tourette's Syndrome:** Disorder that includes multiple motor and one or more vocal tics, which occur many times per day, nearly daily. If a child has Tourette's syndrome, symptoms tend to appear between the ages of 3-10 years old.

**Traumatic Brain Injury:** An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment. Applies to open or closed head injuries.

**Transition IEP:** IDEA mandates that at age 16, the IEP must include a statement about transition including goals for post-secondary activities and the services needed to achieve these goals. This is referred to an Individual Transition Plan or (ITP).

**Visual Impairment:** Impairment in vision that even with correction adversely affects a child’s educational performance.

**Vision Specialists:** Provide consultation and support to staff and direct instructional support to students with visual impairments. They provide functional vision assessments and curriculum modifications including Braille, large type and aural media.

**Workability Program:** These programs focus on preparing high school students with disabilities for successful transition to employment, continuing education and quality adult life with an emphasis on work based learning opportunities.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter presents a review of literature on English Learner parents and the impact their engagement or lack of engagement in their child’s academic life can have on their child’s long term educational abilities and opportunities. More specifically, this chapter summarizes the themes and subthemes found in the resources used to answer the following focus question: How are EL parents academically supporting their EL child living with a disability? Furthermore, what accessible information, simple strategies, and school/community resources are available to parents who are acquiring the English language in order to academically support their EL child with a disability? Finally, how can these strategies be implemented successfully at home? To answer these questions, the IEP process and parent role on the IEP team must be understood.

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) provides extra academic support through accommodations and/or modifications to a child living with a disability. The goal of an IEP is to support students living with a disability in ways that will allow them to successfully learn in the general education curriculum. Any child, who has qualified with one of the fourteen disabilities under Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and receives services through FAPE, has an IEP and therefore each one of them have a team in place to provide them with additional supports in school. This team includes the student, the case manager (in this case the author), the student’s general education teacher(s), other paraprofessionals (Psychologist, Occupational Therapist, Speech and Language Pathologist, etc.), administration, and the student’s parent(s) (may also be a guardian, long-term foster parent, or surrogate parent). Parent engagement is essential to a successful and productive IEP team.
According to Family Involvement in Children’s Education, from the U.S Department of Education (1998), it says: “Thirty years of research confirms that family involvement is a powerful influence on children’s achievement in school (Eagle, 1989; Henderson & Berla, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 1994; Ziegler, 1987). When families are involved in their children’s education, children earn higher grades and receive higher scores on tests, attend school more regularly, complete more homework, demonstrate more positive attitudes and behaviors, graduate from high school at higher rates and are more likely to enroll in higher education than students with less involved families. For these reasons, increasing family involvement in the education of their children is an important goal for schools, particularly those serving low-income and other students at risk of failure.”

It is the author’s personal belief based on research and experience that parents are an integral part of their child’s IEP team, whether or not they are English proficient. Furthermore, the author believes that EL parents can make a difference through active engagement (versus involvement) and attitude toward their child’s school environment and process and have the right to know how.

Through qualitative and quantitative research, this project provides insight into the barriers holding immigrant parents back from participating and fully engaging in their child’s academic life and how those barriers can be broken down so that the parents feel included in their child’s school community and welcome to participate and safely inquire about their child’s school process. This review of literature was done in search of strategies and tools EL parents can use at home to support their children academically, socially, and emotionally. Ultimately this literature review is geared toward the careful analysis of research aimed to determine how EL parent engagement in their child’s academic life (to include the IEP process) is a key factor in the progression and success of their child’s future in post-secondary education.
English Language Learners and Overrepresentation in Special Education

One recurring theme found through research of EL parents and children living with disabilities is the issue of overrepresentation. Overrepresentation of minority groups, especially of Mexican or Latinos in Southern California, has been an increasingly popular topic in education. One of the articles in particular discusses the idea that overrepresentation can be the result of several different factors. “Factors contributing to minority student overrepresentation include students’ lack of or inconsistent participation in primary prevention programs (i.e. Head Start), inappropriate language and educational assessment, over-referral of minority students for suspected learning difficulties, duration of enrollment in language support services, and lack of cultural and linguistic knowledge by K-12 teachers, specialists, and administrators (Artiles et al., 2005; Artiles et al., 2002; Artiles et al., 1997; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Serna & Nielsen, 1998).”

Expanding on the argument of inappropriate language and educational assessment is the researched idea that these minority students, many of whom are English Language Learners, are placed in Special Education because there is a misinterpretation of the assessment results that are being used to determine whether or not a particular student has a discrepancy large enough to diagnosis them as having a learning disability. The argument is that a student who is not proficient in the English language will struggle in grade level curriculum written in English not because they have a learning disability but because they are still acquiring the English Language. To add to the argument, many of these students’ immigrant and/or parents are not questioning the placement of their child in Special Education based on the assessments administered. Perhaps they do not know what to ask or where to even begin their inquiry process.
Strategies and Tools for EL Parents

Another theme found is the idea of culturally responsive practice. The projected message through much of the multiculturalism in education is to build and maintain a multicultural educational environment in schools and classrooms. There are many ways to do this. School districts can create this environment by providing parent development opportunities through free seminars and activities based on the findings from parent surveys and interviews they can invite parents to participate. Individual schools can survey their parents about their concerns, perspectives and ideas to inform their school’s family liaison and provide guidance for future on-site parent informational classes and seminars. Schools can also develop a cultural resources binder that includes a list of available on and off site translators with available languages, a reference list of effective culturally responsive parental involvement practices, contacts for programs offered locally through community organizations and a map including community places of education, dining and worship. Although all of this information suggested for a cultural resources binder can be found online, generally through a school or district website, both quantitative and qualitative research for this project shows that many EL parents do not have personal access to the Internet at home and/or the knowledge and skills for successfully accessing this information on the Internet. Therefore a tangible binder for reference would be a consideration for meeting the needs of this parent population. Individual staff within a school can also work to create a multicultural environment.

School staff, teachers and parents can create this environment by working as agents of change. Administration at school sites (i.e. school principal) can create a time and place for families to engage. For example, the principal of the middle school upon which this project is based, has specific mornings set aside to invite parents to have coffee with her and talk.
Educators can implement culturally responsive instruction by connecting each student’s academic work to his or her family, community, and culture. EL parents can do this as well in order to support their child and acquire the English Language themselves. EL parents of a child with a disability can also commit to at least two district or school classes or seminars each year to learn more about their role in their child’s educational process and to build relationships with other parents who share common struggles and concerns. The case manager can do this not only in the classroom but also during IEP meetings by using a translator to discuss information from the IEP. The more the parents understand how the Education Specialists and accompanying IEP team aims to support their child, the greater chance they will be able to start understanding how to support their child academically.

**Possible Barriers Impeding EL Parent Involvement**

This is a reoccurring theme. An in depth look at researcher’s surveys and studies show that many parents are afraid to fully engage in their child’s education. Some reasons involve a sense of embarrassment. One reason given is that some parents do not have an understanding of how the education system in the United States works, especially as it relates to Special Education. Some immigrant and/or EL parents have reported a feeling of prejudice from their child’s teachers or administration. Some fear that if the school finds out they are here illegally, then they will be deported back to the country from which they came. Some feel that they cannot do anything to help and therefore do not inquire as to how they can help. Some parents work long hours and are rarely home to be available to help their child. Finally, other immigrant and/or EL parents hold family support and leisure time in higher regard than working toward a post-secondary education. These are only some of the barriers mentioned through the author’s resources. The goal of this project is to target and address these barriers with this target
population of parents so that the lines of communication are broadened to more than the typical annual IEP meeting.

**Multiculturalist Response to Children, Parent Roles, and Education**

Dependent upon what country an immigrant may be from determines their cultural bias regarding their children, their role as parents in their child’s education, and education in general. As briefly mentioned in the previous theme on barriers, research revealed that some cultures do not hold post-secondary education in as high regard comparatively to other cultures. For the purpose of this project, the primary focus remains in one Southern Californian middle school and within what might be considered a large population of EL students’ receiving Special Education services. For this project, the school site of study’s population of immigrant parents is primarily from Mexico. A recurring theme in research that is found in the Mexican culture is a strong sense of closeness to family. Often times, mothers will not want their children to leave home for college. They might prefer them to stay close to home which would essentially limit their child’s options for attending a more prestigious or trade focused college that their child might have preferred to attend. Parents’ attitudes and cultural views of what they might deem important in life may contribute to the views of their children.

**Conclusion**

Three things are notable through the literature review thus far. Primarily, parents who are English Language Learners are still an important part of their child’s academic school life and can make a difference through their engagement in and attitude toward their child’s school environment and process. Dependent on the country from which these parents are from originally, cultural views on education and social habits of immigrant parents vary. For example, some parents are not as involved because there is a lack of understanding as to what extent they
realize they should be involved in their child’s academic lives but are not. In relation, teachers have a culturally responsive role in helping support immigrant parent’s involvement and participation in their child’s academic life. Part of this culturally responsive role includes educating parents on what to be aware and ask questions about regarding the Special Education referral and assessment process. In conclusion, the evidence provided throughout this review of literature exemplifies the need of limited English speaking parents with an EL child with a disability to have information clarified and strategies provided to them in a comprehensive handbook accessible in English and Spanish so that they are equipped to support their child.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Many English Language Learner (ELL) students receive Special Education Services as defined through their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Frequently, parents from this population do not fully understand what an IEP is or why their child had one, even though they had been attending IEP meetings for their child for several years. Many parents involved in the study for this project were unaware or lacked the understanding of how to successfully access and engage their child in the services and resources available to them.

If EL parents were provided with the resources, tools and strategies that they desired in a comprehensible handbook written in their primary language and at their level of readability, then perhaps their knowledge, confidence and level of engagement as active participants in their child’s English Language Development and IEP process might increase positively resulting in their provision of the essential, additional academic support their child needs. No tangible, streamlined handbook existed that was knowingly accessible to parents to provide them with the knowledge and understanding that they needed.

Thus, the purpose of the project was to create a handbook that was both accessible and culturally responsive to the parents.

Setting

This project was designed in a middle school setting in a suburban community in Southern California serving a high percentage of families whose first language was Spanish. At the time of this study, this school site’s student enrollment was at approximately 1,350. Numbers averaged about 75% socioeconomicly disadvantaged students, 65.5% English Language Learners with their primary language being Spanish, and just over 18% of students receiving
Special Education services. With a total of fifty teachers at this school site, ten of those teachers were Specialized Academic Instructors educating all students receiving Special Education Services under an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) for mild to moderate disabilities. At the time the research for this project was conducted, there were approximately 131 English Learner (EL) students with an active Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**Project Design and Methods**

The design of this project was a handbook created to provide parents or primary caregivers in the role of parent the information, tools and strategies that they need to fully participate as member(s) of their child’s IEP team. Within the field of education, the handbook is an accepted publication type for the purpose of educating parents and para-educators, providing them essential information in an accessible manner. Handbooks are typically organized in user friendly format with clearly labeled headings so that information related to specific topics can be found easily. Handbooks use less formal and less technical language. If any technical terms are used, they are clearly defined.

The content and design of this handbook was based on findings gathered via a thorough review of research literature and also a parent survey. This project relied on the explanatory research process by gathering qualitative data from peer reviewed articles followed by quantitative data from a parent survey. This Mixed Methods research approach allowed for a variety of viewpoints to create a culturally relevant handbook that specifically addressed EL parents’ concerns about their involvement on the IEP team. The findings of the survey both focused the development of the handbook on areas that EL parents would find most beneficial and also prioritized the strategies found in the literature that EL parents would use most to support their child academically through involvement with their child's school community.
Survey Participants

All parents of students who possessed both an IEP and were eligible for English Language Learner interventions were invited to take the survey in a classroom at the school site used for the basis of this project’s research. There were approximately 125 parents invited through invitation with 39 parents responding that they would attend the open house setting to complete the survey. Another 14 parents responded they could not attend but gave permission to have the survey sent home. Out of the 39 parents who responded that they would attend the open house setting, only 21 actually attended. Therefore in addition to the 14 parents who requested the survey be sent home, another 18 surveys were sent home to the parents who said they would attend the open house setting to take the survey and did not. In total, 32 surveys were sent home for parents to complete and return at their earliest convenience. Out of the 32 surveys sent home, only 15 were returned completed. The total number of completed surveys that were analyzed for this project was 36. The participants involved in this research were parents of students who were designated as English Language Learners and had an active IEP based upon a diagnosis of a mild to moderate disability.

Survey Instruments

A survey was used to gain a better perspective of the parents’ current abilities, availabilities to their child, and understanding of the U.S. education system and their child’s IEP process. The paper survey was available in both English and Spanish. The survey is presented in Appendix in English and in Appendix B in Spanish.

The survey was taken anonymously on paper with the availability of a translator as needed in an open house setting over a period of several hours. For parents unable to attend the open house setting, the survey was sent home given their permission. Consideration for the
wording of the survey questions was taken very seriously in an effort to be culturally responsive and remain unbiased. Also, this survey was designed to support parent’s feelings of empowerment to make the parents’ feel empowered in seeking their advice while showing them appreciation and gratitude for taking the time to complete the survey.

Survey Analysis

The survey results were analyzed via content analysis based upon the original hypothesis:

If immigrant, EL parents are provided with the resources, tools and strategies that they desire in a comprehensible handbook written in their primary language and at their level of readability, then their knowledge, confidence and level of engagement as active participants in their child’s English Language Development and IEP process will increase positively resulting in their provision of the essential, additional academic support their child needs,

The results of the parent survey were analyzed by graphing the results for each of the twelve questions on the survey and then by comparing the common answers of the questions to the hypothesis and subsequently to the data found in the research. Graphs were developed using Excel and various Word features to enable different views and interpretations of the parent survey data in support of creating a tangible and streamlined handbook. Anecdotal notes of the parents’ attitudes, questions and observed strengths and weaknesses while taking the survey were also analyzed and considered when developing the outline of information to be included in the parent handbook.

Audience for this Project

This handbook was created with two different groups of people in mind. First, this handbook was created for parents or primary caregivers of primary and secondary grade school
children who are designated as English Language Learners and who receive Special Education services due to a qualifying disability. The handbook also teaches parents or primary caregivers who seek to understand their child’s educational program and process better in an effort to support them academically in their language development and overall academic achievement. Second, the handbook was designed for teachers and administration, at the school the project took place, to guide them in ways to support more parental involvement.

**Procedures**

The outline created for this handbook titled, *A Guide for Parents Acquiring the English Language- Acting as an Advocate for Your Child Living with a Disability and Supporting Them Academically in Their English Language Acquisition*, includes information organized throughout into twelve chapters. An overview of these twelve chapters can be found in Chapter 4 and an outline can be found on page two of the parent handbook in Appendix C. For purposes of providing a general overview or outline of the procedures, information in the twelve chapters are grouped together in the following four categories or sections:

**Section 1.** The need for a parent handbook and fundamental knowledge of the education system in the U.S. as it applies to all students, including those receiving Special Education services. This section of the handbook focuses on the need for a handbook to promote parent engagement and academic support in the academic lives of children by defining their roles and responsibilities of an EL designated child living with a disability and the ways in which they can foster English language development in that child.

This section of the handbook provides parents, or primary caregivers, as well as educators a brief look at the following: structural differences in Education systems; educational laws, both general and related to Special Education, in the U.S.; an overview of state and Special
Education related assessments and interpretation of their scores; and strategies for parents to help support their children academically and emotionally through the assessment process. This section is designed to give a little history as to why parent-child interactions are so important and why parents need a handbook to guide them in their interactions with their child to improve their understanding, development and retention of grade level academics in the English language.

