



Parents on the IEIC

September, 2001

Parents have an important role in guiding system policy on a local level through the Inter-agency Early Intervention Committees (IEIC) and other collaborative efforts. Ideally, the perspective and guidance of parent members can keep the systems practical and useful, and reflective of the realities of family life. The presence and questions of parents keep the language understandable. For that reason, parent representatives are required by Minnesota Statute 125 A.30 subd.(a) as members of IEICs.

Recruiting parents and maintaining parent participation on the IEICs is often mentioned as a challenge. Parents process and function with great individuality and can bring a wealth of capacity and diversity. Some bring leadership skills that are a rich community asset. It works best when IEICs aim for having more than one parent representative, to avoid having a token parent or creating a situation where one parent alone becomes burdened with too many responsibilities, or having to represent the voices of all parents.

Only an active, responsive, interagency committee that functions in a respectful and open climate with a feeling of a “level playing field” will experience the meaningful participation of parents.

1. Invite parents.

- Briefly and clearly describe what the committee does
- Use many different strategies that are culturally appropriate, i.e., print, media, personal contact, letters with a follow-up call
- Describe the purpose and history of the IEIC
- Include a description of IEIC membership
- Identify meeting times and the expected time commitment
- List expectations and opportunities for parents who participate
- Distribute the invitation through service providers, support groups, advocacy organizations, medical staff, other parents
- Give an honest approximation of how much time this commitment will require

2. Provide community supports.

- Make parents aware of available supports
- Meeting stipends
- Childcare provided or reimbursed
- Transportation expenses, etc.
- Describe process for accessing supports

3. Validate the experience and the role.

Parents have a lifelong commitment and responsibility to their child with special

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needs and must guard their personal energy. In order to commit to a committee membership, they need to:

- understand the function and process of the committee
- feel comfortable enough in the atmosphere of the IEIC to ask the “obvious questions” that may clarify for the whole group
- have opportunity for responsibility and leadership
- see results for their efforts
- feel they are working as an equal partner on a level playing field, as evidenced by equal access to information or an equal voice

4. Adopt an active IEIC posture.

- Expect more of the committee process than simply processing through budgets and state driven rules and regulations.
- Go beyond giving agency updates as the whole meeting agenda.
- Work together to address community concerns. Those activity based outcomes or products have the natural effect of engaging new parents who bring new commitment and enthusiasm.

5. Strive to make IEIC meetings accessible for all.

- Meetings: Meeting time may be a factor for parent participation. Consider a meeting time and place that is “mutually inconvenient.” When the group works from that framework, it is honestly possible to validate everyone’s commitment and acknowledge in an ongoing way what each one gave up in order to attend.
- Diversity: Aim for diversity in parent membership; gender, socioeconomic status, disability type, ethnic or cultural background.
- Location: Look for a neutral, community-based site that is not affiliated with a specific agency.

Use the Family Support Subcommittee to increase ongoing awareness of the IEIC. As more parents participate in that role, developing family support activities and efforts, an increased awareness of the IEIC and its potential will follow. When parents see that their participation actually impacts the life of their child and family or someone else’s, the time and effort directed toward IEIC membership becomes time well spent.