

New Jersey Department of Education



Parent Engagement in the Special Education Process

Winter Learning Institute

March 14, 2025

Office of Special Education (OSE)



Welcome and Agenda



- **Learning Objectives**
- **Collaborating and Engaging with Families**
- **Engaging Families in the IEP Process**
- **Overview of Facilitated IEP Meetings, Mediation and Due Process**
- **Resources**



Learning Objectives



By the end of the session, participants will:

Understand the importance of fostering partnerships between families and educators to build trust, enhance collaboration, and support student success.

Gain an understanding of how to use collaboration skills to support families of students with disabilities.

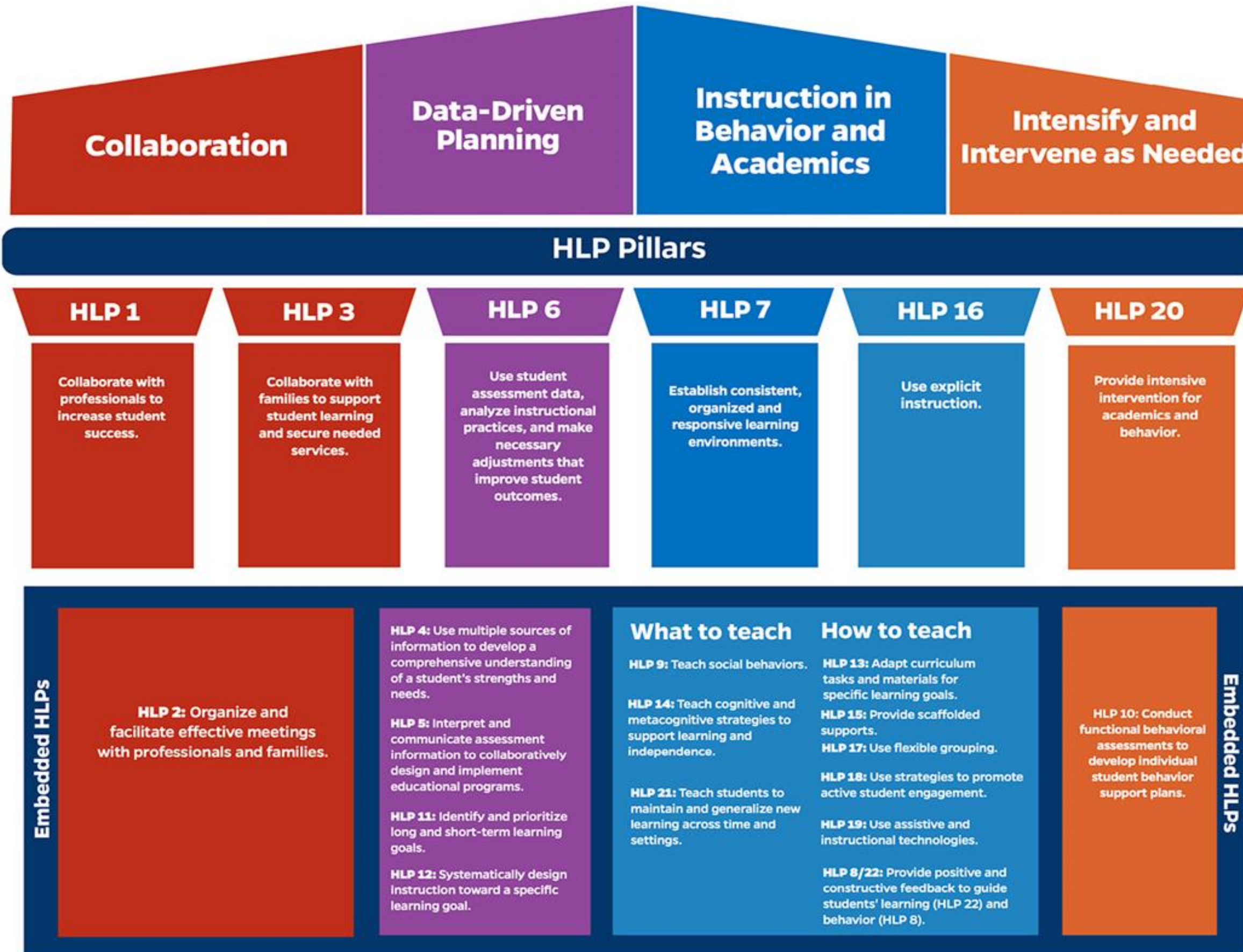
Learn skills that help teach educators and families about the IEP process and methods to resolve conflicts.