**Section 2: Knowledge of Disabilities and Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

Procedures- the 14 Disability Categories outlined under IDEA and a Summary of the Key Important Rights and Responsibilities of Parents with a Child Receiving Special Education Services. This section of the handbook provides a comprehensive, streamlined view of the rights parents have in requesting, accepting, maintaining, changing, denying, or revoking specialized services under the umbrella of Special Education available to their child living with a disability.

This section of the handbook provides general and specific information on the 14 qualifying disability categories in California and a concise view of the Procedural Safeguards, notifying parents of the key rights they should be aware of through the IEP process; an explanatory view of each section of an IEP document; important legal timelines to follow under an IEP; and ways in which they are expected to help support their child’s teachers and their child.

**Section 3. Understanding the English Language Learner identification process and the CELDT.** This section of the handbook states why parents, or primary caregivers, lay the foundation for academic success in English language acquisition and IEP goal attainment.

This section of the handbook provides information regarding the English Language Learner classification and the CELDT that parents, or primary caregivers, should be aware of as they work to support and foster their child’s English Language acquisition through their learning
process even beginning when their child is in middle school. This section also provides kinds of language and reading development tools and strategies parents can begin to work on with their children in primary or secondary school as their children begin to learn with new expectations under the Common Core Curriculum Standards initiative.

Section 4: Tools, techniques, and materials parents can use to help support their adolescents through discipline and a healthy lifestyle. This section of the handbook gives tools, techniques and materials parents can use to support their child physically, emotionally and mentally through discipline and a healthy lifestyle at home. It provides many examples and resources parents can use to teach their child self-discipline, the importance of education, and how health and academic success are related. This section is the “how to” part of the handbook that gives materials, ideas, and techniques on how to foster a child’s resilience and support their physical, emotional and mental developmental stages at home. The goal of this “how to” section is to support clear thinking, good study habits and ways to improve academically through English Language acquisition reading strategies.

Conclusion

Through an outlined Data Collection Plan and Literature Review, the Mixed Methodology approach to this study was deemed appropriate with its’ primary emphasis being qualitative data consisting of peer reviewed articles and its’ secondary emphasis being quantitative data consisting of a parent survey. The limitations of the quantitative data obtained from the parent survey prompted clarifying questions throughout the overall data collection process. Based on the withstanding parent feedback that essentially supports the accumulated qualitative data collected for this project, all of the data inevitably provides evidence that supports the need for a comprehensive guidebook for ELL parents with a child receiving Special
Education services based on the concluding evidence that can simply be summarized as such: “In general, immigrant parents have limited knowledge of the ‘invisible codes of power’ embedded in school cultures (Delpit, 1998), a limited understanding of the curriculum and organization of U.S. schools, and a lack of awareness of their rights as parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990), all of which constrain the questions they might pose and the critiques they might make of schooling practices. (Carreon, Drake, and Barton, 2005).” Consequently, this concluding evidence effects the level of parent engagement that children need, specifically children who are not yet proficient in the English language and who live with a disability.
Chapter 4

Results

While some research has shown that cultural attitudes and expectations, as well as socio-economic status, are factors of interference with parents’ engagement in their child’s academic life, the results of this project’s research show that primary language differences continue to interfere with parents’ engagement in their child’s IEP for various reasons (e.g. parent illiteracy in their own primary language; non-proficient translators or translators who are uncomfortable with how to correctly translate the legal terminology associated with an IEP; social bias that parents might feel because of their culture/language, etc.). This project answered the following questions established by the author: How are EL parents academically supporting their EL child living with a disability? Furthermore, what accessible information, simple strategies, and school/community resources are available to parents who are acquiring the English language in order to academically support their EL child with a disability? Finally, how can these strategies be implemented successfully at home? Through analyzing this thesis project’s data collected through a mixed methods research approach consisting of both qualitative and quantitative data, the author used deductive reasoning to conclude that a handbook for parents acquiring the English language with a child living with a disability was justified through culturally responsive practice.

Therefore, the project created was parent handbook designed to support parents acquiring the English language as advocates for their child living with a disability and as supporters of their child’s English language acquisition. This handbook is organized into the following twelve chapters: Understanding Differences in Structural Education Systems; Important U.S. Education Laws; Understanding Assessments; Academic Strategies for Parents to Use at Home with Their
Child; Learning About Your Child’s Special Needs; Preparing for an IEP Meeting; IEP Goals; Revoking SPED Services; English Language Learners; Ways to Help Your Adolescent Through a Time of Change; Discipline at Home; and Health and Academic Success. Categorically, these chapters are each broken down into smaller subsets to provide in detail facts and advice to parents based on important topics related each over-arching chapter.

**Overview of the Handbook Components**

Chapter 1 primarily compares and contrasts the U.S. and Mexico school systems because research and results provide evidence that the majority of immigrant and/or EL speakers at the school site of study for this project are primarily Spanish speaking and from Mexico. Chapter 2 is provides comprehensive information on Education Laws and cover the following topics: attendance, changing schools, important disability laws, parents’ rights/Procedural Safeguards, Special Education eligibility, agencies providing intervention services, and an overview of a defined disability. Chapter 3 encompasses both Special Education assessments and state required assessments. In this chapter, areas of assessment are reviewed; information on understanding assessment scores is provided; and the changes in state assessment in relation to the new Common Core State Standards is discussed.

Chapter 4 provides academic (reading, writing and mathematics) strategies for parents to use at home with their child. Chapter 5 encourages parents to learn about their child’s special needs by providing common characteristics of the 14 Disability Categories under IDEA with specific disabilities highlighted. Chapter 6 provides parents with information and tools to successfully prepare for their child’s IEP meeting. This includes information on the IEP agenda format; how to organize paperwork and thoughts through a parent reflection worksheet; key
Special Education timelines; acknowledgement of parent concerns and available resources to support parents; and tips on effective communication during a meeting.

Chapter 7 reviews a child’s IEP goals by addressing the following aspects: parent choices; good and bad examples of goals; progress monitoring toward goals; steps to having good communication during an IEP meeting; and additional parent resources for support.

Chapter 8 prompts parents with questions regarding their desire to revoke their child from receiving Special Education services and provides reasons they might feel they want to revoke services, what the outcomes of them revoking their child’s services might really mean, and a request to revoke services template to model their written request. Chapter 9 is all about English Language Learners and covers why and how a child is designated as an ELL, the purpose and administration of the CELDT, and how a child might re-classify.

Chapter 10 provides parents with ways to help their adolescent through a time of physical, emotional and mental changes. Chapter 11 goes in depth on Discipline at home by covering a positive discipline Approach, preventative procedures to avoid problems and suggested strategies. Finally, Chapter 12 is written in a context to provide understanding of the connection between health and academic success. This chapter educates parents about self-care and modeling a healthy lifestyle through diet, exercise and sleep information and strategies; ways parents can work to keep their children healthy while still promoting active learning; and what an effective parent’s role looks like when supporting an EL child with a disability.
Chapter 5

Discussion

Research shows that among many factors, primary language differences continue to interfere with parents’ engagement in their child’s IEP for various reasons that include: parent illiteracy in their own primary language; non-proficient translators or translators who are uncomfortable with how to correctly translate the legal terminology associated with an IEP; and social bias that parents might feel because of their culture/language. For an ELL student living with a disability that has no academic support at home due to their parent(s) lack of English acquisition, he or she will continue to struggle learning academic standards in their secondary language. The questions that guided this project are as follows: How significant is the impact of the involvement or lack of involvement of English Language Learner parents in their learning disabled child’s life? Furthermore, what information, simple strategies, and school/community resources do parents/guardians desire an understanding of and access to in order to successfully support their child academically toward meeting the goals in their IEP? The Mixed Methods research approach used for this project provided a variety of viewpoints that address some of the following common themes found in chapter two: minority student overrepresentation in Special Education and how parents can ask questions in the assessment/qualification process that could help prevent this; the need for culturally responsive practice; the barriers immigrant parents face; and the cultural biases regarding children with disabilities, parent roles and education. In this chapter, the rationale and enduring understandings that drives the author’s defense for creating an informative Special Education handbook for EL parents using simplified, concise text are reviewed. The author also reviews the following: the lessons learned throughout this project, proposed recommendations for other educators; how the project was implemented; the global
implications of this project in the context of the field of education; the limitations the author faced; and which direction the author foresees this project going.

**Summary of Project**

This project was primarily designed for the parents of English Learner (EL) students in middle school (6th-8th grade) who receive Special Education Services through an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) for a mild to moderate disability; however, parents of children at all levels may benefit from most of the information provided no matter what the grade of their child with a disability. Despite the years the some of these students have had IEPs in place, many of their parents are unaware or lack the understanding of the purpose of their child’s IEP in part due to language barriers. Furthermore, many EL parents are unaware or lack the understanding of how to successfully access and engage their child in services and resources available to them. Research shows that parents are an integral part of their child’s IEP team and their engagement, support and opinions matter because they are ultimately the ones who will approve or deny Special Education Services offered to help support their child’s needs. Using Mixed Methods research, this project relied on the explanatory research process by gathering qualitative data from peer reviewed articles followed by quantitative data from an anonymous parent survey consisting of twelve questions inquiring of the parents’ literacy level and needs. This research and parent survey data results provide evidence that there is a necessity for a parent handbook at a lower readability level, outlining and defining important Special Education guidelines and academic support strategies parents can use at home with their child. A total of 20 peer-reviewed resources were used in addition to survey data from 36 parents.
Lessons Learned

In working to answer the guided project questions to determine whether a parent handbook would be useful in providing education and support to immigrant and/or EL parents, both qualitative research through peer reviewed articles and quantitative research through a parent survey had to be put into action. A few things were determined through this project’s Mixed Methods, explanatory research process. Despite the overwhelming amount of parent information and Special Education resources available on the Internet and through local agencies in both English and Spanish (among other select languages), research first revealed to the author that the readability level at which these resources are written is difficult for many immigrant or immigrant parents to comprehend, specifically those immigrant parents that come from Mexico. In addition, parents would need access to the Internet and knowledge of how to navigate the search engines on the Internet to find the information they are seeking. For many immigrant parents of low socioeconomic status, owning and learning how to use a computer is not always a financial option to them. Second, cultural practices as well as an understanding of the laws in a new country play a significant role in determining the attitudes and level of engagement of immigrant parents/guardians in their disabled child’s life. The third and final measure taken in helping develop this project was the knowledge that many of these children of immigrant parents are also English Language Learners themselves and therefore require extra academic support and guidance that teachers can provide and that parents can reinforce at home with or without knowing English. Immigrant and/or EL parents will be better able to understand and carry out their role as an advocate for their child living with a disability when they have a better understanding of the following: differences in education systems; parent rights of a child in
Special Education; knowledge of key vocabulary associated Special Education; and related characteristics of their child’s disability and how it might affect their academic progress.

It is the author’s belief that educators can learn to be aware of the struggles that EL students with disabilities face each day both at school and home. Their learning process is a continuous uphill battle if their needs are not met properly in all settings from the accommodations and modifications in their IEP to the structural support system they have at home. In addition to providing these students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) at school, educators need be aware that constant communication and provision of parent resources is essential to the success and academic progress of their child. It is the author’s recommendation that special educators use this parent handbook or develop their own handbook through available resources to help bridge the communication and cultural gaps they might experience with one or more EL parents that have a child in their Special Education program.

**Project Implementation Plans**

Through the learning process of this project, the author learned that educators have a responsibility to practice sensitivity to cultural attitudes and expectations, be aware of their student populations’ socioeconomic status as it relates to their access to technology at home and adult availability, be realistic about the primary language differences of their students’ parents when providing feedback, and be willing to modify information for their students’ parents so that they might be able to better access the resources and services available to them in an effort to support their child. Also, even with a proficient verbal translator, discussing the terms and aspects of a child’s IEP can be misconstrued or misunderstood if translated out of context. This handbook will be used as the grounds for discussion as to how educators should be using best practices in knowing the background knowledge their translators have before inviting them to
participate as a translator in a child’s IEP meeting. By the spring 2014 school semester, this parent handbook will be translated fully into Spanish and provided at the beginning of the semester to parents who participated in the parent survey for this project. It is the intent of the author to get additional feedback from them before utilizing it through the Special Education department. In order to guarantee success, this project should be evaluated by university rubric expectations, collaborative team efforts of discussion on how and when to implement the handbook with parents, and a follow-up parent survey after having had a select group of EL parents seeking information read the handbook.

**Global Implications**

This project benefits the field of education by improving and increasing the engagement of immigrant and/or EL parents with a child in Special Education by differentiating the education they receive regarding their child’s education process and needs. This project adds to previous research practices by reflecting on past and current educational policies and practices regarding steps taken to educate and involve EL parents in their child’s Special Education process. The constant growth in diverse ethnic groups in the United States allows for this handbook to provide current strategies and updated information about new educational laws and practices in a tangible, reader friendly text and format that parents can use for at least several years to come or before educational reform and teaching strategies change again with the continual advancement in an every changing global economy. This project converges with and clarifies past predictions, research, and practices in relation to the changes over time in educational curriculum, changes in educational law and classroom structure and population.

According to the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network of New Jersey in a guide for helping parents navigate the education system, developed by: Developed by Diana MTK Autin
“Parents know a lot about their children – how they learn best, what makes them happy and what makes them sad or angry, what they struggle with at home in homework, how many friends they have, whether they are experiencing bullying or harassment at school. Parents should also know through report cards, contact with their child’s teacher, and review of tests and grades, and the kind of progress their child is making – or is not making. Because of parent involvement requirements in special education, bilingual education, No Child Left Behind, and discipline, they should also know the services their child is receiving and how they are working. All of this information is important for parents to know and fully understand. If there is something they don’t understand, it is important for them to speak to their child’s teacher, special education case manager, Intervention and Referral Services team coordinator, or other specialist, and ask for that information to be explained to them.” Although the No Child Left Behind initiative has recently expired and a new Common Core initiative is being implemented, the requirement of parent participation in their child’s IEP process still remains with the added challenge of getting parents to not only engage more than once a year in their child’s education program whether it be direct or a balance of direct and indirect engagement.

The ideological foundations of America, such as equality, individual dignity, freedom and opportunity, provide an inviting foundation for involvement of parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in their disabled child’s academic life. With so many other factors that present themselves to this particular parent population, we see barriers created. The author is suggesting that ultimately the common goal that teachers and parents must share is to act in a way that is “child-centered.” What a child needs to succeed in a 21st century, globally competitive world is a sound education fostered in a safe environment to allow them the opportunity to develop an intrinsic motivation to be life-long learners despite any mental or
physical challenges they might have. In conjunction with a safe learning environment at school, children need a safe and equally supportive learning environment at home.

This project was primarily designed for the parents of English Language Learner (ELL) students in middle school (6th-8th grade) who receive Special Education Services through an active Individualized Education Program (IEP). Despite the years the some of these students have had IEPs in place, many of their parents are unaware or lack the understanding of the purpose of their child’s IEP in part due to language barriers. Furthermore, many EL parents are unaware or lack the understanding of how to successfully access and engage their child in services and resources available to them. Research shows that parents are an integral part of their child’s IEP team and their involvement, support and opinions matter because they are ultimately the ones who will approve or deny Special Education Services offered to help support their child’s needs. Through research and an anonymous parent survey, the need for a parent guidebook at about an 8th grade reading level outlining and defining the key important things to know in regard to Special Education in the United States and strategies on how to support an EL child living with a disability became evident.

Limitations

The original focus of this project led research into a broad spectrum of factors related to the lack of immigrant Hispanic parent engagement in their children’s academic lives which initially overwhelmed the intent of the research and ultimately led the researcher in a different direction geared toward meeting the needs of the parents. It was and continues to be evident that if the parents’ needs are met, they are better able to meet the needs of their children, especially those living with a disability and working to acquire the English language. From the establishment and implementation of this project’s focus, the following limitations were
experienced to include: a limited number of parent participant who provided feedback on the survey administered to 36 of the 127 EL parents with a child in Special Education invited to be exact and the questionable validity of the parent/guardian answers based on their contextual understanding of what the questions ask.

