DEVELOPING EMPOWERED PARENTS: HOW A PARENT RESOURCE CENTER (PRC) INCREASES ACCESS TO SPECIAL EDUCATION INFORMATION

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Activity #1

- What are some challenges that you may experience when working with families that include students with disabilities in your school community?
ACPS IS A CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE SCHOOL COMMUNITY
What is the model used by the Dept. of Education in Virginia?

- There are two components that are regularly integrated throughout the materials, resources, presentations, workshops:
  - A parent’s perspective
  - An educator’s perspective
What is a Parent Resource Center (PRC)?

- Approximately 46 out of the 134 school divisions in Virginia operate a PRC.
- PRCs vary widely throughout the Commonwealth, in terms of services, hours of operation and staffing.
- See http://centerforfamilyinvolvement.vcu.edu/parent-resource-centers/
What are the benefits of the PRC?

- Support families with challenges that accompany raising a child or youth with a disability
- Provide resources
- Educate families. The knowledgeable parent is better able to advocate for the student and collaborate with the school.
- Fosters family participation in the student’s education
- Reduces misunderstanding and litigation
What supports does the Alexandria PRC provide to parents?

- Promotional cards
- Literary and DVD resources
- Social Media
  - Facebook – Anne R. Lipnick Parent Resource Center
  - Twitter - @LearnwithThePRC
- Support groups
- School-based Support (New)
- Site-based Support (New)
- Private consultations with parents
High Technology Interventions

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Low Technology Interventions

- Connections to community-based organizations
- Connections to community-based businesses
- Linkages with School-based or Central Office Teams
- Collaborations with Internal Teams – FACE
Parent liaisons and the PRC team collaborate to reach culturally and linguistically diverse families who may be overwhelmed by navigating the educational system.

Cross promotion of activities results from both parent liaisons and the PRC team.

Strengthened ties with community-based organizations increases the credibility and parent’s trust of the PRC.
Low Technology Interventions

- Use of language line and voiceovers
- Listserv
- Family Engagement Series
No Technology Interventions

- Parent support groups
- Make It – Take It Sessions
- Share services or supports identified in the community
- Connections to community-based organizations
- Connections to community-based businesses
No Technology Interventions

- Linkages with Central Office Teams
- Linkages with School-based Teams
- Collaborations with Internal Teams – FACE
- Training of community based org. staff in the community
Lessons Learned in Parent Consultations

- Data collection
- Scheduling an informal meeting at the beginning of the school year (sets the tone for the year)
- Identify the purpose of the meeting prior to attendance
- Identify all team members and staff that touch the life of the student
- Determine ways to communicate with team members
- Include the student as early as possible to advance self-advocacy skills (www.iamdetermined.org)
Lessons Learned in Parent Consultations

- Prepare parents for all formal meetings including eligibility/IEP/or child study meetings
  - What does the parent want?
  - What are the goals that the parent believes are important?
  - What is reasonable to ask for?
Lessons Learned in Parent Consultations

- Famous statement: If not X, then what?
- Educate parents on compliance
- Bring a friend/relative to the meeting to take notes and keep track of questions
- How to determine: How to pick your battles? What are you sacrificing? What is benefitting the child?
- Help parents to prepare for the meetings to avoid any surprises
Lessons Learned in Parent Consultations

- Identify potential accommodations or services
- Educate parent on their role as a key IEP member
- Encourage and coach parents to participate on panels and SPED organizations to increase representation and voices
Lessons Learned in Parent Consultations

- Understand that the parent is a valued partner of the IEP team
- Understanding the parent’s role as a team member will reduce any intimidation felt by parents
- SPED process is not routine for the parent, despite it being familiar for the team.
- Setting should be respectful
- Facilitate conversations via use of language line and translators
What if you don’t have a PRC?

- Lay the groundwork for establishing a positive, collaborative partnership with the parent.
- Say, “I’m so excited that your child is going to be in my class this year. I really need to count on you to collaborate with me and for you to share information about your child with me so that together, can help him/her have a successful year.”
- Say, “What are your child’s strengths or gifts?”
- Activity: Initiate the meeting with the parent at the beginning of the school year.
What if you don’t have a PRC?

- Make sure the parent understands the eligibility and IEP process
- Say, “Special education is governed by Federal law but it can be confusing. I want to make sure you are knowledgeable of the law, know how to advocate and receive the services that your child needs.”
- Activity: Share and explain a flow chart explaining the special education process, including child study (referral), eligibility, evaluation, development of an IEP, and identification of services.
What if you don’t have a PRC?

- Educate the parent about the culture of special education and the person-first language used in the field

- Think, “Despite any disability diagnosis attached to a child or young adult, the student should always be known as a person FIRST. As a result, we say “child with a learning disability” rather than an “LD kid” or a “young person with autism” rather than “an autistic teen”

- Activity: Read the attached article. Visit the website: www.disabilityisnatural.com
Activity #2

- How can we apply the strategies to your school district, and expect to see significant progress?
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