Identify strategies and tools educators and families can use to effectively collaborate.



High-Leverage Practices (HLP)



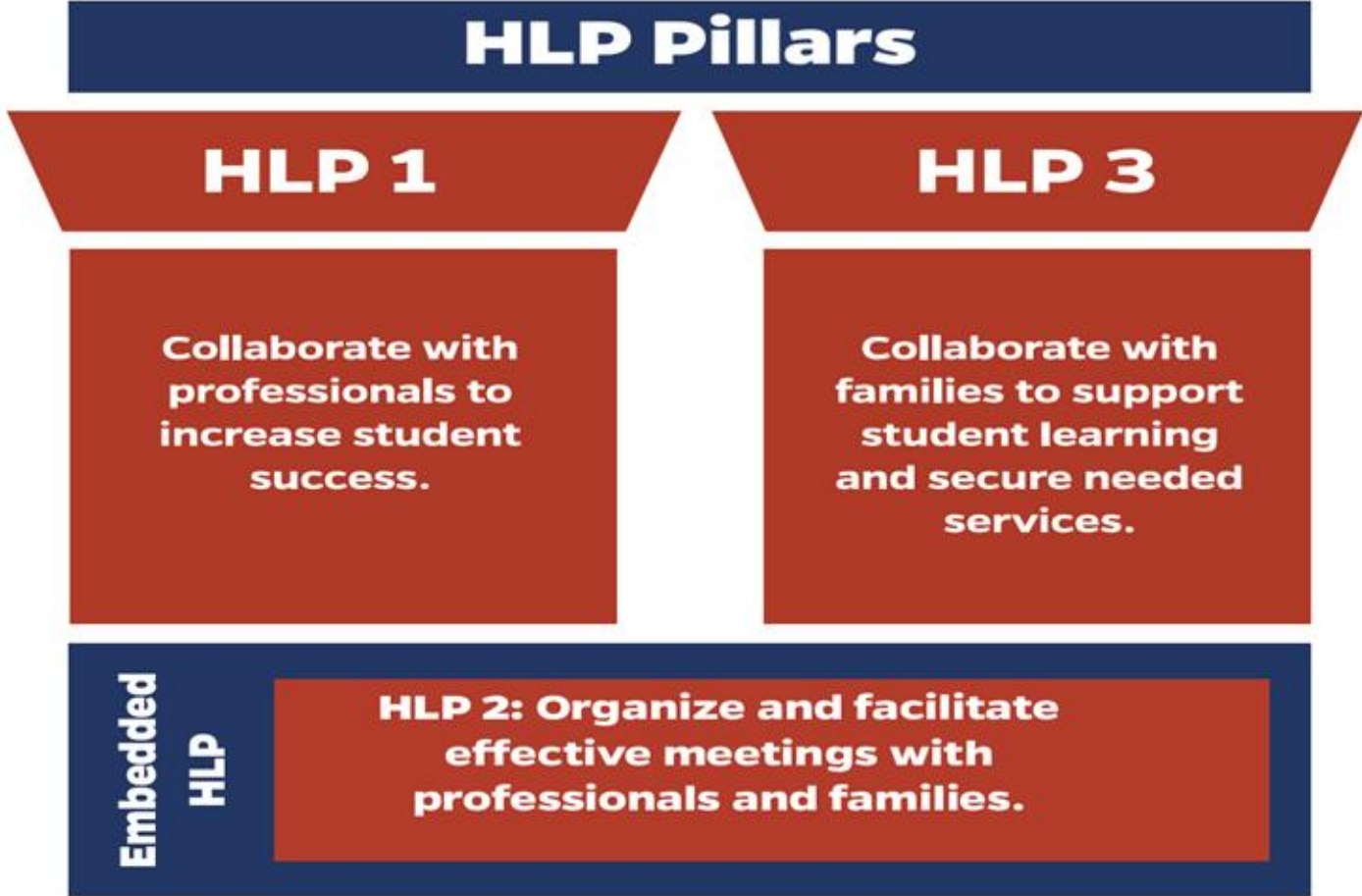


Collaboration: HLP 1 & HLP 3



DOMAIN ONE: COLLABORATION

Bonnie Billingsley, Virginia Tech
Grace Francis, George Mason University
Margaret P. Weiss, George Mason University
Jocelyn Washburn, University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning
Terese C. Aceves, Loyola Marymount University
Laurie VanderPloeg, Council for Exceptional Children



Collaborating with Families Throughout the IEP Process



IDEA & Families



“

Federal requirements provide a baseline for family-educator collaboration, including annual conferences and IEP meetings. These mandates establish the importance of including family expertise and perspectives in decision-making for those responsible for a student’s learning and wellbeing. In particular, parental expertise provides IEP teams with a comprehensive understanding of students’ needs, strengths, intersectional backgrounds, and preferences to effectively plan and implement instruction and services.

”

Council for Exceptional Children & CEEDAR Center



Research: Educator and Family Collaboration



Barriers to Educator-Family Collaboration:

Educators report limited knowledge about collaborating with families (Kyzar et al., 2019).

Educators have low expectations for family involvement and negative perspectives of family “over” and “under” involvement.

Parents find little value in school-centric forms of family involvement such as volunteering at school (Francis et al., 2019).

Benefits for Students with Disabilities and Their Families:

Students demonstrate significant academic and behavioral improvements (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2024).

Students experience greater success in achieving goals, developing self-determination, and securing positive post-school outcomes such as employment (Gross et al., 2021).

Families value shared decision-making that enhances student, family, and professional outcomes (Mueller & Vick, 2019).



Why This Matters



- Schools with positive parent engagement practices were significantly **more likely to see improvement in student attendance and grade-level reading proficiency.**
- Elementary schools with positive parent-school ties were **10 times more likely** to improve in mathematics achievement and **4 times more likely** to improve in reading achievement.

(Ishimaru, 2017)



From Referral to IEP



Navigating the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process

Pre-Referral