Based on observations and experiences the author has had teaching special education at a middle school site where yearly numbers average about 75% socioeconomically disadvantaged students, 65.5% English Language Learners with their primary language being Spanish, and just over 18% of students receiving Special Education services are English Language Learners, this project meets a true need in education to hear the voices of the parents and provide inclusion and education not only students but their parents in relation to their child’s English Language Acquisition and Special Education rights and services. With a growing EL population, specifically in southern California, the urgency to build and maintain school and parent relationships is essential in understanding the needs of our ever growing, diverse population. In all reality, this handbook provides educational tools and strategies that any parent or teacher could use in multiple settings. Educators at the author’s school site will have access to this project and all materials for implementation after the translation is completed. Culture and its’ associated norms, religion, family dynamics, family values and practices, parent level of education, illegal citizenship, and socio-economic status are just some of the factors that might play a role in the academic lives of EL students living with a disability and affect the academic support they are given at home and provided with at school. For all of these aforementioned reasons, further studies could extend in multiple different directions, creating entirely different studies with a much narrower focus.
Conclusion

This project will be translated into Spanish so that it can be provided to parents of incoming middle school children at San Marcos Middle School who are designated as ELLs and who have an active IEP. It will be used as a resource provided to these parents at the beginning of the school year during Back to School Night as well as at Annual IEP meetings. Since this handbook is specifically written to address EL parents of a child living with a disability, Education Specialists should be aware of who their target parents are before handing this handbook out. Although it would support a range of parents of children in Special Education, the key intent is to provide information to those parents who either lack the access, understanding or both to confidently research or engage in parent education resources. Educators might also want to consider how knowledgeable an EL parent is of their child’s special education process in the United States before providing them with this book and how inclined/motivated they are to take advantage of the help. This project should be evaluated by EL parents of a child in Special Education who seek to better understand their child’s educational program and their role in their child’s program.
References


EL PARENTS AS ADVOCATES FOR CHILD WITH DISABILITY


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Appendix A

Project Parent Survey in English
Dear Parents,

Although you were not able to attend SMMS on Thursday, August 29th to take the parent survey, I appreciate your willingness to allow me to send the survey home. As a Graduate student at California State University San Marcos, I am conducting this survey as part of my research for my Master’s Thesis project. My project is geared toward developing a manual to support parents who have a child receiving support services through Special Education. In order to better support you, I need to gather information from you to help guide my research and to make the manual useful to you.

This information is anonymous. The purpose of this survey is to obtain data from you, the parents and guardians of students here at San Marcos Middle School, who knows these students the best. The information gathered in this survey is 100% anonymous and is, in fact, protected as anonymous by Education Code law. I must promise to the university that this information will be used ONLY for my research for my thesis paper.

My goal is to better support the parents of our students’ with the important and useful information, so that I can develop this manual to be actually helpful to you. Please complete the survey and fill out the notecard provided and return to Ms. Flemmer in room 39 as soon as possible so that I may enter your name in a drawing to win a McDonald’s or Target gift card as a small token of my appreciation for your feedback.

Thank you again for your participation.

Sincerely,

Ms. Chelsea Flemmer
1.) Please list what language YOU (the parent) speak most often at home. (Please fill in the blank.)


2.) Please list any other languages YOU speak at home. (Please fill in the blank(s).)


3.) In what language do YOU write most fluently? (Please fill in the blank.)


4.) Which language do YOU prefer to read? (Please fill in the blank.)


5.) If you do not feel that you are currently fluent in the English language, do you wish to be? (Please check all that apply.)

☐ I am interested in learning to speak, read, and write English fluently.

☐ I am already attending English Language courses through my community or college.

☐ It is hard to find the time to learn and practice speaking English, but I would if it were more convenient.

☐ My job does not require me to speak that much English.

☐ I am most comfortable speaking, reading, and writing in my primary language.

6.) To help me best serve your family needs, please share the highest grade or level of school you have completed in your country:

☐ 8th grade or _____ grade (Please enter equivalent grade level in any country.)

☐ Some secondary or high school, but did not graduate
7. Please share the highest grade or level of school that your spouse or significant other has completed?

- Does not apply - single parent/guardian household
- 8th grade or _____ grade (Please enter equivalent grade level in any country.)
- Some secondary or high school, but did not graduate
- High school graduate or GED
- Some college or 2-year degree
- 4-year college graduate
- More than a 4-year college degree

8. What are your hopes and expectations in education for your child? (Highest Level)

- At least some High School
- High school graduate or GED
- Some college or 2-year degree
- 4-year college graduate
- More than a 4-year college degree
9. In a typical week, about how many hours do you work outside the home? Also, please check for your spouse/significant other/or other guardian in the household.

You:  
☐ 40+ hours a week  
☐ part-time  
☐ full-time, at-home parent

Spouse/Other:  
☐ 40+ hours a week  
☐ part-time  
☐ full-time, at-home parent

10. Does your child attending SMMS participate in an after-school program or club sport?  
(Please check all that apply.)

☐ Boys and Girls Club  
☐ After-School Intervention with Gear Up or a teacher on campus  
☐ Community club sport (example: club soccer team)  
☐ Other – music, church activities, Scouts, etc.

11. Do you feel this middle school provides parent involvement opportunities that are helpful to the social support and academic success of your child? (Please check all that apply.)

☐ I feel informed about opportunities for my child.  
☐ I feel my child is supported and that their needs are being met.  
☐ I do not feel informed as a parent.
I do not feel that my child's needs are being met.

12. What do you want to understand better about the IEP process?

(Please check all that apply.)

☐ I understand the IEP process and do not have questions.

☐ How a child qualifies for Special Education and what tests are used to determine if they have a disabling condition

☐ Information about disabilities in general or specifically about my child’s condition

☐ My rights as a parent of a child receiving support in a Special Education Program

☐ Information about my child's IEP goals and how I can help them meet their goals

☐ Additional interventions available and offered to support my child
Appendix B

Project Parent Survey in Spanish
Estimados padres,

Aunque no fuera capaz de asistir a SMMS el jueves, 29 de agosto para tomar la revisión paternal, aprecio su buena voluntad de permitir que yo envíe la revisión a casa. Como estudiante licenciada en la Universidad Estatal de San Marcos llevaré a cabo una encuesta como parte de mi investigación para mi proyecto de tesis para mi maestría. Mi proyecto se orienta hacia el desarrollo de un manual para apoyar a los padres que tienen un niño recibiendo servicios de apoyo a través de la educación especial. Para mejor apoyarlos, necesito recopilar información de usted para ayudar a orientar mi investigación y realizar un manual útil para ustedes.

Esta información es anónima. El propósito de esta encuesta es obtener información de ustedes, los padres y tutores de los alumnos en la escuela intermedia San Marcos, que conoce mejor a estos estudiantes. La información acumulada en esta encuesta es 100% anónima y es, de hecho, protegida como anónima por la ley del código de educación. Debo prometer a la Universidad que esta información será utilizada solamente para mi investigación.

Mi objetivo es apoyar mejor a los padres de nuestros alumnos con información importante y útil, y desarrollar este manual para poder ser realmente útil para usted. Además de la revisión, por favor complete el notecard proporcionado y devuélvalo a mí en la sala 39 cuanto antes de modo que pueda ingresar su nombre en un sorteo para ganar una tarjeta de regalo de Target o McDonald's como una pequeña señal de mi apreciación para su repuesta. Gracias de nuevo por su participación.

Sinceramente, la Sra. Chelsea Flemmer

1.) Por favor escriba cual idioma habla USTED más a menudo en casa. (Por favor, rellene el espacio.)


2.) Por favor escriba cualquier otro idioma que se habla en casa. (Por favor, rellene el espacio.)


3.) ¿En qué idioma escribe con la más fluidez? (Por favor, rellene el espacio.)


4.) ¿Cual idioma prefiere leer? (Por favor, rellene el espacio.)


5.) Si usted no siente con fluidez en el idioma inglés, ¿desea ser? (Por favor marque todas las que aplican).

☐ Estoy interesado en aprender a hablar, leer y escribir en inglés con fluidez.
☐ Ya estoy asistiendo a cursos de inglés a través de mi comunidad o colegio.
☐ Es difícil encontrar el tiempo para aprender y practicar hablando inglés, pero lo haría si fuese más conveniente.
☐ Mi trabajo no requiere que hable mucho inglés.
☐ Estoy más cómodo hablando, leyendo y escribiendo en mi lengua materna.

6.) Para ayudarme a servir mejor las necesidades de la familia, por favor, indique el grado más alto o nivel de escuela que haya completado en su país:

☐ 8vo grado o grado ____ (por favor escriba el grado equivalente en cualquier país.)
☐ Algunos secundaria o preparatoria, pero no se graduó
☐ Graduado de la preparatoria o GED (Educación General)
☐ Algo de colegio o universidad
☐ graduado de la Universidad de 4 años
☐ Más de un título universitario de cuatro años

¿7. Por favor, indique el grado más alto o nivel de escuela que haya completado su cónyuge o pareja?

☐ No aplica-padre/madre soltero/a hogar de guarda/guardian
☐ 8vo grado o grado ____ (por favor escriba el grado equivalente en cualquier país.)
☐ Algunos secundaria o preparatoria, pero no se gradúan
☐ Graduado de la preparatoria o GED (Educación General)
☐ Algo de colegio o universidad
☐ graduado de la Universidad de 4 años
☐ Más de un título universitario de cuatro años

8. ¿Cuáles son sus esperanzas y expectativas en la educación de su hijo? (Máximo nivel)

☐ Por lo menos algo de preparatoria
☐ Graduado de la preparatoria o GED (Educación General)
☐ Algo de colegio o universidad
☐ graduado de la Universidad de 4 años
Más de un título universitario de cuatro años

9. En una semana típica, ¿cuántas horas trabaja fuera de casa? También, por favor verifique por tu cónyuge/pareja otro/u otro guardián en el hogar.

   **Usted:**
   - [ ] 40 horas a la semana
   - [ ] a tiempo parcial
   - [ ] no trabajo

   **Cónyuge / otros:**
   - [ ] 40 horas a la semana
   - [ ] a tiempo parcial
   - [ ] no trabajo

10. ¿Su hijo que asiste a SMMS participa de después de escuela en algún programa o club de deporte? (Por favor marque todas las que aplican).
   - [ ] Boys and Girls Club
   - [ ] Intervención después de la escuela con un profesor en el aula o en Gear Up
   - [ ] Sport club comunitario (ejemplo: equipo de futbol)
   - [ ] Otros – música, actividades de la iglesia, Scouts, etc…

11. ¿Siente que esta escuela proporciona a los padres oportunidades para participar que son útiles para el apoyo social y éxito académico de su hijo? (Por favor marque todas las que aplican).
   - [ ] Estoy informado acerca de las oportunidades para mi hijo.
   - [ ] Siento que mi hijo es compatible y que sus necesidades están siendo satisfechas.
   - [ ] No estoy informado como padre.
   - [ ] No creo que se están satisfaciendo las necesidades de mi hijo.

12. ¿Qué quisiera entender mejor sobre el proceso de IEP? (Por favor marque todas las que apliquen).
   - [ ] Entiendo el proceso IEP y no tengo preguntas.
   - [ ] ¿Cómo un niño califica para educación especial y qué pruebas se utilizan para determinar si tienen una condición incapacitante
☐ Información sobre discapacidades en general o específicamente sobre la condición de mi hijo
☐ Mis derechos como padre de un niño que recibe apoyo en un programa de educación especial
☐ Información sobre las metas de IEP de mi niño y cómo puedo ayudar a cumplir sus metas
☐ Intervenciones adicionales disponibles y ofrecidas para apoyar a mi hijo
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Parent Handbook
A Guide for Parents Acquiring the English Language-
Acting as an Advocate for Your Child Living with a Disability and Supporting Them
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PBS Home Matrix

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Your Role as a Parent of an Adolescent in Middle School
Introduction

Both parents and schools share the responsibility to educate a child until they are legally an adult (18 in the United States). This shared responsibility comes with equal knowledge and respect between parents and their children’s schools. Even though parents are the experts on their children, they should work with school staff to gain knowledge of programs, services and curriculum that can best help their child meet their goals. Both parents and schools share similar responsibilities in the education process.

1. Parents are responsible to recognize their child’s strengths and needs. School are also responsible for identifying a child’s strengths and needs.
2. Parents are responsible to make time and an effort to support their child academically, socially and emotionally. Schools are also responsible for providing a safe learning environment for all students that encourages learning, practice, and social interaction with others inside and outside of the classroom.

Parents cannot support their child academically by themselves if the school is not meeting their child’s needs and a school cannot meet the needs of a child’s if the child’s parents are not supporting the child’s needs at home. Both parents and schools must work together in order to support all children successfully.

This parent handbook is written to educate parents unfamiliar with the Special Education process in the United States, particularly California, and answer many of the questions parents frequently ask about Special Education programs and services. This handbook also offers resources available to parents and their children and provides multiple strategies and tips on how to support a child living with a disability. In order for parents to better support their child living with a disability, parents must have an understanding of information so that they are able to confidently
communicate with their child’s school. Informed parents who have a clear understanding of their child’s special needs and education process are better able to be assertive in their role as an advocate (supporter) of their child. As quoted by Eldon Ekwall and William Glasser: “We learn…

10% of what we READ

20% of what we HEAR

30% of what we SEE

50% of what we both SEE and HEAR

70% of what is DISCUSSED WITH OTHERS

80% of what we EXPERIENCE PERSONALLY

95% of what we TEACH someone else.”

It is recommended that parents and guardians of English Language Learners receiving Special Education Services learn as much as possible about how to support their child academically by taking the following action:

■ Read this handbook.

■ Hear what is discussed in their child’s IEP meetings.

■ See what other information and resources are available to you and your child by researching and asking questions.

■ Discuss what is stated in this handbook with family and their child’s school staff.

■ Attend parent trainings and workshops through their child’s school, school district and SELPA.

■ Share what they know with other parents who do not fully understand the special education process.
## Chapter 1

### Understanding Differences in the Structural Education Systems of Neighboring Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Unites States</strong></th>
<th><strong>Mexico</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Law:</strong> Must attend school from Kindergarten (before 1\textsuperscript{st} grade) through high school (12\textsuperscript{th} grade). Age 6-18 in most cases.</td>
<td><strong>Law:</strong> Must attend school from Primary (starting in 1\textsuperscript{st} grade) through Secondary (12\textsuperscript{th} grade), since recent law in 2012 called for mandatory Upper Secondary school (high school, grades 10-12). Age 6-18 in most cases.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are one to two years of **preschool**, depending on the state. Pre-school is not mandatory.  

**Elementary school:** grades K-5 or 6, depending on the district.  

**Middle school:** grades 6-8  
*Some private elementary and middle schools require uniforms but most public schools do not. They simply enforce a dress code.*  

**High school:** mandatory grades 9-12 unless student exits by taking a High School Exit Exam  

In most places in Mexico, preschool is not mandatory for entrance into Primary School, but is offered for ages three through five.  

**Primary school:** grades 1-6.  

**Lower Secondary school** (junior high or middle school): grades 7-9  
*Students are required to wear uniforms in Primary and Lower Secondary School.*  

**Upper Secondary school** (high school): grades 10-12; not mandatory until June of 2013 and is generally three years in either a technical school for those who will attend college or a vocational school.  

