

HLP 3: Collaborate with Families to Support Student Learning and Secure Needed Services



High-Leverage Practices for Students with Disabilities

The relationship between special educators and family members of students with disabilities is a sacred trust and needs to be carefully nourished and protected. Schools have much to learn about students from family members who know them best. It is therefore critical that the lines of communication between home and school always remain open, positive, and respectful. Both IDEA and ESSA note the importance of collaborating with families. The effective special educator who works well with families to learn all they can about the student will be in a strong position to run effective meetings (HLP 2), and work with their colleagues to implement an effective IEP (HLP 1). Collaboration with families will also inform the development of long- and short-term goals (HLP 11), and other needed supports and practices noted within the social/behavioral and instruction HLP domains.

This resource is intended to support school leaders looking to embed the HLPs in professional development, implementation, teacher observation and feedback efforts at their school site.

The major source for content within this resource is the chapter by Mayumi Hagiwara and Karrie A. Shogren in *High-Leverage Practices in the Inclusive Classroom*; the book *High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: The Final Report of the HLP Writing Team*, and content on www.highleveragepractices.org.

● Teachers Who Effectively Collaborate with Families

Promote Positive Interactions Between Educators & Families

- Communicate with families openly and honestly in a way that is comfortable for both parties.
- Demonstrate a high level of knowledge in the area they are working in, continue to learn and grow as professionals, and communicate high expectations for students and families.
- Treat families with dignity, honor cultural diversity, and affirm strengths.
- Are available, consistent, and go above and beyond minimum expectations.
- Recognize the strengths of every member of the team, share power with families, and focus on working together with families.
- Are reliable and act in the best interest of the student, sharing their vision and actions with families.

Use Effective Practices for Communicating with Families

- Communicate in a language and format accessible to the family.
- Use face-to-face interactions in planned, formal, and informal meetings (e.g., open house, community/school events, IEP meetings) to communicate with families.
- Use written and digital communication to share formal and informal information about school activities, parent and student rights and responsibilities, and student educational progress.
- Make phone calls to families as needed to build on students' strengths and discuss supports or resources.
- Share information and/or resources with families via course management systems, school websites, and classroom webpages/ blogs.

● Tips for School Leaders to Support Teachers ●

- Evaluate teachers' skill and comfort with respect to working with families from various cultural backgrounds.
- Provide instruction around cultural sensitivity and equip educators with specific practices to use in this space.
- Provide feedback on their performance, and corresponding pointers or professional development opportunities on skills/areas to improve.
- Provide opportunities for those who may feel uncomfortable to observe effective models of interactions with culturally and linguistically diverse families.
- Provide any necessary training, resources, and other supports for using school websites, course management systems, or other school-wide communication platforms.

● Questions to Prompt Discussion, Self-Reflection, and Observer Feedback ●

- What are strategies you can use to ensure families feel respected and valued by the school team?
- Does your school have a specific strategy or set of tools that are used to guide interactions with family members from backgrounds different from the majority culture?
- How does HLP 1-3 connect to the IEP and IEP process?
- Why is it important to communicate with families for a variety of purposes, and not just for formal reasons?

References & Additional Resources

Online Resources

[High-Leverage Practices in Georgia Webinar Series | CEEDAR](#)

This series is a 7-part webinar that creates awareness of High-Leverage Practices and how these practices align within Georgia's Tiered System of Support for Students. This series provides information and resources that are applicable to stakeholders in various settings. Webinar 1 covers Collaboration, Assessment, and Social/Emotional/Behavioral HLPs.

[High-Leverage Practices: A Professional Development Guide for School Leaders](#)

A downloadable online guide providing school leaders, including administrators, principals, mentors and coaches, with practical tools for engaging staff members in learning about how high-leverage practices can enhance student learning in the school and district.

Journal Articles

- Currie-Rubin, R., & Smith, S. J. (2014). Understanding the roles of families in virtual learning. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 46(5), 117–126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059914530101>
- Curtiss, S. L., Pearson, J. N., Akamoglu, Y., Fisher, K. W., Snodgrass, M. R., Meyer, L. E., Meadan, H., & Halle, J. W. (2015). Bringing instructional strategies home: Reaching families online. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 48(3), 159–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059915605816>
- Edwards, C. C., & Da Fonte, A. (2012). The 5-point plan: Fostering successful partnerships with families of students with disabilities. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 44(3), 6–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991204400301>
- Francis, G. L., Haines, S. J., & Nagro, S. A. (2017). Developing relationships with immigrant families: Learning by asking the right questions. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 50(2), 95–105. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059917720778>
- Rossetti, Z., Sauer, J. S., Bui, O., & Ou, S. (2017). Developing collaborative partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families during the IEP process. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 49(5), 328–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059916680103>
- Sawyer, M. (2014). BRIDGES: Connecting with families to facilitate and enhance involvement. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 47(3), 172–179. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059914558946>
- Turnbull, A., Zuna, N., Hong, J. Y., Hu, X., Kyzar, K., Obremski, S., Summers, J. A., Turnbull, R., & Stowe, M. (2010). Knowledge-to-action guides: Preparing families to be partners in making educational decisions. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 42(3), 42–53. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991004200305>
- Valerie, L. M., & Foss-Swanson, S. (2012). Using family message journals to improve student writing and strengthen the school-home partnership. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*, 44(3), 40–48. <https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991204400305>