During the pre-referral phase, parents work together with teachers and staff to try and resolve problems informally within the classroom.



Referral

If informal measures are not solving the problem, you can request an evaluation for special services. Referrals can be made by parents, teachers, or other staff.

Informed Consent

After receiving a referral, the school district has 15 days to provide you with a plan for evaluating your child's needs. After reviewing it, you have 15 days to sign the consent before testing can begin.

Send a Letter

15 Days

Provide Consent

IEP Meeting

After the evaluation is done, you will meet with involved school personnel to review results and discuss your child's needs. If your child qualifies, you will discuss what services your child will receive and establish goals for the next year.

Evaluation

Qualified school district personnel will assess your child to determine whether he/she needs special education services. Evaluations may be conducted by the school psychologist, speech/language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, and others as needed.

Attend IEP Meeting

30 Days

Be Evaluated

60 Days

Revisions

The IEP is reviewed annually or whenever you request a review meeting. Every 3 years, your child will be re-assessed to make sure the services are the best fit for your needs.

NOTE: Timelines are based on standards for families in California. Your state may vary.

Implement Plan

Attend Annual Review Meetings

Implementation

Once you have signed the IEP, it will be implemented as soon as possible. If you disagree with the plan, you can request mediation to resolve the dispute.

Prepared by Nicole Connolly, Ph.D.
<http://drnicoleconnolly.com>



School Success!



Family Engagement: IEP Process



Referral

- Provide Clear Communication
- Respect Cultural Contexts
- Involve Families Early

Evaluation

- Explain the Process
- Request Input
- Open Dialogue

Eligibility Determination

- Simplify Results
- Collaborative Decision Making
- Emotional Support



Family Engagement: IEP Process



IEP Development

- Focus on Partnership
- Individualized Accommodations
- Allow Time to Review
- Visualize Progress

Implementation

- Regular Communication
- Invite Feedback
- Create Support Networks

Review

- Celebrate Achievements
- Be Solution-Focused
- Plan for Future



Foundations for Engagement



Family-School Collaboration



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“Families constitute the core of society; families are our students’ first and most impactful educators. Learning from and partnering with students’ families enhances teaching efficacy.”