4 **Types of Secondary Schools in Mexico:** General Secondary which is academic; Technical Secondary, where students take additional hours of vocational classes; Tele-
secondary, which is broadcast to remote areas; and Workers’ Secondary intended for working youth and adults.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Types of Schools:</th>
<th>Main Types of Schools:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Schools</td>
<td>Public Schools (including rural televised schools &amp; technical schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charter Schools</td>
<td>Private Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Schools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Schooling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Practices:</th>
<th>Grading Practices:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter System: A, B, C, D, F</td>
<td>Number system: 10-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A” the best grade</td>
<td>“10” being the best grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“D” passing poorly</td>
<td>“6” passing poorly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“F” failed course/subject</td>
<td>“5” failed course/subject</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Report Cards</th>
<th>Report Cards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every six weeks a report is issued: 4</td>
<td>Sent home several times throughout the year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progress reports and 2 official report cards divided up over 2 semesters in a school year.</td>
<td>(Note: Research data varies.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations of Parent Involvement</th>
<th>Expectations of Parent Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Parents are asked to help fundraise for donated money.</td>
<td>- Parents are expected to donate money to the schools and help maintain the school by doing things such as painting or cleaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Each school has their own parent board and all parents are welcome to attend school board meetings with opportunities to speak.</td>
<td>- Parents are not part of the School Board and are not asked by the governing School Board for their opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Parent involvement is highly encouraged at home as well as at school (ELAC; Parent teacher conferences; etc.)</td>
<td>- Overall, parent involvement is not required or even encouraged.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*It is important to note that current educational reform and re-organization is occurring in Mexico. For further information, it is recommended that you research information on the Internet or call your local consulate or child’s school district.*
Chapter 2

Important U.S. Education Laws

The school year is 180 days. Students must attend at least 170 days of each 180-day school year. Although the state requires students to only attend 170 days of the 180 day school year, parents and students should be aware that their child between the ages 6 and 17 is considered truant under SC Code of Regulations - Chapter 43-274 when the child has three absences in a row that are not excused by a parent or a total of five absences that are not excused by a parent. California’s State Education Code states that it is the parents’ responsibility to see that their children attend school regularly from the ages of six to eighteen.

Tardiness: Late arrival (tardiness) can result in the following:

- A child who is tardy misses important instruction and has to catch up on work.
- A child who is tardy and walks into class late can distract the rest of the students in the class from learning.
- A child who is consistently tardy will suffer discipline consequences. These can change from school to school. (Example: 3 tardies= 1 detention after school)
- A child who is consistently tardy is creating bad habits that will be hard to break as an adult.

Parents are responsible to have their child at school on time each day and encourage their child to be on time to each of their individual classes each day as expected by the child’s school. (Example: Students might be locked out of their classroom if they are not in class on time. They then would go to a lockdown period in the office which means they are missing instruction.)

See the next page for 3 reasons to miss school and 6 reasons not to miss school.
You can help your child become successful by stressing the importance of education and by following these suggestions in relation to their school attendance:

- Only allow your child to stay out of school if he/she is ill or has a medical or dental appointment.
- Always telephone the school to inform them as to the reason for your child’s absence.
- Always call, e-mail or send a note with your child when he/she returns to school.
- Schedule routine medical or dental examinations either early in the morning or after school to enable your child to attend at least part of the school day.
- Make sure your child packs their school supplies, P.E. clothes and lunch the night before so they do not forget anything the next morning.
- Use a working alarm clock to make sure they get up in time.
- Record your child’s absences on a calendar so you won’t forget the dates and reasons for the absence. This will help you when you check with the school to review your child’s attendance record.
- Always inform the school if you change telephone numbers, have a new work or emergency number or if you move.
Changing Schools

If your child is going to change schools, please:

- Keep your child in school until the last possible day.
- Always check your child out of the old school before you check into the new school.
  - Withdraw your child from the old school and enter the new school on the same day.
- Make sure to notify the new school of your child’s 504 plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP) so that their new school can request a copy.

Attendance

When students are absent or tardy for 10 days of school (excused or unexcused) and those days are not made up in Saturday school as offered by the school, a school district can make a referral to the School Attendance Review Board (SARB) and require parent(s) to attend a meeting. In San Marcos Unified School District, parents/guardians are required to sign a School Attendance Team Review or SART contract. If after parents/guardians sign this contract and the student has 3 more unexcused absences, then SMUSD will make a SARB referral.

Students with special needs can sometimes have challenges that result in absences or tardiness such as side effects from medication they are taking, a desire to avoid bullying, etc. Parents should be in constant communication with their child’s school regarding the reason their child is absent or tardy to address any problems and prevent a SARB referral.

*Always provide doctor’s notes as proof when the reason for their absence is medically related.

If you know that a SARB referral for your child is being considered by the school and your child has an IEP, immediately put into writing a request for an IEP meeting to determine with the team that attendance concerns are not part of the student’s disability before a referral is made.
If you receive a notice to attend a SARB meeting, gather documents that explain their child’s absence (examples: doctor’s notes; any financial documentation; etc.), why their child’s special needs are getting in the way of attendance, and efforts that have been made to resolve this.

*Important to remember:* The school is there to help support your child with special needs. If your child is missing school due to their disability, keep the school updated on what’s going on so that they do not consider your child truant.

**Important Disability Laws in the U.S.**

**The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** - a federal (U.S.) law providing Special Education services through an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for eligible children birth to age 22. This law is fulfilled by Local Education Agencies (LEAs), better known as school districts.

**The Lanterman Act** - created Regional Centers in California and are ruled by the Department of Developmental Services. The regional centers provide services to people of all ages with developmental disabilities through an Individual Program Plan (IPP). These services include Early Start for infants and toddlers.

**Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** - an anti-discrimination law. Any agency that receives federal (U.S. government) funds must provide equal opportunity for access. Under this law, schools are required to support a student with a qualifying disability through a 504 Accommodation Plan which is similar but not the same things as an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** - an anti-discrimination law that applies to both publicly funded and privately funded settings: employment, transportation, public services and accommodations that are run privately but accessible to the public.
Public agencies that serve children with special needs include: Local Education Agencies (public schools); Community Mental Health (CMH); Regional Centers (LEAs); Head Start and County Health and Human Services. Below is a list of government and non-profit agencies in our area:

Our health care system can be very confusing and is always changing. Parents should find a trustworthy organization specific to your child’s disability and stay connected to keep up to date on relevant health care issues. Not only does your child need you to advocate for their rights, but so do the officials and law makers responsible for the decisions that will affect your child’s educational rights and resources. As a citizen of the United States, it can seem scary to get involved in legal law-making decisions, but there are simple ways to make a difference with small efforts:

- Sign online petitions.
- Send an email or a letter to a legislator.
- Make a phone call to voice your concerns.

Not only will you be helping support your child living with a disability, but you will also be helping support so many more children whose parents might not be advocating for them.

Learn the facts. Get involved. Let your voice be heard because that is what the U.S. Education System is founded upon!

Parent Rights/Procedural Safeguards

All parents/guardians are to receive the most recently updated version of Parent Rights/Procedural Safeguards at least once a year at their child’s IEP meeting. These legal rights are long and can be confusing for many. In general, it is important for you to know 5 basic rights:
1. **General Rights** - You, the parent, have the right:
   - To a free and appropriate public education for your child
   - To place your child in a private school after giving your child’s current school written notice 10 days before they begin attending the private school.
   - To receive prior notice to begin or refuse changes in your child’s IEP
   - To agree with and given permission to begin any special education services before services or placement of your child has even begun.
   - To appear before the school district board of education concerning your child’s need for nonpublic education if this placement has already been rejected by the IEP team.
   - To review and receive a copy of your child’s records within 5 days from the school district’s receipt of your written request.
   - To request a change of your child’s records if you believe they are not correct.
   - To a different educational setting for your child during their suspension or expulsion trial.
   - To confidentiality.

2. **Rights Related to Assessments** given to your child:
   - You have the right to submit a written request for special education assessment and receive the school’s or district’s plan to assess your child explaining the planned assessment within 15 days.
   - You have the right to get an independent educational evaluation done of your child, especially if you do not agree with the school’s evaluation.

3. **Rights Related to the IEP Process** - You have the right to participate as a member of your child’s IEP team by reviewing assessments given to your child, considering whether or not they are eligible for special education and in helping decide the appropriate placement for your child.
4. Rights related to mediation and due process:

- You have to request a mediation conference from the state superintendent of public instruction before filing for due process.
- You have the right to be informed of any available services (free or low cost especially) when filing for due process.
- You have the right to an unbiased hearing at the state level.

5. Right to file complaints:

- You have the right to file a formal complaint with the school district if you feel that they have not followed the law despite your efforts to communicate with them and support your child.

Your Child’s Rights:

California Age of majority. In the state of California (as well as some other states), your child has the legal right to make decisions independently without your permission when they become a legal adult at 18 years of age. If you’re your child still has an active IEP when they reach 17 years of age, a statement must be included in the notes of the IEP that your child has been told of their rights once they turn 18.

Special Education

If you are reading this handbook, you most likely already have a child receiving Special Education Services who has an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) or you have a child that is currently being assessed for a possible disability and you are learning the process. Special education is free, specially designed instruction for a student with special needs whose educational needs cannot be met with changes to their routine in a general education setting.
Who may receive special education services?

In order to receive services through the Special Education Program, students between the ages of 3 and 22 must have one or more of the following state and federally (or nationally) recognized disabilities:

1. Autism
2. Deaf-blindness
3. Deafness
4. Developmental delay
5. Emotional disturbance
6. Hearing impairment
7. Intellectual disability
8. Multiple disabilities
9. Orthopedic impairment
10. Other health impairment
11. Specific learning disability
12. Speech or language impairment
13. Traumatic brain injury
14. Visual impairment, including blindness

Children from birth until their 3rd birthday may be eligible for special education early intervention services if they meet the early intervention criteria. These early intervention services are provided through outside agencies, not schools. (See page 17 for a list of agencies.)

Agencies Providing Intervention Services

Do different agencies have different rules or guidelines for qualification to receive Special Education Services?

Yes. Since various state and federal agencies operate under different laws and guidelines, the eligibility criteria may differ considerably among different agencies. Parents should ask for explanations of terms from any agency providing services. Think of it like shopping for a new cell phone company. Verizon, Sprint, T-Mobile and Cricket all have different terms and conditions, many of which are similar, but different none-the-less.
Since you are reading this guidebook, you are most likely a parent or general education teacher of a child who has already been identified as having a disability or who is suspect to having a disability that affects his/her ability to learn without accommodations (small adjustments) or modifications (changes). This is because school districts are required by law to follow the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and California Education Code laws and regulations in the determining whether or not a child has a disability and if so, what special education services they will receive. Therefore, if you do not feel that they have done their job to identify the needs of your child, you may take action and request in written form that they assess your child.

**Do all students with a disability require special education?**

No. The educational needs of many students with disabilities can be met with accommodations (small adjustments) and/or modifications (changes) to their routine and work in their general education classrooms. If after a complete evaluation your child requires special education to learn successfully, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) will be developed to list appropriate special education services to support your child in school.

**What exactly is a disability or learning disorder and how does it affect my child?**

There are 14 different categories of disabilities that a child can qualify under. Some disabilities are considered Learning disorders which affect the brain’s ability to get and process information. **Learning disorders are not an indicator of your child’s intelligence (brainpower).** In fact, children with disabilities often have average or above average intelligence. Mild to Moderate Disabilities are also very common. Nevertheless, the following disabilities badly affect a child's ability to learn and progress in school. Sometimes specialized services through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan are required in order for
a child to be able to learn. Other disabilities could be physically related or emotionally related and affect a child’s ability to learn and participate effectively in the general education curriculum without supports. Special Education Assessments help determine whether or not your child might have a disability. Assessments are basically a series of evaluations used to determine a person’s ability to learn, understand, retain and recall new and old information.
Chapter 3

Understanding Special Education Assessments

In order to figure out whether or not a child is living with a disability, information must be gathered through an assessment or evaluation process. The goal is to determine whether or not the student’s functioning ability and true ability to learn at a typical rate are the result of a disability and not a reflection of bicultural/bilingual issues, social/emotional factors, and/or health factors. This testing and observation process helps recognize a child’s strengths, weaknesses and areas of need(s). Assessments can be formal (official) through standardized tests (tests based on grade level education standards across CA/U.S.) or informal through observations and classroom work. These assessments include collecting, recording, scoring, and interpreting information about a child.

What areas will my child be assessed?

Assessments for special education should always be given to a student in all areas of concern. These areas could include the following:

- Cognitive functioning (reasoning skills)
- Academic functioning (skills necessary to learn, understand, practice and use new information)

### 7 IDEA AREAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Woodcock Johnson III Tests</th>
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<tr>
<td>o Oral Expression</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Listening Comprehension</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Written Expression</td>
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<tr>
<td>o Basic Reading Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Reading Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Mathematics Calculation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Story Recall, Picture Vocabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding Directions, Oral Comprehension</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Fluency, Writing Samples</td>
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<td>Letter-Word Identification, Word Attack</td>
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<td>Passage Comprehension, Reading Vocabulary</td>
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<td>Calculation, Math Fluency</td>
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- Mathematics Reasoning (Applied Problems, Quantitative Concepts)

-Speech and Language (how quickly and accurately they hear language, understand language and respond using language)

-Fine Motor skills (examples: handwriting, drawing)/ Gross Motor skills (examples: running, jumping)

-Auditory processing (understanding what is heard and ability to quickly use that information)

-Sensory processing (understanding what they touch or feel)

-Visual processing (interpreting and understanding what they see and their ability to quickly use that information)

-Social emotional (abilities to interact with other people/ manage emotions appropriately)

-Behavior, neuropsychological

-Memory (short term and long term)

-Attention (how long they can stay focused)

-Development (physical (body) and emotional (mind))

After the assessments are completed, a report must be written which provides an explanation for any recommendations made to help the student. Recommendations must be supported by multiple sources of information, including school records, parent and teacher reports, work samples, class observations and standardized tests. Overall, this report provides an exact, fair picture of the student’s situation, skills, and needs by including behavior, health and development information and any needs for specialized services that were concluded from the information gathered.

**What should I understand about the assessment scores?**

It is important to understand the test scores you are shown in your child’s assessment reports. First, it is always a good idea to have chart in front of you as you begin look at your
child’s scores. Here is an example in the figure below of a commonly used chart from the Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc. used to understand assessment results:

To best understand the test scores, you will need to learn and understand some basic statistics.

**Here are some examples of tests that provide Standard Scores and Scaled Scores are:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Type</th>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Scaled</th>
<th>T score</th>
<th>Percentile rank</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>70</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>85</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>115</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>130</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>40</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>145</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Standard Scores** are based on a mean (average) of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. Below is a description of Standard Score intelligence ranges: *(include list of tests that use this)*
Here is a general chart you might want to consider when doing your own research:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Scaled Score</th>
<th>Standard Score</th>
<th>Percentile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Superior</td>
<td>17 to 20</td>
<td>131 and above</td>
<td>98 and above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>15 to 16</td>
<td>121 to 130</td>
<td>92 to 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Average</td>
<td>13 to 14</td>
<td>111 to 120</td>
<td>77 to 91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>8 to 12</td>
<td>90 to 110</td>
<td>25 to 75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Average</td>
<td>6 to 7</td>
<td>80 to 89</td>
<td>9 to 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average</td>
<td>4 to 5</td>
<td>70 to 79</td>
<td>2 to 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Well Below Average</td>
<td>1 to 3</td>
<td>69 and below</td>
<td>2 and below</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keep in mind that some children have average to above average levels of intelligence (brainpower) as seen by their IQ score (general level of intelligence) and score average to above average on various subtests yet extremely low on other subtests. This is why **it is important to compare their level of intelligence** (brainpower) **with their academic achievement** (educational goals that have been met).

