

Inclusionary Practices and Systems:

## **FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

### **WHAT ARE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS?**

Education services for children and families with disabilities benefit from strong working partnerships among key stakeholders. These stakeholders commonly include families and caregivers, education teams, and community partners. In these relationships, all partners are valued members on a team, working together to implement best practices in coordinated and meaningful ways..

### **WHY ARE FAMILY AND COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IMPORTANT?**

#### **WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES?**

- Family and community partnerships are critical to programs serving students with disabilities because they encourage generalization of skills taught in classroom settings.
- Strong partnerships provide the foundation for effective wrap-around services. .

### **IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER\*:**

- Ensure that interactions are sensitive and responsive to cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity.
- Provide unbiased information in a way that families can understand.
- Be responsive to family concerns, priorities, and life circumstances.
- Work with families to develop outcomes, goals, and individualized learning plans.
- Ensure that family priorities and concerns, as well as child strengths and needs, are included in education planning.
- Support family functioning and build confidence and competence.
- Work with families to identify and apply informal and formal resources and supports.
- Help families know and understand their rights.

*\*Note. Adapted from DEC Recommended Practices, 2014*

### **CASE STUDY: Hood Canal Preschool**

Teaching inclusion and acceptance at an early age is a foundational approach of Hood Canal. They strive to provide an environment that embraces each individual's differences within their teams as well as their communities. Hood Canal's aim was to cultivate an inclusive, supportive learning environment that engages the whole student community while promoting collaboration, communication, and academics. They began to determine what practices would assist them in creating a program that serviced all students. Hood Canal wanted to ensure that experiences were intentional and meaningful and that all learning opportunities were provided for all students, despite their ability or background.

Hood Canal placed high importance around building relationships with important stakeholders, families and students, and community members with an intentional focus on the Skokomish Tribe, Hood Canal. They wanted to create an environment where all cultures are respected, acknowledged, and safe.

One process that has been developed and implemented is the Caregiver Community Learning Circle (CCLC). A caregiver is defined as any person responsible for a child's well being. The goal of Hood Canal is to eliminate the concept of traditional parenting and encourage caregiving in an inclusionary manner. The CCLC meets bi-monthly and discusses their relationships and their ability to navigate complex and intense emotions, as well as learning opportunities they need in order to engage children with their peers, caregivers, and community. In these meetings the community is working to develop an understanding of each child's age and stage of development, age appropriate behaviors, and basic neuroscience and psychology. This exploration has been guided by a leader with educational experience in early childhood, based on the vision and mission of Restorative Circles adapted to their culture, environment, needs, and demographics, books, as well as workshops in culture diversity and awareness by Ryan Guzman. These resources steer the discussion and help the group develop an understanding of themselves as caregivers, their own behaviors and how they affect children, as well as how to use strategies such as mindfulness and self awareness.

Through the CCLC program, Hood Canal has had the opportunity to provide caregivers the space, time, and support thereby reaching out to their children, families, and community. They are addressing the local inclusion systems and needs taking into consideration the environment, caregivers, community, and collaboration. Their long term mission is that by creating the CLCC in pre K, the concepts and community will grow together through each grade. Outcomes they hope to accomplish are to reduce bullying and isolation as well as celebrating diversity.



## RESOURCES

1. **Bryan, J.** (2005). Fostering educational resilience and achievement in urban schools through school-family-community partnerships. *Professional School Counseling*, 219-227.
2. **Division for Early Childhood.** (2014). DEC recommended practices in early intervention/early childhood special education 2014. Retrieved from
3. **Haines, S. J., Gross, J. M., Blue-Banning, M., Francis, G. L., & Turnbull, A. P.** (2015). Fostering family-school and community-school partnerships in inclusive schools: Using practice as a guide. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 40(3), 227-239.
4. **Sheridan, S. M., & Wheeler, L. A.** (2017). Building strong family-school partnerships: Transitioning from basic findings to possible practices. *Family Relations*, 66(4), 670-683.