Educators must intentionally infuse family-professional collaboration into professional practices (e.g., assessment, social/emotional behavior development, and instruction).
(Aceves & Kennedy, 2024)

”

[Family-School Collaboration Tool](#)





Family-School Collaboration



The sharing of varied expertise and perspectives among professionals and families of children with disabilities is necessary to:

1 Understand each student's academic and social needs.

2 Cultivate positive, mutually beneficial relationships.

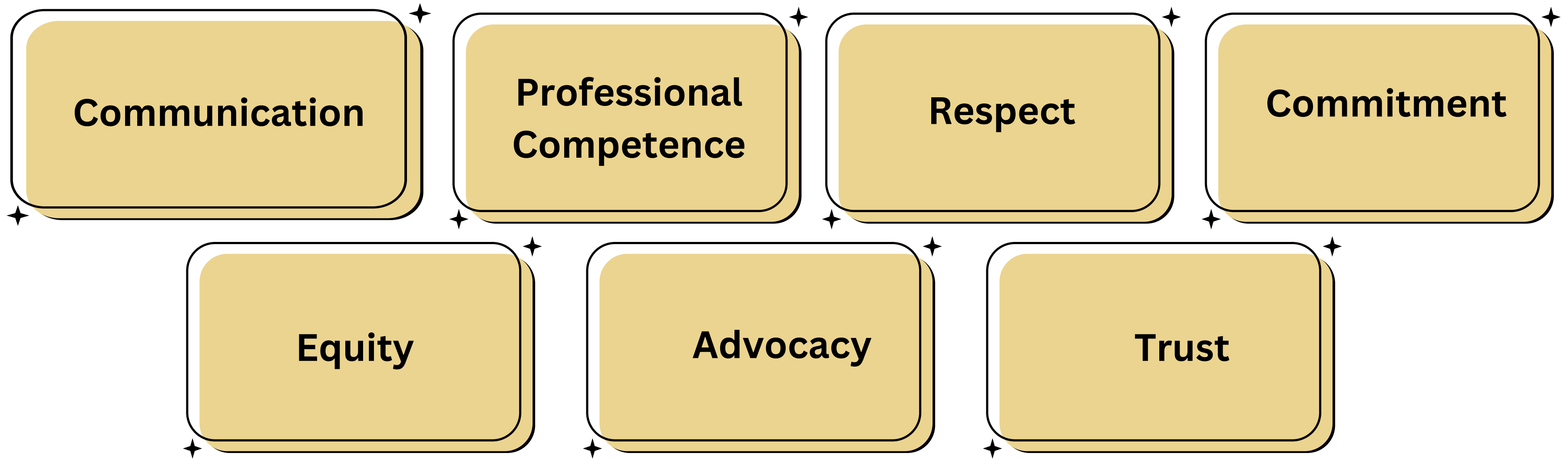
3 Share resources.

4 Implement student Individualized Education Programs.

5 Monitor student progress and adjust instruction.

6 Jointly identify and implement culturally inclusive pedagogies and practices (CIPP).

The Seven Principles of Family- School Partnerships



Key Considerations (1 of 2)



Trust

Do you honor families' decisions or ideas even when you do not agree with them?

Communication

Do you offer families opportunities to share their stories, dreams and priorities and do you actively listen as they share this information?

Respect

Do you honor cultural diversity by listening empathetically to the family's perspectives and by asking members what information or support you could provide that they might find helpful?

Advocacy

- Do you let families know that they may have others present at their child's meetings?
- Do you encourage the family to discuss their concerns and ask them to describe a school process that they found satisfactory or challenging?

Key Considerations (2 of 2)



Professional Competence

- Do you set high expectations and ask the family what information would be helpful for them?
- Do you offer to make their goals for their child come true?
- Do you have knowledge of and access to resources for parents?

Equality

- Do you listen empathetically to the family's perspectives?
- Do you reflect on your words to consider if your ideas represent a power-over or power-share approach?