Whether your child is being assessed for the first time or not, he/she will most likely take anywhere from 9-20 cognitive (mental) tests from a set of tests such as the Woodcock-Johnson-
III or WIAT III. Many schools will then compare your child’s intelligence (brainpower) to their academic achievement (ability to learn, understand and use new and old information and skills based on the educational goals that they have met).

Comparing your child’s intelligence to their academic achievement is called the **Discrepancy Model**. San Marcos Unified School District currently requires a 22.5 point difference between cognitive (mental) scores and achievement scores in order to classify a child as having a specific learning disability. In uncommon cases, the Discrepancy Model does not help determine whether or not a child has a true disability affecting their ability to learn and other considerations need to be taken into account.

**Remember that having a learning disability doesn't mean you can't learn. Intelligence can be developed! The goal is figuring out how your child learns best.**

**Parents**- Support your child’s learning both inside and outside of the classroom by partnering with teachers and respond to the help they offer you and your child. Do not worry so much about advocating for your child to get good grades. Instead, help your child focus on improvement instead of worrying about how smart they are. Encourage them to put in the effort needed to learn more and grow their intelligence. Based on years of research by Stanford University’s Dr. Dweck, Lisa Blackwell Ph.D., and their colleagues, we know that students who learn this mindset show greater motivation in school, better grades, and higher test scores.

**What about State Testing? Does that affect my child’s placement in Special Education?**

**NO.** State testing does not affect your child’s placement in Special Education; however, their state test results do provide the school with more information on how well your child is learning and remembering grade level information being taught. It is one of many forms of data used to monitor your child’s progress and needs. Also, there have been modified versions of the
state tests available to students who do need additional supports because of their disability. A simple example of a state test medication would be having three multiple choice answer options instead of four multiple choice answer options.

**PARENTS BE AWARE:** Star Testing based on the California State Content Standards is being discontinued and a new state assessment based on new nationally adopted Common Core standards will begin in the year 2014/2015. Information on modified versions of the new tests has yet to be released.

**State Testing and the New Common Core State Standards**

**What are standards and what is going to be the difference between our current state standards and the new Common Core standards?**

Standards are the academic knowledge and skills that a student should have at each grade level, kindergarten through grade 12.

Instead of each state in the U.S. teaching by their own set of education standards, new Common Core education standards are being implemented across the country so that standards and expectations are more equal, allowing all students regardless of income level, ethnicity or where they live to have equal education.

The **main goal of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** is to **help students become active learners who can learn how to think critically and problem solve.**

**What will my child be expected to do under these new standards?**

- Students will be expected to READ and WRITE across all subjects (Math, Language Arts, Science, and History) to prepare for college and careers.
- Students will be expected to learn how to problem solve and use evidence from multiple texts to prove or defend their answers.
Students will be expected to apply knowledge and skills in real-world situations.

Students will be expected to find, evaluate and use information to solve problems individually with the use of technology.

How and when will my child be tested on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)?

Beginning in the 2014/15 academic school year, California will use the Smarter Balanced Assessment to test student learning and provide teachers with better information on what your child is able to do and what areas they need to improve.

In addition to the work of schools, parents must work to better prepare our students to confront the challenges of our constantly changing future. You can do this by education yourself on what changes are being made in education and how you can help. Continue reading to learn how to better understand and therefore better prepare your child to succeed in school.

What can I do as a parent to help my child transition into learning under these new standards? Help your child become a stronger, quicker reader.

Can’t read English? OK, well guess what? The great news is that YOU can still support your child in their reading!!! Teachers are expecting you to help support your children in reading. Read the follow things to focus on to help your child becomes a stronger, quicker reader.
Chapter 4

Strategies Parent can use to help their Children be Better Readers, Writers and Mathematicians!

Parents- Have your child read non-fiction (true, fact based) books and stories to learn about the world around them.

- Get them more non-fiction texts that are interesting to them. Garage sales, use book stores or the city library is a great place to find non-fiction text at your child’s reading level.
- Find books that explain things.
- Have your child read non-fiction texts aloud to you or a family member in English.
- Discuss with your child in English or Spanish what ideas they read about in their text.

Parents- Encourage your child to read more difficult text much more carefully.

- Know what your child’s reading and comprehension level is and challenge them by getting them a book at one-half to one full grade level higher than their current reading level. (Ask your child’s Language Art’s teacher what their current reading level is.)
- Show interest and have discussions about what they are reading by having them tell you what they find interesting in their reading. They can tell you in English or in their primary language (example: Spanish).

Parents- Use evidence to discuss reading.

- Demand evidence in every day discussions/ disagreements.
- Read the same book your child is reading if it is available in your primary language and discuss with them the events in the text using evidence.

Parents- Encourage your child to write at home. (Examples: journal, diary, or write stories)
Parents- Practice Academic Vocabulary with your Children

- Read often and constantly with your child (from infancy through middle school).
- Find multiple books about the same topic to read.
- Let your kids see you reading (newspaper; books; magazines).
- Have conversations with your child in English if possible or in Spanish.
- Listen to your children.
- Sing English songs on the radio with your children.

Parents- Help your child learn 10 facts about 1 important thing instead of 1 fact each about 10 different things.

- Know what the Common Core grade level standards are for your child so you know what to help them focus on at home.
- Provide your child with time to work on important school work at home or by enrolling them in an after-school program to get help on important school work.
- Read your child’s IEP progress goal updates when they are sent home.

Parents- Be aware of your child’s math skills from last year and what they need to focus on this year.

- Be aware of what your child struggled with last year and how that will affect learning this year.
- Advocate for your child and ensure that support is given for “gap” skills – negative numbers, fractions, etc.

Parents can help their child increase their speed and accuracy (correctness).

- Push your child to know/ memorize basic math facts by testing them with flashcards at home on their multiplication skills for multiplication facts with numbers 0-12.
• Know all of the fluencies your child should have and prioritize learning of the ones they don’t have yet.

Parents can help their child KNOW their math and DO their math, especially in every day real life.

• Notice whether your child REALLY knows why the answer is what it is.

• Provide TIME for your child to work on math at home. Advocate for the TIME your child needs to learn key math. Make sure if they need extra time in math that they are given this time at school and that it is documented in their IEP.

• Ask your child to DO the math that comes up in your daily life (telling time; making change when buying something at the store, etc.)

• Make sure your child is thinking about Math in real life
Chapter 5

Learning about Your Child’s Special Needs

Each child is different no matter what their disability. Your role as a parent is to learn how the disability shows up in your child. This way, you will learn how to best support your child inside and outside of school.

Where should I start? Well you have already started simply by reading this handbook. Here are some things you will need to know about your child:

• Common characteristics of their disability
• How the special needs of your child might affect various parts of their life: school, social, daily life activities, and home
• What treatments and interventions are proven to be effective verses experimental
• Whether or not a behavior is related to the disability or to a typical developmental stage of childhood or adolescence.

Common Characteristics of the 14 Disability Categories under IDEA

1. Autism

This is a developmental disorder based on a child’s behavioral symptoms. Symptoms can begin around 6 months of age and are usually noticeable by 2-3 years of age. They usually continue throughout adulthood. Autism is made up of a group of symptoms that include the following:

- Difficulties socially interacting with others and difficulties communicating with others

Examples: Child might not respond to verbal prompts or gestures; rarely smile or make eye contact, if at all; rarely respond to their own name; lack the understanding or ability to pretend play or copy someone or something; not be able to have a conversation; and act like they don’t seem to hear when they actually do.
- Repetitive behaviors
  - Repeated movements: hand flapping, making sounds, head rolling and body rocking.
  - Compulsive behavior: arranging objects or toys in stacks or lines.
- Few interests (usually very interested/obsessed with one or two things)
  - Routine daily activities and pre-occupation with one toy, game or TV show
- Strange habits
  - Self injuries: skin picking, hand biting and head banging
  - Sleep problems: sleeplessness or waking up in the evening with energy in the evening or early morning
  - Poor fine and gross motor skills (handwriting and ability to participate successfully in physical education)

To be diagnosed by a doctor with Autism, a child must have at least six symptoms: 2 social; 1 impairment of communication and 1 showing restricted and repetitive behavior. The onset of symptoms must occur before age 3. This should be diagnosed by medical doctors/psychologists with information and feedback from the child’s teachers or care provider.

2. **Deaf-Blindness**

Combination of severe hearing and visual impairments, causing severe communication and other developmental and educational needs.

3. **Deafness**

Severe hearing impairment that prevents a person from usefully recognizing sounds in the environment (car horn honking; garbage disposal; etc.) or processing what someone is saying with or without the use of a hearing aid even when the volume of sound is increased.
4. **Developmental Delay**

A delay in one or more of the following areas: physical (body) development; cognitive (brain) development; communication (speaking); social or emotional development (interacting nicely with others and ability to manage emotions appropriately); or behavioral development (reacting to changes and situations with typical and appropriate responses based on age).

Someone who has this combination of delays will have trouble learning and functioning in everyday life. This person could be 10 years old, but might not talk or write as well as a typical 10-year-old. He or she also is usually slower to learn other skills, like how to get dressed or how to act around other people.

5. **Emotional Disturbance**

A disorder showing one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a point that seriously affects a child’s ability to learn and progress in education:

(a) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual (brainpower), sensory (hearing, sight, touch, taste or smell), or health factors (body).

(b) Unable to build or keep typical relationships with classmates and teachers.

(c) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings demonstrated in normal circumstances.

(d) Constant unhappiness or depression.

(e) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears related to personal or school problems.

A disability under Emotional Disturbance can be any one of the following:

- anxiety disorders;
- bipolar disorder (sometimes called manic-depression);
- conduct disorders (aggressive to people or animals; destructive of property; deceitful-lying/cheating)
• eating disorders (anorexia or bulimia)
• obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD - brain gets stuck on a specific thought or desire)
• Psychotic disorders (schizophrenia; drug/alcohol abuse)

Some of the characteristics and behaviors seen in children who have an emotional disturbance include:

• Hyperactivity (short attention span, impulsiveness)
• Aggression or self-injurious behavior (acting out, fighting)
• Withdrawal (not interacting socially with others, extreme fear or anxiety)
• Immaturity (inappropriate crying, temper tantrums, poor coping skills)
• Learning difficulties (academically performing below grade level)
• Children with the most serious emotional disturbances may exhibit distorted thinking, extreme anxiety, strange physical movements, and irregular mood swings.

6. Hearing Impairment

An impairment in hearing, whether lifelong or changing but that is not included under the definition of "deafness."

7. Intellectual Disability (formerly known as Mental Retardation)

Very low intellectual functioning skills (examples: a brain that has a very low ability to get, store, understand, use and retrieve information immediately or in the future), existing at the same time with deficits in adaptive behavior (life skills developed for independent living). This is a disability obvious at birth.

8. Multiple Disabilities

Two or more impairments. Requires a specialized program that will help meet the needs of both
disabilities (example: Intellectual Disability and Orthopedic Impairment). The term does not include deaf-blindness.

9. **Orthopedic Impairment**

the term includes impairments caused by an inherited (genetic) abnormality (defect), impairments caused by disease (example: bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (examples: cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).

10. **Other Health Impairment**

having little strength, energy, or awareness, while at the same time experiencing an increased awareness to environmental stimuli (things that cause a person to feel or have a response) resulting in a lack of awareness and attention in the educational environment (example: the classroom), that—

(a) is due to long-lasting or serious health problems such as asthma, Attention Deficit Disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and

(b) Badly affects a child’s educational performance (or ability to learn, practice, remember and correctly use information they learn).

**Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)** and **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** are developmental disorders where children can have problems paying attention, concentrating, difficulty following simple instructions, and have a need to physically move their body (sometimes impulsively without thought of consequences).

**Three symptoms of ADHD include:** inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity.
1. **Inattention** - easily distracted; can’t follow directions or finish tasks; appear not to listen; make careless mistakes; forgetful; problems organizing; avoid sitting still; lose things and tend to daydream.

2. **Hyperactivity** - fidgeting or bouncing behavior; struggle to stay seated; constantly moving and talking even when they shouldn’t be.

3. **Impulsivity** - difficulty taking turns; will blurt out answers; often interrupt others.

It is important to remember that many of these symptoms are common to all children and do not necessarily indicate this disorder. Although a healthy diet instead of sugar and junk food are known to help a child feel and thing better in school, they are not the causes of the causes of ADD and ADHD.

*ADD and ADHD in children are both considered medical conditions and should be diagnosed by a physician with additional assessment and observational notes provided by the child’s school.*

**Causes of ADD/ADHD:**

- **Heredity**: ADD and ADHD tend to run in families (genes)

- **Chemical Imbalance in the body** (when chemicals in the brain or other bodily organs are too high or too low. *Examples*: Low amounts of Serotonin in the brain may lead to depression. Too much insulin the pancreas increase can lead to diabetes.)

- **Structural Differences in the Brain** (different sizes of each part of the brain and differences in how nerves and fibers connect)

- **Other Life-effecting Causes**: Prenatal (beginning pregnancy) exposure to tobacco, lead, drugs and alcohol; perinatal (mid-pregnancy) factors including
complications with labor and delivery; and post-natal (after giving birth) causes such as exposure to environmental toxins (lead and PCB’s- *coolants, insulating materials, and lubricants in electric equipment*) all increase the risk of a child developing ADHD.

*Important to Know and Consider if your child has ADD or ADHD and are not receiving help:* Children with ADD and ADHD are at higher risk for developing Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, depression, anxiety disorders, learning disabilities and Tourette’s Syndrome. They are also at higher risk to try drugs and alcohol in their future in an attempt to self-medicate their symptoms (e.g. marijuana). Children will continue to struggle with this disorder into adulthood if they do not learn strategies in primary and secondary school to help them succeed in school. Children and young adults with ADD or ADHD may benefit from medication supervised by a doctor and from behavior therapy given by a school special education team.

11. **Specific Learning Disability**

A disorder in one or more of the basic mental and emotional processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may appear in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. These types of disabilities include:

- Perceptual disabilities- brain cannot function properly by recognizing, organizing, and understanding the information from our five senses (hear, see, smell, taste and touch)
- Brain injury
- Attention Deficit Disorder (previously known as minimal brain dysfunction)
- Dyslexia- a problem that makes it difficult for a child to read because their brain has trouble processing letters and sounds.
• Developmental aphasia- a language disorder that is not related to a person’s intelligence. Can be the result of a brain injury, illness or disease.

(Note: Specific Learning Disabilities are NOT a result of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantages IF child had a healthy pregnancy and delivery.)

12. **Speech or Language Impairment**

difficulty understanding or expressing thoughts due to difficulty with pronunciation, clarity, voice, ease, and/or language.

13. **Traumatic Brain Injury**

Injury to the brain caused by an outside physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that negatively affects a child’s educational performance (or ability to learn, practice, remember and correctly use information they learn).

*Example:* Child is in a car accident getting his head smashed in, permanently damaging part of the brain by bruising it or causing it to bleed.

14. **Established Medical Disability (0-5 years only; CA definition only)**

Disabling medical condition or inborn/inherited set of symptoms that the IEP team determines will most likely require special education services. This disability is not in federal law.

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For further information on the disability categories listed, visit one of the national organizations with website information or local chapters that host meetings or trainings.

*Tip:* Pay attention to the sponsor of the website. Websites ending in .edu are generally trustworthy. Also, some non-profit organizations can be helpful as well and they are typically noted by .org or .net.
Parents REMEMBER: Your child’s special needs might affect various parts of their life: school, their social life, daily activities, home life. Remember that the goal is to learn how your child learns best because they can learn!! They just need the support and tools to do so. You and your child’s school are the ones who must work together to provide support and determine which tools will best help your child learn successfully. Your child’s school cannot do this alone and needs your involvement and active participation in your child’s learning process and well-being.
Chapter 6

My Child Has an IEP. What Should I Know before the Meeting?