Commitment

- Are you sensitive to the emotional needs of the family?
- Do you highlight ways the family has made a difference in the child's educational progress?



Navigating the IEP Process Together



- Partnering with families throughout the IEP process is key to student success. Families bring invaluable insights into their child’s strength and needs, making them essential partners in the decision making.
- Meaningful collaboration builds trust, ensures the IEP is tailored to the child, and leads to better outcomes for the students.



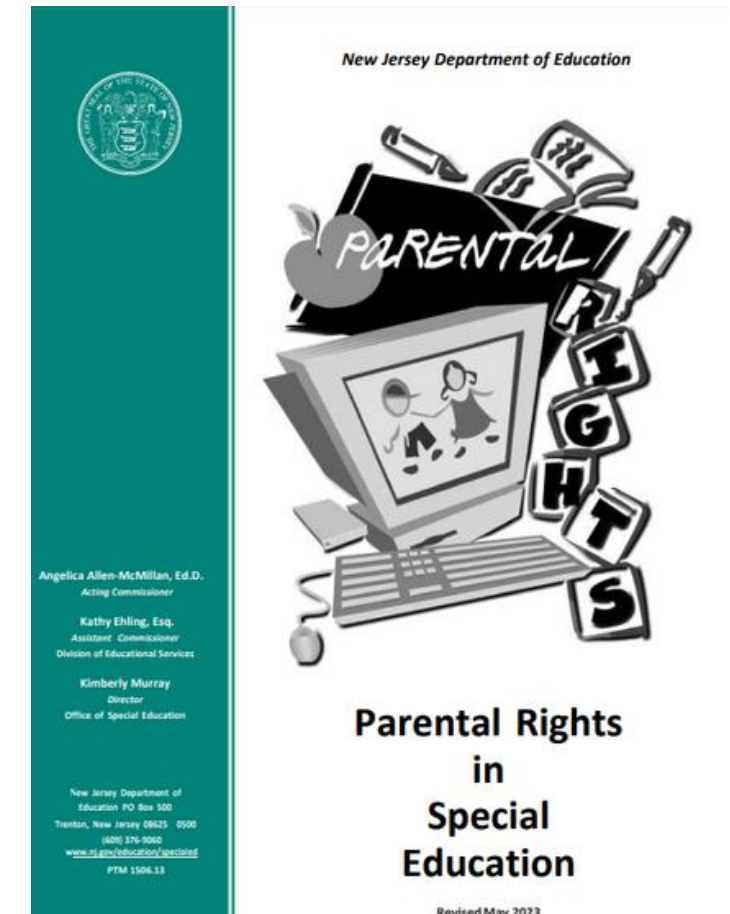
General Strategies During the IEP Process



Parental Rights in Special Education



- Explaining procedural safeguards to parents and guardians fosters trust, transparency, and mutual understanding between families and schools.
- Helping parents understand their rights and the procedural steps empowers them to actively participate in their child's education, advocate effectively, and make informed decisions.
- Clear, accessible explanations of procedural safeguards demonstrate a commitment to family engagement, ensuring parents feel respected, heard, and confident in navigating the special education system.



[State of New Jersey Department of Education Parental Rights in Special Education \(PRISE\)](#)



Inclusive IEP Meetings



Activity: Ensuring Student Success



How does your district ensure that families are consistently informed about and engaged in the special education process?



Inclusive IEP Meetings (1 of 4)



Before the Meeting:

- Collaboration to determine dates and times that work best for the whole team, including parents/guardians shows respect for everyone's time.
- Invitations, reports, and or requests should be sent in the parent's/guardian language. Be sure to ask if an interpreter is needed for meetings.
- Whenever possible, sharing data, including assessments, progress reports, and other relevant data, in advance of a meeting to ensure parents/guardians' have time to review the information.



Inclusive IEP Meetings (2 of 4)



During the Meeting:

- Set a collaborative tone by starting with introductions and an overview of the meetings purpose.
- Ask the family to speak to their child's strengths and needs as they know them. This allows the parent to be heard.
- Facilitate clear communication by avoiding jargon; explain terms and processes clearly.
- Stay student focused. Including student strengths shows that the team knows their child.