IEP meetings are planned times used to write or change your child’s education program by deciding which services are needed to support your child in their learning process.

Order of the Important Parts of Your Child’s IEP that will be discussed in an IEP Meeting

1. Assessment Data
2. Present Levels of student
3. Needs of student
4. Goals and Services to support student
5. Placement of student in Gen Ed and SPED

In more detail, your child’s IEP Meeting Agenda (or schedule) should go in the following order:

1. Introductions of the Team Members are made.

Team Members include:

- You, the parent
- Your child if possible
- Your child’s IEP Case Manager (person responsible for making sure your child’s needs are being met at school under the terms of their IEP)
An administrator (principal, vice principal, or District Special Education Program Specialist)

At least one general education teacher who works with your child (unless they live with a severe disability and spend 100% of their day in a self-contained special education classroom)

Your child’s school counselor

Any other professionals who might provide your child with services (Speech and Language Pathologist; Occupational Therapist; one-on-one instructional aide; etc.)

2. Review what the team will discuss and in what amount of time.

3. The purpose of the meeting will be stated. (Example: Annual IEP or Triennial IEP)

4. Parent(s) will be offered a copy of the recently updated Procedural Safeguards in English or Spanish. (Translations of this Procedural Safeguards in other languages will need to be requested by the parent in writing.)

5. The case manager will review the front page of the IEP and confirm/update your contact information.

6. Any results from assessments (tests/observations) given to your child will be reviewed.

7. Review/Determine your child’s eligibility to receive Special Education Services.

8. Review progress on past goals.

9. The team will discuss your child’s present levels (what your child is able to do; includes their current reading and comprehension level) with verbal and/or written feedback from your child’s General Education and Special Education teachers and service providers (examples: Speech and Language Pathologist; Occupational Therapists).
10. Discuss special factors.

11. Discuss your child’s Individual Transition Plan or ITP (if student is 16 or will turn 16 prior to their next IEP)

12. The team will recommend or suggest new goals for your child that you will all discuss and have to approve. (See page ___ for help determining what good verses bad goals are.)

13. Discuss accommodations (small adjustments) and modifications (changes) to help support your child inside and outside of the classroom at school.

14. Recommend, discuss and approve services.

15. Discuss educational setting (what part of the day your child will spend in and out of General Education classrooms and environments)

16. Team will review the notes taken during the meeting and add anything that was left out.

17. All team members in attendance will sign the IEP as participants.

18. Team members, including parents, will receive a copy of the paperwork to keep for reference and their records.

*Before an IEP meeting, it is important to organize your paperwork and thoughts. Be prepared to share your observations of your child at home by filling out the reflection worksheet on the next page.*
Parent Reflection Worksheet

Child’s Name _________________________________________________________________
Special Needs/ Disability ____________________________________________________________________________________________________

Answer the following questions about what you observe from your child at home by circling one of the answer options and writing any additional comments:

Comments

Positive Attitude: Strength OK Borderline Concern ____________________
Responsibility: Strength OK Borderline Concern ____________________
Relationships with brothers/sisters: Kind/Helpful Rude/Selfish Both (Varies)
Parent/Guardian Relationship: Cooperative Uncooperative Both (varies)

Communication: Circle all that apply. Comments
  o Speech is unclear/hard to understand ________________________________________
  o Trouble expressing thoughts/ideas __________________________________________
  o Difficulty processing auditory information ____________________________________
  o Trouble remembering things ________________________________________________

What does your child enjoy doing for fun?
  Playing outside      Watching TV       Playing video games      Drawing
  Social Media (e.g. facebook/texting)      Reading      Playing games with family

How much time does your child spend doing homework and/or reading every night?
  20-30 minutes    45 minutes-1 hour    1 ½ hours      2 hours

Self-Help Skills at Home:
  Requires help getting ready for school: Normally Sometimes Rarely
  Begins working on homework independently: Yes No Needs attention before starting

List 3 areas of strength for your child. List 3 areas that worry you.
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________
Mark your calendar with the dates that your IEP states you will get written progress reports.

When the reports come, ask questions if there is something you do not understand or if you have concerns. If you do not get the reports, let the school know this in writing.

**Child’s Goals:** what your child will be doing by the next annual IEP meeting.

If you have concerns or think that something should be changed, put in writing your request for an IEP meeting. The school district has up to 30 days after your request (not counting long school vacations) to have the meeting. Examples of items that could be added to an IEP if needed:

- Behavior Support Plans (if disability is the cause of the behavior)
- Related Services (if additional services are required to meet the needs of your child)

*Special Education provides a Free and Appropriate Public Education or FAPE.*

An appropriate education results in some progress and helps a child access the curriculum. For example, if a student needs to sit at the very front of class so that they can see the board easily and be given extra time to copy notes so that they do not fall behind, then they must be given those accommodations that are stated in their IEP.

The purpose of Special Education is to help a child with a disability learn strategies using their strengths to support themselves in their learning process despite their weaknesses. For example, if a child has difficulties listening and remembering information in class, their Specialized Academic Instructors (or Special Education teachers) will teach your child to write notes while they are listening to help them stay focused and remember what they learned. The goal is that the child will eventually use this strategy of note-taking without their teacher reminding them to do so.
Your written consent is needed for the school district to put an IEP into effect for your child. If the district believes a change needs to be made to your child’s IEP, they cannot make one without your consent.

**What are the Key Special Education Timelines I should know?**

- The law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - IDEA) has specific timelines that are to be followed in Special Education. Timelines apply during regular school sessions (the beginning of the school year - generally mid-August/September to the beginning of June when school is let out for summer break).

- Your school must respond in writing to your written request for an assessment within 15 calendar days.

- After you sign an agreement to allow your child to be assessed (or tested and observed), your school must complete the assessments and hold an IEP meeting within 60 calendar days.

- After your child has an active IEP in place, you can request an IEP meeting whenever you have a concern. Your school must hold the meeting within 30 calendar days of your request.

- Annual (yearly) IEP meetings must be held no later than your child’s annual review date which is located at the top of their IEP paperwork. In this meeting, your child’s progress toward meeting their goals is reviewed, new goals are written and services are updated as determined by the team. Your child’s school must make a reasonable attempt to find a meeting date that works for you and the school. *Please note that it is against San Marcos Unified School District’s Union policy for teachers to have to work past their contract
hours (which end at 2:40pm for teachers at the middle school level). Most school districts have a Union that protects their rights.*

*For an overview of a Special Education Assessment and IEP Timeline, please see the chart below on the following page.*
I have concerns with my child’s services in their IEP.

Before scheduling an IEP meeting to discuss your concern(s), think about whether or not your concern(s) may be the primary cause of your child’s difficulty that is causing you to be concerned.

1. Write down your concern(s) and look for data to support your concerns. Always contact the teacher(s) first regarding your concern(s) before contacting your child’s case manager unless the child’s case manager is one your child’s teachers.

2. Gather your child’s IEP and any assessments. If you are not sure you have everything or you would like translated copies of the IEP and any assessments, write a letter to the school district asking them to provide you with copies. The district office has 5 days to provide you with the information that you requested.

3. Review the assessments and IEP papers. Make sure you understand the documents. If you need help with this, write down questions that you have.

* The IEP is developed from assessment information and observational notes from parents and teachers that are updated once a year. If something is missing or incorrect in the assessment(s) or notes provided by the teachers and/or parents, it may be the cause of why the IEP isn’t working well. Parents- Always make sure you are updating your child’s case manager and school with any changes that might affect your child’s ability to function and learn at school. (Examples: if your child is taking a new medication; if you have moved; if someone in the family has passed away; if you and your spouse are separating or getting a divorce; etc.)

4. Check to see if key issues in the assessment are addressed somewhere in the IEP goals, accommodations, services and/or behavior plan. Your child may simply need more time receiving services or their goals might need to be more specific so that it is clear what the child is
working to accomplish. Or perhaps you would like to see more data to show what progress has been made toward the goals.

5. If the paperwork and goals seem appropriate, you might need to ask for additional services or different services to help support your child so that they can progress.

**NOTE:** Sometimes a parent might agree with how the IEP is written but discovers that their child is not being provided the services (accommodations/modifications) that were written in the IEP. For example, a student might have “additional time to complete tests” listed as one of their accommodations but you come to find out that your child’s general education history teacher is making them turn in their test at the end of the period whether they are finished or not and is not giving them extra time to complete it. This would be an example of where your child’s needs are not being met as stated in their IEP and you can take steps to advocate for your child by requesting in writing a meeting with your child’s principal and special education team to discuss the terms listed in your child’s IEP that are not being met.

*The school will have 30 days to hold the meeting from the time they receive your written request.*

**KEY:** An IEP can be changed as needed at any time because its purpose is to assist your child in making progress toward their goals. IEPs do not guarantee results and do not mean your student will be taught individually.

**Tips on IEP Meetings**

Parent and student participation in the decision making process is important because the IEP meeting is an opportunity for decision making. The parent is a member of the IEP team and therefore must be present at the meeting. To ensure that your child’s IEP meeting goes as smoothly as possible, consider doing the following:
Before the meeting: organize your information and order your child’s needs beginning with their most important need. Ask for copies of any reports that you might have lost by contacting the district office with a written request.

✓ Build positive relationships with one or more people on the IEP team (e.g. case manager; counselor, etc.)

✓ Know the purpose and plan of the meeting. Find out who will be there, what is going to be discussed, and how much time has been pre-arranged for the meeting.

✓ Make a plan for someone you trust to attend the meeting with you to offer moral support, take notes, and help you remember the questions you wanted to ask and concerns that you had wished to address. You are encouraged to leave children who are not part of the IEP at home if possible, as they may cause distractions during the meeting.)

During the meeting:

At the beginning:

✓ Confirm the length of the meeting and if anyone needs to leave early. If everyone you requested to be at the meeting is not there, re-schedule another meeting where everyone is present. By law, one administrator (principal or vice principal), your child’s case manager, at least one of your child’s general education teachers and any other professionals who provide services to your child (e.g. Speech and Language Pathologist, Occupational Therapist, or school counselor, etc. must be present.)

✓ Keep communication respectful. Understand what people think and why by listening and asking questions.

✓ Listen, take notes and ask questions after each section of the IEP is discussed if you don’t understand something or if it doesn’t sound correct.
✓ Be sure the team addresses all of the parts of the IEP even if they are addressed out of order due to various circumstances.

✓ Focus on what you want for your child (your interests) and not how to get there. The rest of the team may have some great ideas you haven’t considered.

✓ Make sure the notes from the meeting taken by the team’s note taker are correct and have all the key points that were discussed included.

✓ Sign wisely. You do not have to sign at the meeting. You can take everything home and consider it before signing. If you agree with some parts of the IEP and aren’t sure about other parts, sign the parts with which you agree and schedule another meeting.

Don’t forget to thank the team for their efforts in helping support your child as you make positive decisions together!
Chapter 7

IEP GOALS

What should I know about IEP goals so that I can decide whether or not I agree with the suggested goals for my child?

Goals are written for any area related to the disability that gets in the way of your child’s learning and prevents them from getting ready for life after high school.

Annual goals. These are goals that the child can realistically meet in a year. Goals may be academic (math, reading, writing, etc.), address social or behavioral needs (following classroom rules; keeping hands to self), relate to physical needs (fine motor skills—writing or gross motor skills—running), or address other educational needs (example: Speech and Language). The goals must be measurable—meaning that they must be able to be measured whether or not the student has met those goals.

WHEN YOU SIGN THE SIGNATURE PAGE OF AN IEP, YOU ARE SAYING THAT YOU UNDERSTAND YOUR CHILD’S GOALS AND AGREE WITH THE EDUCATION PLAN SUGGESTED TO HELP YOUR CHILD MEET THOSE GOALS.

BUT DO YOU REALLY?

In order to know which goals are “good” goals for your child, you must understand your child’s

Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (or current performance in school). The IEP must state how the child is currently doing in school.

Evaluation results such as classroom tests and assignments, individual tests given to decide eligibility for services or during reevaluation, and observations made by parents, teachers, related service providers, and other school staff is used to figure out the present levels of a student. This information will help guide the team, including you, in deciding what goals are appropriate for
your child. With this knowledge and understanding, you can now make the best choices to help support your child.

*Parents have 3 choices: 1. To Agree; 2. to discuss further; or 3. to disagree.*

When reviewing the draft goals that your child’s case manager might have developed with your input and input from your child’s teachers before the IEP meeting, make sure the goals…

- …are SMART: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time limited.
- …describe what the child will be able to do.
- …include present levels of performance or baselines (as documented in the IEP paperwork). These are the skills they can do now.
- …describe the skill so when you are reading them, you can form a picture of that your student is doing. Example:

**Examples of baselines (what your child can currently do) and goals (SMART goals):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bad Examples (Don’t agree)</th>
<th>Good Examples (Agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baselines</strong></td>
<td>[Student name] is below grade level in writing.</td>
<td>[Student name] can write a 2 paragraph essay consisting of complete sentences. He does need help with spelling and higher level vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals</strong></td>
<td>By his next annual IEP, [student name] will improve his written essays with 80% accuracy.</td>
<td>By [date], when given a writing topic, [student name] will write a 3 paragraph expository essay with an emerging topic sentence, 4-6 supporting sentences and a summary conclusion using appropriate grade level language and conventions with 80% accuracy as measured by student work samples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Baseline</strong></td>
<td>[Student name] reads slowly.</td>
<td>[Student name] participates in a reading fluency program called Read Naturally. She is reading an average of 100 words per minute correctly in beginning 3rd grade level reading passages. She will</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
continue to work toward reading 100 words per minute correctly at a mid-third grade to beginning fourth grade level this year.

**Goal**

By next year, [student name] will read faster in 6th grade level text.

By [date], when given a narrative or expository reading passage at [student's name] instructional level, [student name] will read the passage with appropriate pacing, intonation, and expression at a rate of 100 correct words per minute in 2 consecutive trials as measured by teacher-charted records/fluency reading log.

**Baseline**

[Student name] does not know how to change fractions and got an F on his fraction’s test.

[Student name] can successfully add, subtract, multiply and divide both proper and improper fractions, as well as whole numbers with and without decimals. He can convert or change an improper fraction to a mixed number and vice versa. Currently he is able to convert a fraction to a decimal and percent with 40-50% accuracy as measured by his work samples and assessments.

**Goal**

By 2014, [student name] will be able to convert fractions with 80%.

By [date], when given a teacher-made sample of fractions, [student name] will convert them to decimals and percentages and create a visual representation with 80% accuracy as measured by student work samples/criterion assessments.
**How will I know if my child is making progress toward their goals?**

**Measuring progress.** The IEP must state how the school will keep track of and measure the progress your child makes toward reaching the goals in their IEP and when you will be given updates on their progress toward meeting those goals.

You should receive reports on the progress your child is making toward their IEP goals as well as traditional progress reports and report cards. The schedule of the IEP goals progress reports are agreed upon in the IEP and generally vary from primary to secondary school. For example, at SMMS goal updates are provided 2x a year at the time official report cards are issued. Your child’s teachers and IEP case manager measure progress by looking at your child’s scores and work in the following areas:

- **Standardized tests** (a test in which all the questions, format, instructions, scoring and reporting of scores are the same for all test takers. No modifications made.)
- **Work samples:** homework, tests, or recording of speech
- **Teacher observations** (data from check lists, charts, or other methods of recording data)

*Continuous progress monitoring* is a practice used by your child’s teachers and case manager to measure progress. Teachers, paraprofessionals, school staff, and parents should ALL be observing and taking notes on the behaviors and academic progress a child with a disability is making. Parents- you can do this by looking at your child’s goals and asking yourself: “When I read the baseline and the annual goal, can I picture in my mind what my child will be doing?”