Inclusive IEP Meetings (3 of 4)



During the Meeting:

- Families may have a lack of understanding of the components of the IEP. Explain each part of the IEP. Checking for their understanding and asking if they have questions allows parents to participate fully in the process.
- Problem solve as a team. Address differences of opinions respectfully by focusing on potential solutions.
- Provide a draft copy of the IEP. Allow time to process, by not rushing signatures.





After the Meeting:

- Follow up promptly. Send a finalized copy to the family within the required timeframe.
- Ensure implementation of the IEP. Share the finalized IEP with the relevant staff, ensuring they understand their roles.
- Maintain communication. Be proactive in addressing any concerns or necessary adjustments.



Dispute Resolution Options





Resolving Disputes



Always try to resolve issues by working collaboratively

- Cultivate an environment focused on respect, transparency, and open communication with all IEP team members.
- Resolving conflicts at a local level is essential because it promotes collaboration, preserves relationships, and ensures timely solutions that directly benefit the student.
- When families and schools address disagreements close to the source, they foster open communication and build trust, which are critical for creating a positive and productive educational environment. Local-level resolution often allows for tailored solutions that reflect the unique needs of the child and the context of the school community, avoiding the delays and adversarial nature that can come with more formal dispute resolution methods.
- Try meeting to resolve any issues or concerns.

Utilize local dispute resolution practices or a facilitated IEP Meeting



Facilitated IEPs



Voluntary process where both parties agree to use a neutral third party to assist in developing a mutually acceptable IEP.



Free service provided by the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Special Education.



Keeps the focus of the meeting on a productive student-centered IEP process.



Meetings normally last three hours.



[Request for Facilitated IEP Form](#)

New Jersey Department of Education,
Office of Special Education
FACILITATED IEP REQUEST FORM

IEP Facilitation is a free and voluntary service that the New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Special Education (OSE) offers to individualized education program (IEP) teams to promote effective communication and assist the team in developing a mutually agreed upon IEP.

Either parents or the school district can request IEP Facilitation. As the process is voluntary, ***both parties must agree*** in order for facilitation to occur.

The OSE attempts to accommodate all requests for IEP Facilitation. However, certain circumstances can prevent the assignment of a facilitator. These include:

- Both parties do not agree to facilitation;
- The request is not received with sufficient time to assign a facilitator (e.g. district must hold the IEP meeting by a certain date to meet timeline regulation); and/or
- Demand for IEP Facilitation exceeds the number of available facilitators.

The parent or district can rescind the request for the IEP Facilitation. As a courtesy to the other party and the IEP Facilitator, the OSE should be notified as soon as possible.

Date of request: _____ Requesting party: parent/guardian district adult student
Grade: preschool elementary middle high Student's ***first*** name (optional): _____
Primary focus/concern: placement related services evaluations academic supports transition
 goals/objectives other: _____

Parent/Guardian contact information: _____
Name _____
Phone (best) _____



Facilitated IEPs



Both parties
agree to
participate



Establish
ground rules



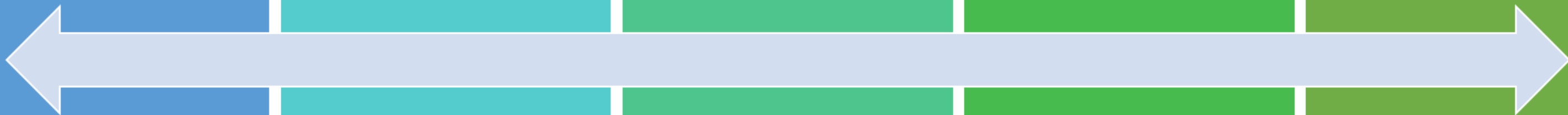
Collaborative
and solutions-
focused
meeting



Focus on
listening to
understand



Develop a
mutually
agreeable IEP



What is Mediation?



Mediation is a way to discuss and resolve disagreements between a parent or guardian and the LEA with the help of a trained, impartial third party known as a mediator.



Benefits of Mediation



Cost Effective



Individualized Agreements



Preserve Relationships



Timely Results



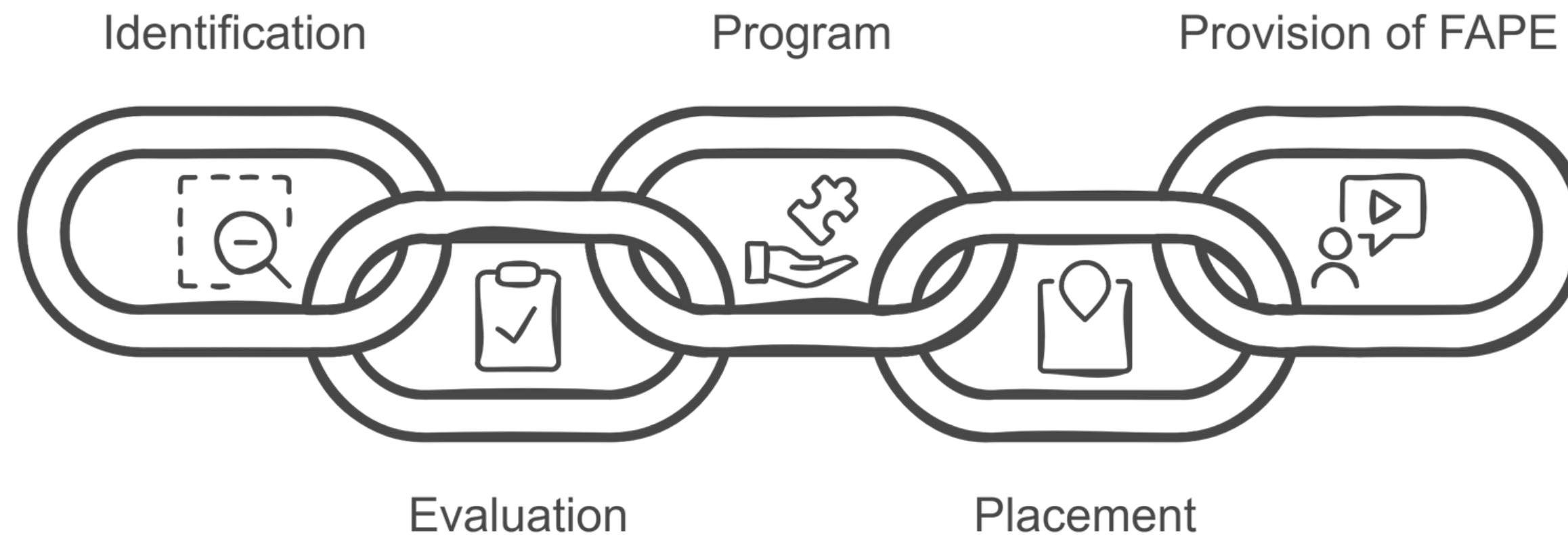
Win- Win Situation

What is Due Process?



Due process is a legal process in which the resolution of a disagreement is decided by an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) from the Office of Administrative Law (OAL).

Due Process addresses disagreements between parents/guardians, adult students and Local Education Agencies (LEAs) regarding:



Due Process Overview



A due process hearing can be requested for issues such as:

- A child's identification, evaluation, or education
- Whether the child is receiving a free appropriate public education (FAPE)
- The nature of the child's program or services



Resolution Session

- The district must conduct a resolution session with the parents and the relevant member(s) of the IEP team who have specific knowledge of the facts identified in the request.
- The resolution session must include a representative of the district who has authority to make decisions on behalf of the district.
- The school district may not include its attorney unless the parent is accompanied by an attorney.



Resources and Reflection



Activity: Share your Reflections



- What are the common experiences of families as they navigate special education processes?
- What are the obstacles to effective and productive collaboration?
- What are ways that we can collaborate with families in the education of their child with a disability?



Family Rights & Engagement Website



<https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/parents/>





What else would you like to know?

- Information
- Resources
- Trainings



Feedback



- The Learning Resource Center Network is a free one-stop shop that provides quality instructional materials, technical assistance, professional learning opportunities, and consultation on policies and best practices in special education to families and educators of students with disabilities. All services are offered at no cost to members.