**What accommodations (adjustments) and/or modifications (changes) will be used to help my child reach their goals?**

The goal of an accommodation is to get rid of barriers to learning the general education material and to showing mastery of the general education material. What the students are expected to
learn in each grade level are basically the same for all; however, students’ learning and abilities to show understanding of the standards will vary.

The goal of modifications is to allow educational progress in learning the material being taught given different changes to the level or amount of material used to access the curriculum.

*Steps to Having Good Communication during an IEP Meeting*

**Build Agreements.** Look and Listen for opportunities for agreements that put your child’s needs first. Use and ask for facts/data/references.

**Repeat/reflect to check that you heard the person correctly.**

“I think what I hear you saying is….and your suggestion is….”

**Acknowledge the positive and express appreciation.** Keep it student-focused.

**Take a break.** If you feel too overwhelmed or too emotional it is a good idea to step outside for a few minutes and gather your thoughts or speak with your support person.

*In general, keep communication short and to the point. Use language that is respectful.”*

**Learn About Systems and Laws that Support Families.** There are several service systems available to help you support the needs of your child living with a disability.

If you would like more information about your child’s disability, the Special Education process, the process of an IEP, or of Special Education laws, contact your state education agency or your local education agency (SELPA- example: North Coastal Consortium for Special Education or NCCSE) . Here are some additional resources of information you may find helpful:

**Office of Special Education Programs**

**Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services**

**U.S. Department of Education**

400 Maryland Avenue, SW
EL PARENTS AS ADVOCATE FOR CHILD WITH DISABILITY

Washington, DC 20202-7100
(202) 245-7531 (Voice/TTY)

Web: www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY)
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013
(800) 695-0285 (Voice/TTY); (202) 884-8200 (V/TTY)
E-mail: nichcy@aed.org
Web: www.nichcy.org

Technical Assistance for Parent Centers--the Alliance

PACER Center
4826 Chicago Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55417-1098
(888) 248-0822; (612) 827-2966
(612) 827-7770 (TTY)
E-mail: alliance@taalliance.org
Web: www.taalliance.org

The IDEA Partnership Projects

Associations of Service Providers Implementing IDEA Reforms in Education (ASPIIRE)
The Council for Exceptional Children
1920 Association Drive
Reston, VA 20191-1589
(888) 232-7733; (703) 264-9456
(703) 264-9446 (TTY)

E-mail: ideapractices@cec.sped.org

Web: www.ideapractices.org

Families and Advocates Partnerships for Education (FAPE)

PACER Center

4826 Chicago Avenue South

Minneapolis, MN 55417-1098

(888) 248-0822; (612) 827-2966; (612) 827-7770 (TTY)

E-mail: fape@pacer.org

Web: www.fape.org

IDEA Local Implementations by Local Administrators (ILIAD)

The Council for Exceptional Children

1920 Association Drive

Reston, VA 20191-1589

(877) CEC-IDEA; (703) 264-9418; (703) 264-9480 (TTY)

E-mail: ideapractices@cec.sped.org

Web: www.ideapractices.org

The Policy Maker Partnership (PMP) for Implementing IDEA 97

National Association of state Directors of Special Education

1800 Diagonal Road, Suite 320

Alexandria, VA 22314

(703) 519-3800; (703) 519-7008 (TTY)
In addition to understanding your child’s present levels of performance in school and the goals that are all listed in their IEP, it is important to understand the following information that is and by law must be included in your child’s IEP:

**Special education and related services.** The IEP must list the special education and related services to be provided to your child for purposes of meeting your child’s needs. This includes extra accommodations or help and services that the child needs. It also includes modifications (changes) to the program or supports for school personnel-such as training or professional development-that will be provided to assist the child.

**Participation with nondisabled children.** The IEP must explain how much of their school day (within the 6.5 hours required by law) that your child will not join nondisabled children in regular general education classrooms and school activities.
Participation in state, country and district-wide tests. Most states and districts give achievement tests to children in certain grades or age groups (example: the Smarter Balance Achievement test newly adopted by 45 states or CELDT used by California to determine language proficiency). The IEP must state what modifications (changes) they will make to the tests that will allow your child to participate in taking the tests so that they can demonstrate their knowledge and skills. If a test is not appropriate for the child, the IEP must state why the test is not appropriate and how the child will be tested instead.

Dates and places. The IEP must state when services will begin, how often they will be provided (daily, weekly, monthly, or minutes within a year), where they will be provided (inside a Special Education classroom, inside a general education classroom, etc.), and how long they will last.

Transition service needs. The IEP must list and describe the steps your child will be guided to take to reach his or her transition goals with a statement of transition services needed to help them meet these goals at each important transition stage from elementary school through high school. The main transition periods that need to be listed and described in your child’s IEP include their transition from 5th or 6th grade (elementary school) to 6th or 7th grade (middle school); their transition from 8th grade in middle school to 9th grade in high school; and their transition from 12th grade in high school to a job or college after high school.
Chapter 8

Revoking or Stopping Special Education Services

*I am thinking of taking my child out of Special Education.*

Taking away your child’s right to receive Special Education Services is a major decision that have serious consequences for your child. Before you send in a written notice to your child’s school district requesting that you no longer want your child to receive Special Education services, ask yourself the following questions?

**Do I want my child out because I am unhappy with the services being provided to them or their placement in Special Education classes?**

First communicate with your child’s school and IEP case manager about your concern(s) and work with them to find possible solutions. If you feel that the school is not supporting your child or implementing the accommodations and modifications listed in your child’s IEP or if you feel like you are not being heard by your child’s school, then contact the district. Be confident and prepared to talk to the district by writing down your concerns and questions. This will help you to be relaxed.

Your communication is important to your relationship with the professionals who are working with your child in school. Establishing and maintaining a positive relationship with your child’s IEP team is important and can be done by remaining assertive and considerate as you share your concerns, suggestions and appreciation.

**Do I want to pull my child out of a Special Education program because my child is unhappy in Special Education? If yes…**

1. Work with your IEP team to figure out what is causing your child to feel this way and brainstorm ways to address the concerns. Call your child’s school counselor to schedule a
meeting with them to discuss your questions and concerns.

2. Think about how much choice your child should have in the decision to exit Special Education. For example, does your child want out of Special Education because someone made fun of them or because they want to impress a girl/boy? OR do they really feel that they are bored and being limited in their Special Education classes?

**Do I want my child out of Special Education because I feel that they no longer needs this program?** *If yes*…

1. Gather evidence to support this (child’s reading and comprehension level; assessment data; grades; and personal observational notes).

2. If you do not have the data to support your opinion, then request in writing that the Special Education team assess (or test) your child to determine if your child is still eligible for Special Education Services, unless of course they were recently assessed for their Triennial IEP review.

**If I take my child out of Special Education, I do understand that**…

1. My child will not be protected under Special Education law if he or she gets in trouble and is disciplined by the school. Example: Sometimes bad behavior is directly related to a child’s disability and therefore needs to be considered when consequences are given to the child.

2. If my child starts to struggle again academically, physically, socially, behaviorally or emotionally, I would have to make a written request for assessment to determine if my child could participate again in a specialized program to receive services to support their needs. This would be treated as an initial evaluation just like the first time they were tested and qualified to receive services through Special Education. The timeline for assessments then goes into effect.

3. All services, accommodations (e.g. reading tests aloud to student; providing students with extra time to take tests or complete school projects if they work slower than their classmates) and
modifications (e.g. larger font; elimination of 1 of 4 answer options on a test to provide fewer answer options to have to choose from, etc.) will be STOPPED and no longer offered by your child’s teachers.

If after reading and asking yourself the questions listed above and you still decide to cancel your child’s services against the school’s recommendations to continue services for your child, you must submit a written request (example as seen below) to the district, you will receive a document from the district explaining the changes in your child’s school day and elimination of an IEP from there on out.

Please find an example template of the letter you should write to the district requesting services for your child to be canceled.
Dear (Name):

This letter is to tell you that I no longer give permission to continue my child in Special Education. I understand that my decision will completely stop all special education services available and provided to my child and that my child will have a possible change in their schedule. I do understand that services will not stop until you have provided me with a prior written notice about the end date of special education services.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: Your child’s name

Your child’s principal
Chapter 9

English Language Learners (ELLS)

What does it mean that my child is called an EL student?

EL is the abbreviation for English Learner.

Why is my child an English Language Learner?

When enrolling your child in an U.S. public school for the first time, you filled out paperwork that includes an HOME LANGUAGE SURVEY. When you indicated that your child speaks another language other than English, they were given the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) to determine their English language fluency (ability to speak quickly using correct English). Using this test, your child was tested in the areas of Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Based on their results, they were identified as an English Language Learner (ELL) and receive English Language Development (ELD) instruction through one of the following: an English Language Development Immersion Program; English Language Development instruction in an ELD Language Arts classroom; and/or ELD instruction in their General Education or Special Education classes.

CELDT

What does CELDT stand for? California English Language Development Test

What is the CELDT? A state test of English Proficiency (ability to speak, read and write in English easily and without difficulty).

Who has to take the CELDT? U.S. and California laws require any student whose primary home language is not English to take this test yearly from kindergarten through grade twelve in California public schools or until the student becomes proficient in the English language and is re-classified as proficient in the English Language. Students who are required to take the CELDT...
are classified as English Language Learners. All English Language Learners must take the CELDT, including English learners with disabilities. If an EL student with a disability needs special assistance, it must be documented in their IEP. The CELDT is not a timed test and therefore an accommodation of extra time given does not need to be noted in a student’s IEP.

*I thought my child was bilingual. Why are they being called an English Language Learner?*

If your child’s primary home language is not English, then they are classified as an English Language Learner or EL student because they have demonstrated by their CELDT scores that they need extra instruction to learn the skills in English required to succeed in the general education grade level curriculum. They might speak English using only basic vocabulary and their reading level in English is most likely much lower than their reading level in their primary language, if they can read at their grade level in their primary language.

**The CELDT helps schools classify students into 3 categories:**

1. **English Learners (ELs)** - Students who need to improve English skills so that they are able to successfully participate in the regular school program.
2. **Initial Fluent English Proficient (IFEP)** - Students who test fluent in English after they take the CELDT for the first time.
3. **Reclassified English Proficient (RFEP)** - Students initially identified as ELs, but later meet the requirements for English language proficiency.

* All other students whose primary language is English are classified as English only (EO).*

**The CELDT has three purposes:**

1. To identify English Language Learners and provide them with the academic support they need.
2. To determine the level of English language proficiency. There are 3 levels:

- **Emerging (Beginning/Early Intermediate)**
  - Limited English: simple words and phrases
  - Basic English skills in social and academic settings

- **Expanding (Intermediate)**
  - Able to speak English in full sentences without too much hesitation.
  - Able to learn, talk and even write about different academic and social topics.

- **Bridging (Early Advanced/Advanced)**
  - Have successfully learned the skills in English needed to complete their schoolwork. These skills include communicating about different academic subject matter in different ways with different people about a wide range of familiar and new topics.

3. To check their progress in learning to listen, speak, read and write in English each year.

**When will my child take the test?** Your child will take the test within 30 calendar days after they enroll at a California public school for the first time. From year to year, the testing takes place between 4-6 weeks into the school year. This yearly testing time may change with new, upcoming policies. To stay up to date on policy changes and to find detailed information on the CELDT, you can find information online at the following website:

[http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/el/resources.asp](http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/el/resources.asp). Or for further information through SMUSD, contact the English Learner Resource Center Department by calling 760-290-2442.

**How will I know what level my child tested?**

Parents will be provided with a copy of their child’s report showing their overall performance level (Emerging, Expanding and Bridging), a performance level and score for each level of the
test (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing), and a comprehension score (average reading score for Listening and Reading).

**Will my child always be classified as an English Language Learner?** No, not if they reclassify.

In the San Marcos Unified School District, English Language Learners are ready to reclassify when they meet the Bridging or Advanced level in at least 3 out of the 4 tested areas, scoring no lower than the Expanding or Intermediate level in any one of the four tested areas.

**What does it mean to reclassify?** Reclassification is the process through which ELLs are reclassified as Fluent English Proficient (RFEP). This happens when they have demonstrated academic English proficiency based on school district-established criteria. Not all school districts in California have the same re-classification requirements.

**What can parents do at home to help?**

- Send your child to school on time, well rested and well fed.
- Talk to your child about doing their very best on the CELDT. Share the results with them.
- Have your child speak to you in complete sentences in English or your home language.
- Have your child regularly summarize the events of any activity (such as their day at school) or something they read.

*Talk with your child regularly about how they are doing in school. Showing interest in what they are learning shows them that you value education and are interested in their academic success.*

- Have your child read to you or a sibling in English.
- Encourage your child to read 30 minutes a night from a library book of their choice.
- Take your child on educational trips
  - Examples: The Zoo or Wild Animal Park; Sea World; museums; hikes with trail signs they can read.
Chapter 10

Helping Your Adolescent through a Time of Physical, Emotional and Mental Changes

Middle school age children or adolescents between the ages of 10 through 14 go through many physical, emotional and mental changes. All of these changes can result in different behaviors and struggles (some good and some bad). Adolescents are becoming more aware of themselves as they watch their bodies change and grow. They are often unsure of themselves as they experience changes in hormones which affect their feelings and moods. Because of this, they need encouragement and assurance that they belong, that they are important and that they are loved so that they build the confidence to explore their developing interests. Some adolescents are excited to learn while others who struggle in school might find themselves negatively reacting to you and others because of the changes they are going through, perhaps without the proper support.

How young teens grow, mature and change can be influenced by things such as genes (inherited in the family), family practices and beliefs, friends, neighborhoods, culture, values and the general society in which they live.

All of these changes can allow an adolescent to feel self-conscious and very sensitive, especially when they are worrying about some of the following things:

- Possible deaths of family members (parents, grandparents, etc.)
- School or neighborhood violence
- Pressure to do drugs or drink
- Not having enough to eat
- Their parents’/guardians’ relationship (divorce)
Be aware: Your child might have a severe emotional problem if they are experiencing extreme or long-lasting “mood swings.” Talk to their school counselor or doctor if you suspect something more serious is going on.

Parents- Your middle aged children need you just as much as they did when they were younger, if not more! Provide them with extra love and attention during this time of change as their school responsibilities continue to increase. Their comfort and safety starts with you and building a good relationship with them will help you create and maintain this relationship.

Effective parents work to prevent undesired behavior from their children by…

- …showing them love by communicating with them.
- …spending time with them and asking them about their day.
- …listening and trying to understand their children’s’ point of view so they know the best way to support them.

Provide encouragement within a structured environment with limits set to help keep the child physically and emotionally safe. Limits should be clear and come with specific expectations. Parents are the #1 role models of their children. Try to behave and live the way you would expect your child to live. Believe in yourself and practice having a positive attitude with respect for others and high expectations for yourself. Your children will most likely follow your example.

In order to encourage your child within the limits you have set, it is important to really know your child including where they are at all times. When parents know where their children are at all times, adolescents are less likely to have bad experiences involving drugs, alcohol, smoking, sex and/or pregnancy, criminal behavior and any other violent encounters. In order to
successfully communicate with your child, parents must practice asking assertive questions and not accusing questions.

**Examples:**

**Assertive:** Please remember that you are to be home from school by 3pm. What friends do you enjoy walking home with after school?

**Accusing:** You better be home by 3pm from school. Or are you going to be too busy talking to those older high school boys I have seen in our apartment building that said hi to you the other day?