Learning Resource Center Network



Educators, leaders and families of Students with Disabilities have access to:

Support	Services	Professional Development
<p>Content Area Specialists and Educational Support Personnel</p> <p>Engagement in organic communities of practice with other educators and families who have a vested interest in special education</p> <p>Pre-service teacher support</p>	<p>Production Services: Maker-space</p> <p>Resource Library with multi-level Instructional materials as well as family and community resources</p> <p>Consultation Services- Technical Assistance and Workshops</p>	<p>Ongoing professional development opportunities for educators and families at each LRC locations with in-person, hybrid, and online options</p> <p>New Teacher Academy</p> <p>Access to archived training and support resources</p>





LRC Locations and Contact Information



LRC North

7 Glenwood Avenue, Suite 201

East Orange, NJ 07017

(973) 414-4491

Contact: Renee.Mincey@doe.nj.gov

- **LRC North Satellite**

- (@ William Paterson University)

- 1600 Valley Road, Suite G001-G016

- Wayne, NJ 07470

- Contact: MaryEllen.Simpson@doe.nj.gov

- **LRC Central**

- 200 River View Plaza, 1st Floor

- Trenton, NJ 08611

- (609) 376-3955

- Contact: Aysha.Ahmad@doe.nj.gov

LRC South

(@ Rowan University)

James Hall, Room 1140

201 Mullica Hill Road,

Glassboro, NJ 08028

Contact: bomgardner@rowan.edu



Follow our LRC Network on Social Media



• @LRC_network

The screenshot shows the LinkedIn profile for 'lrc_network'. The profile picture is the NJDOE Office of Special Education logo. The bio reads: 'Learning Resource Center Network (NJDOE) Review Upcoming Events and Join Today! linktr.ee/lrc_network'. Below the bio are four icons: 'events', 'releases', 'projects', and 'New'. The post grid shows several posts, including 'NEW RELEASE Office of Special Education' with a 'Significant Disproportionality' report, 'Congratulations New Jersey!' with a map of NJ, 'PARENT SURVEY 2024 FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES', and 'Person-Centered Approaches in Schools and Transition (PCAST)'.





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WLI Evaluation Form



Special Education

OSE Home Policy and Procedures Data and Monitoring Parental Rights and Engagement Specialized Programs, Partnerships and Projects Engagement, Professional Development and Technical Assistance

Office of Special Education

**REGISTER BELOW TO
"REACH THE EDGES"
IN EDUCATION**

**WINTER
LEARNING INSTITUTE**

MARCH 10, 2025
THROUGH
MARCH 14, 2025

Home / Special Education

What is the Winter Learning Institute?

The Office of Special Education is excited to announce the 2nd Annual Winter Learning Institute 2025 (WLI 2025)! With this year's theme, "Reaching the Edges," the OSE will focus on strategies and initiatives that ensure equitable outcomes for all students. By improving policies, practices, and procedures, we will empower educators, families, and interested parties to better serve every learner.

Over ten (10) virtual sessions will be offered from March 10th through March 14th. Each day of the WLI 2025 is centered around a specific thematic strand. The themes for each day are as follows:

- **Monday:** Strategies and Supports
- **Tuesday:** Least Restrictive Environment
- **Wednesday:** Attendance and Discipline
- **Thursday:** Quality Improvement
- **Friday:** Family Engagement

To register, review the offerings below. Click on the link provided for each of the sessions you wish to attend. Submit your interest by filling out the webinar registration form. Reminders and resources will be sent out 24-48 hours in advance of the session.

Workshop Evaluation Form

Your feedback is important to us. Please complete the [Workshop Evaluation Form](#), following your session.

You access the evaluation by scanning the QR Code or by visiting the website at:

www.nj.gov/education/specialed/winterinstitute.shtml.

[2025 Winter Learning Institute Evaluation Form](#)



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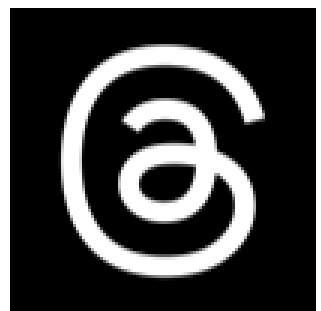
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Thank you!



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