Everyone is different and all children are different. Getting to know your child is the best way to determine the best way to communicate with them, when to offer your advice or simply let them seek your advice, when to listen instead of lecture, how to respectfully disagree and how to determine good times and locations to allow for communication and bonding time together.

Remember, that you influence your child more than anyone else. Your encouragement, communication, and good examples are essential to giving your child the opportunity to develop into a healthy, emotionally stable, life-long learner and good citizen.
Chapter 11

Discipline at Home

My child’s school uses a positive approach to discipline. Would I be able to do the same at home??

YES! Actually, schools expect parents to be the sole disciplinarians of their children. Parents are responsible for teaching their children self-discipline, responsibility, cooperation, and problem solving skills built on mutual respect and cooperation using firmness with dignity and respect at home, just as teachers are responsible teaching their students the same at school. Some parents rely on their child to translate for them sometimes, but that does not mean their child is in charge. Parents you must remember that you are in charge!

What are some ways I can avoid problems with my child?

Before discussing positive reinforcement strategies, it is a good idea to learn ways to avoid problems altogether. Preventative Discipline helps avoid problems.

Here are some ways you can create a home environment that helps prevent many problems parents experience with adolescents today:

- **Create a loving home environment.** In addition to meeting your child’s basic needs (food, sleep, safety, shelter, and love), establish household rules that reinforce good behavior and mutual respect among all family members. Avoid “spoiling” your child by buying them whatever they want, letting them do whatever they want or letting them eat whatever they want.

- **Keep Rules Consistent.** Your child’s teachers are expected to explain their classroom rules to their students and model how they would expect their students to follow the rules. When parents explain their household rules and follow those rules themselves, their child
will be more likely to follow those rules, therefore preventing undesirable behaviors from their children. Although some rules might not be appropriate to explain to your child because of their age, children are much more likely to follow your rules when they understand the reason for the rules and when the rules are consistent. Be clear about your rules making sure you explain them carefully. A child should never be confused about the rules. Don’t forget to always explain why you are changing a rule if you find that a particular rule no longer is working.

Children will need reminders and prompts to follow rules as they learn them just like the reminders and prompts you expect their teachers to give them at school.

Some examples of household rules that help create good habits in real life:

- No interrupting someone while they are talking.
- Picking up toys after you are done playing. / Clean up dishes after eating.
- Always be on time.

- **Give your child opportunities for them to feel listened to and understood**, whether or not you agree with them. Acknowledge your child’s feelings and show understanding before offering advice or lecturing on what you think they should do.

- **Remember to provide positive reinforcement (or rewards) as soon as possible after you observe them do or say the desired behavior.** This will help motivate the child to continue to follow the rules.

- **Don’t just tell your children that you love and accept them, but show them through your actions and positive reinforcement.**

Some examples include:

1. Acknowledgement of their efforts and good behaviors through compliments or applause
“Awesome job!” “Great work!” “I am so proud of you!” Give them hugs.

2. Provide special freedoms or rights. Make sure to ask them what freedom and rights are important to them first.

- Talking on the phone with a friend or going online to talk to a friend on a school night. Playing video games on a school night or staying up late to watch a movie on a Saturday night.

3. Give them special attention or money. Make sure to ask them their preference of reward first.

- Set aside time with them to talk, play a game or do an activity you both enjoy.
- Or perhaps give them money to do something with their friends or go shopping with.

4. Make or buy them food or candy that you normally do not buy. Make sure to ask them what they would like before you go to the trouble of making something. This will show them that you are interested in what they like and that you care about them.

- Cook them their favorite dinner one night or bake their favorite treat.
- Take them to get ice cream after school.

Questions Parents Should Ask Themselves about Their Discipline

We cannot always prevent bad behavior from our children and therefore discipline does need to be put into place at home. All parents discipline their children different. Simply ask yourself the following questions about your discipline:

1. **Is it consistent?**

2. **Does the child understand the reason their behavior is being disciplined?**
3. **Is it fair?** Fair does not mean equal for everyone. Fair means giving a child what they need based on their needs. For example, a child might be so upset that they failed their test they studied so hard for and throw something in frustration. Instead of yelling at them and giving them a punishment, it is a good idea to determine why they did what they did and give them a chance to explain themselves before you discipline them so that you can discuss the appropriate way to act the next time they are that frustrated. Even though you might take away their privilege that evening for breaking a house rule, you might also want to give them a hug to let them know you understand they must be frustrated after putting in a lot of work only to fail.

**Discipline at Home = Behavior at School**

Often times, how a parent disciplines at home explains a child’s behavior in school. Make sure you do not discipline in anger. Discipline a child by restricting their activities or taking away some of their privileges. Abuse is never the right way to discipline a child because it does not allow for understanding and sets a bad example for your child. In reality, punishment does not work in the long run. Schools aim to teach students to become reflective thinkers and parents should do the same by working to help their child set goals and self-reflect through having conversations with them.

**What are some positive reinforcement discipline strategies I could practice at home?**

1. **Use a positive approach.** Say, “do this” more than “don’t do that.”

2. **Be clear about your rules** making sure you explain them carefully so that your child is never confused about the rules.

3. **Be reasonable and understanding.** When possible, be honest by explaining why things have to be the way they are and try to understand your child’s feeling about how things are.
4. **Remember, all children are different.** What works with one child may not work with another, especially for a child with special needs.

5. **Set an example for your children.** You are your child’s #1 role model.

6. **Set limits on your children’s behavior** that they understand and agree with and make it clear what the consequences are when they cross those limits and break the rules.

7. **Enforce the consequences when necessary immediately after a misdeed** is done to ensure that you discipline when you say you will. Consistency and follow through are key to helping your child understand and follow the rules.

8. **Trust your decisions and follow through with disciplining your child.** Consistency is key to helping your child learn and grow.

**Here is a strategy borrowed from Wayne RESA that can be used easily at home:**

**PBS Home Matrix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Getting Up in the Morning</th>
<th>Getting to School</th>
<th>Clean-up Time</th>
<th>Time to Relax</th>
<th>Homework Time</th>
<th>Mealtime</th>
<th>Getting Ready for Bed</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Help Out</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Own Your Behavior</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manners Count</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>E</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>EVERYDAY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here is an example provided on the website: [http://www.resa.net/curriculum/positivebehavior/](http://www.resa.net/curriculum/positivebehavior/)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help Out</th>
<th>Getting Up in the Morning</th>
<th>Getting to School</th>
<th>Clean-up Time</th>
<th>Time to Relax</th>
<th>Homework Time</th>
<th>Meal-time</th>
<th>Getting Ready for Bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>H</strong></td>
<td>Make bed</td>
<td>Have your backpack, lunch, notes, keys</td>
<td>Do chores</td>
<td>Clean up after self, Play quietly</td>
<td>Put your things in your backpack when finished</td>
<td>Set the table, Put dishes away</td>
<td>Brush teeth, Put dirty clothes away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Out</td>
<td>Put clothes in hamper</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Own Your Behavior</th>
<th>Getting Up in the Morning</th>
<th>Getting to School</th>
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<th>Homework Time</th>
<th>Meal-time</th>
<th>Getting Ready for Bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>O</strong></td>
<td>Get up on time</td>
<td>Be ready to leave on time</td>
<td>Clean up after self</td>
<td>Ask before you borrow</td>
<td>Complete your homework on time</td>
<td>Use kind words and “I” instead of “you”, Apologize for mistakes</td>
<td>Get to bed on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Your Behavior</td>
<td>Get cleaned up and dressed on time</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manners Count</th>
<th>Getting Up in the Morning</th>
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<th>Meal-time</th>
<th>Getting Ready for Bed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>Try a morning SMILE”</td>
<td>“Thank you for the ride.”</td>
<td>“Thank you for the ride.”</td>
<td>Ask politely for help</td>
<td>Ask for help respectfully</td>
<td>Please and thank you</td>
<td>End the day with nice words &amp; positive thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manners Count</td>
<td>Thank parents for their help</td>
<td>“Have a nice day.”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| EVERYDAY      |                          |                   |               |              |              |          |                      |
Parents/Guardians- In order to effectively and meaningfully support your child living with a disability both inside and outside of school, you must be healthy and alert.

Think about it this way:

When people fly on an airplane, the flight attendants review safety procedures in the event of an accident. Part of the safety procedures involve putting on an oxygen mask. Interestingly, they always say to put your oxygen mask on first before helping your child. The same applies in day to day life. If you are not well rested and physically and emotionally healthy, it will very difficult to make sure that your child’s needs are being met.

If you pass out because you tried to help your child get their mask on first, then you and your child do not get help. You have a better chance of saving your child when you are able to function properly. The same applies with supporting your child academically. It is important to take care of yourself.

Parents of a child with special needs have additional challenges and responsibilities that some parents of children without disabilities do not have. When you face important decisions or have to deal with challenging issues, it is very important that you are physically and mentally ready to make decisions and work to support your child.
**Caring for Your Child by Caring for Yourself**

This chart provides ways to recognize and take care of your own needs so that you are fully able to understand and practice ways that you to support your child so that their needs are being met.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.) Recognize your own needs.</th>
<th>2.) Take Care of your own needs.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questions you might ask yourself include:</td>
<td>- Find ways to get plenty of sleep. Although difficult to do when working and raising a family, lack of sleep will affect your memory, thinking, emotions and physical health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Exercise (helps reduce stress)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Enjoyable activities just for you: walking with a friend or watching a movie by yourself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Eat healthy foods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Find people who you can share common thoughts and feelings to help you decide what is really important.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.) Now that you are alert, healthy and happy, you need to make sure that you understand ways in which you can support your child and their needs.</th>
<th>4.) Make sure your child’s needs are taken care of.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Understand your child’s special needs.</td>
<td>- Make sure your child gets enough <strong>sleep</strong> each night (7-9 hours). This helps them stay active, alert in class and able to control their hunger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This guidebook is one way!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• Attend parent training services in your local school district or SELPA.

• Volunteer at your child’s school.

• Enroll your child in an intervention program or after school program (Example: the Boys and Girls Club).

• Ask your child’s school questions about their expectations for students.

• Hold high expectations for your child. (keeping in mind that all students can learn, even those with a disability).

• Provide healthy eating options for your child. They should eat a meal or snack every 4 to 5 hours. Soda, caffeinated or sweetened drinks, cookies, chips and candy should not be part of you or your child’s daily diet but are OK from time to time. Instead, make sure they are drinking enough water and eating enough fruits, vegetables and proteins every day.

• Provide them with structured time to work on homework before helping with family responsibilities.

• Make sure that they get 60 minutes a day of outside play time.

• Limit their time watching television, playing video games and/or socializing on the computer to 1 hour or less a day.

• Engage in board or card games with them at home.

• Have them read to you.

Self-care is not always a parent’s main priority. Their kids are! However, when you are not taking care of yourself, you are not doing the best job that you can do to take care of your child.
(children). You might think you are because you are providing them with everything they need (shelter, food, love, etc.) but if your attitude and mood suffers because you are tired and not eating enough healthy food, these can affect a child’s attitude and mood as well which could interfere with their learning.

Your habits will become or influence your children’s habits. They look up to you! Show them you care about yourself and they will care about themselves and take more pride in maintaining healthy habits.

When you take care of yourself, you are less likely to get sick and need to see the doctor. If your child is taken care of, they will be less likely to get sick.

On the following two pages, you will find some updated resources from USDA and the Harvard Medical Center that might help you plan and monitor yours and your families’ healthy habits. These resources include: The USDA has introduced the "MyPlate" concept replacing the older My Pyramid. The reason for the plate, versus a pyramid, is to provide a visual on serving sizes for each of the food groups. Please find these tables on the next page.
The USDA has introduced the "MyPlate" concept replacing the older My Pyramid. The reason for the plate, versus a pyramid, is to provide a visual on serving sizes for each of the food groups.
Other Ways You Can Help Keep Your Children Healthy while Promoting Learning

In addition to getting plenty of sleep, maintaining a healthy diet and exercising regularly, here are some other ways you can help your children stay healthy:

Limit Television/Computer/Video Game Time

Today many children spend more time in front of a screen whether it be on a cell phone, computer or television, than they do reading, talking with family and friends, or playing outside. It's affecting their health. Studies have shown that too much time watching TV, playing video games or exploring inappropriate websites can be connected with the following:

- violent behavior
- slow progress in school/low grades
- low reading scores
- sleep problems
- being overweight
- eating too much junk food
- bad habits later in life (like tobacco and alcohol abuse)

Spending time on a computer or watching television can be educational if used for that purpose. Health experts recommend limiting screen time to less than 2 hours a day for teens, less than 1 hour a day for children ages 3 through 12, and no screen time for children under 3. Help your kids find other things to do such as playing outside with friends, playing a board game with you or reading a book of their interest.

Limit your child’s time in front of a screen by doing the following:

- Turn off the TV during meals so that you and your family can talk.
• Keep computers, TVs, and video games out of kids' bedrooms, and keep cell phones and iPods out of the bedroom at night.

• If you already allow your child a certain amount of time every day watching TV, going on the computer, and/or playing video games, then don't use those as a reward.

• Choose one day a week where television and video games are off limits. Remember, your child has access to computers at school.

• Give your child opportunities to engage in alternative activities such as reading a book from your local library, writing a story or writing in a diary/journal, drawing (e.g. side-walk chalk; paint; etc.) and outside activities (e.g. riding a bike or playing soccer).

Your Role as a Parent of an Adolescent in Middle School

As we grow older the world around us is changing rapidly. Our children are not growing up like we grew up. Middle school age children between the ages of 10 and 14 are undergoing many physical, emotional and mental changes. All of these changes can result in different behaviors and struggles (some good and some bad). Adolescents at this age might be funny, curious, imaginative and eager to learn while others who are already at risk for school failure might find themselves negatively reacting to you and others because of the physical, emotional and mental changes they are going through.

How young teens develop can be influenced by things such as genes (inherited in the family), families, friends, neighborhoods, culture, values and the general society in which they live.

Some teens may worry a lot about things like:

• Their grades

• How they look as their bodies begin to change and develop

• Popularity
• Possible deaths of family members (parents, grandparents, etc.)
• School or neighborhood violence
• Pressure to do drugs or drink
• Not having enough to eat
• Their parent’s relationship (divorce)

Teens can be self-conscious and very sensitive because of the dramatic physical and emotional changes they are going through.

**Be aware:** Your child might have a severe emotional problem if they are experiencing excessive or long-lasting “mood swings.” Talk to their school counselor or doctor if you suspect something more serious is going on.

**Parents:** Your middle aged children need you just as much as they did when they were younger…if not more! Provide them with love and attention during this time of change and increasing responsibilities. Their comfort and safety starts with you and building a good relationship with them will help you create and maintain this relationship.

**Effective parents:**

Show love by communicating with their children, spending time with them and showing a genuine interest in them. Show them the same consideration and respect that you expect to be given by taking the time to listen and understand them so that you know the best way to approach situations that may cause undesired behaviors or upset.

With college on the horizon, middle school children need encouragement to explore their interests and build confidence. This encouragement does need to be within a structured environment with limits set to help keep the child physically and emotionally safe. Limits should
be clear and come with specific expectations just like your child’s teachers practice doing when giving new directions each day in the classroom.

Parents are the #1 role models of their children. Try to behave and live the way you would expect your child to live. Believe in yourself and practice having a positive attitude with respect for others and high expectations for yourself. Your children will most likely follow your example.

When parents know where their children are at all times, adolescents are less likely to have bad experiences involving drugs, alcohol, smoking, sex and/or pregnancy, criminal behavior and any other violent encounters. In order to successfully communicate with your child, parents must ask assertive questions and not questions that are accusing.

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