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# Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank: How to Prevail When Others Want to See You Drown: Book Review

By Sara Gaines

Coda, Rebecca & Jetter, Rick. *Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank: How to Prevail When Others Want to See You Drown*. San Diego: Dave Burgess Consulting. 2016. 252 pp. \$23.77.

"Leadership is the most meaningful test. It's *who you are*. It flows through your veins." (p.3) Rebecca Coda and Rick Jetter are passionate about educational leadership and improving educational outcomes. In this book, Coda and Jetter delve into the concept of educational leadership, with peers or supervisors are adversarial. "Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank" approaches sabotage, discrimination, politics, and revenge in a candid and realistic manner, referencing real-life stories and difficult situations. Although bringing these uncomfortable topics to the forefront is an important component of this book, it is not the sole purpose, as Coda and Jetter introduce the 10 tenets of becoming a good leader, which guides the reader to staying on top, throughout a tumultuous situation. "Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank" is published by Dave Burgess Consulting, a leader in educational publications. Dave Burgess Consulting is also responsible for several other educationally themed books, such as: *Teach Like a Pirate*, *The Zen Teacher*; and *The Innovator's Mindset*.

In this book, Coda and Jetter respond to an underlying theme present within all educational settings: how to face a "dunk tank" situation, survive, and prevail. According to Coda and Jetter (2016), "I only get one life to live. I will not let others destroy my happiness" (p.13). Maintaining a balance between home and work remain a common topic throughout this book, as the authors guide the reader to maintain their sanity if they find themselves in one of the difficult situations.

The authors spent significant time reassuring the reader that educational leaders who are well-meaning, experienced, and hardworking often find themselves in a difficult situation with adversarial peers or supervisors. Once they are in this position, they may not be sure how to proceed and remove themselves from this situation. The authors, who have both found themselves in this predicament, are able guide the reader to understand adversaries, develop allies, move forward, and thrive after defeat. Coda and Jetter argue that, given the right tools, educational leaders can survive and succeed in a challenging situation through perseverance and the understanding of when to stay and when to go. This thinking moves beyond the other books published through Dave Burgess Consulting, which focus on *how* to be a good administrator or *how* to teach effectively.

*Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank* is a guidebook to surviving and prospering in a difficult environment, yet is ideally read before these difficult situations occur. Coda and Jetter begin this book with 10 crucial tenants that need to be embraced to experience success. Accepting these 10 tenants lays the foundation for the remaining chapters, which outline difficult situations that may occur. Topics that are not traditionally discussed in educational settings, such as alcohol and pill abuse, are freely discussed throughout the 10 chapters as real challenges that occur in educational work places. Other chapters include topics such as: the power of emotion (p.15), aligned relatedness (p.87), the downfall of a 15-hour work day (p.107), creating allies (p.139), knowing when to retreat (p.171), prevailing over a difficult situation (p.193), and thriving after something negative has occurred, to rebuild a positive reputation (p.215).

The book begins early talking about the components of Proactive Paranoia (p.23) and how emotions can impact leaders in the workplace. Coda and Jetter write the book through the frame that a) all people are good and b) that for some adversaries, no amount of persuasion will make them your allies (p.5). This emotional foundation and understanding then moves towards the tactics that have been used by adversaries (p.56) such as rumors and the use of silos. Additionally, the final 2 chapters introduces the "Ten Ideological Practices of Dunk Tank Survivors" (p.198), which is the foundation of balancing the responsibilities of leadership. The strength of this book lies in the variety of real-life experiences and applicable steps that are provided for the reader.

Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank begins with the benefits of being in education and guides the reader through the rocky path of oppositional leadership. By the end of the book, Coda and Jetter guide the reader back to how to flourish after this difficult experience, moving towards future success. This full circle that takes place throughout the book helps the reader understand that a difficult situation does not last forever, but is a cycle and just one part of their career. Coda and Jetter strive to ensure that the reader knows they can leave a difficult situation and move forward as an educational leader, experiencing success afterwards.

The lack of recognition and training for educational leaders who are experiencing difficult situations led to the interviewing of administrators across America. Coda and Jetter (2016) explain that "clashing ideas about what is best for students or the system itself may become the sword that we are either going to die on or use to defend ourselves" (p.11). This supports the concept that although educational leaders may do what they think is best for students, it doesn't always lead to the best personal outcomes and can certainly backfire on the educator trying to accomplish goals. The ongoing theme of "Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank" revolves around the current training to help develop educational leaders, but the lack of information and resources for leaders who find themselves in these adversarial situations. Since this book was written as a response to the lack of guidance leaders receive when dealing with difficult and adversarial conditions in educational workplaces, Coda and Jetter go out of their way to highlight the topics they feel have not been given attention. This book willingly probed into some of the most difficult topics that can occur in educational settings, discussing how to build (or re-build) relationships and when to leave a toxic situation. The chapters include real-life stories and testimonies, from educational leaders who have experienced these difficult situations.

Although the authors provide a great deal of useful information to anyone who is having a difficult time with a co-worker or supervisor, they make you wait for the light at the end of the tunnel. This doesn't occur until the final chapters of the book where they stop giving warnings and start giving tools to overcome. Reading through the adversarial situations can become overwhelming but by the end the text explains to the reader how to "keep swimming" and overcome the "dunk tank" that has taken place. Coda and Jetter provide the reader with gems of information to change their mindset and way of work and overcome a "dunk tank" situation throughout the book.

Coda and Jetter stay focused on developing strategies for dealing with adversarial conditions and guide the reader, so they know when to stay in the situation and when to leave. This book is a strong companion to Fullan's "Leading in a Culture of Change" (2014), where school reform is analyzed and culture change is required. Fullan's book and Coda and Jetter's book are both strongly recommended for educational leaders who are experiencing change; yet contrast in that Coda and Jetter's book will only speak to a population who has experienced a tumultuous situation. Whether investigated as a book study or read independently, "Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank" is a resource that should be on every educational leader's bookshelf. The right amount of real scenarios, problem-solving, and candid conversation about difficult topics make this book a must read for aspiring leaders or current leaders.

## References

Coda, R., & Jetter, R. (2016). *Escaping the School Leader's Dunk Tank: How to Prevail When Others Want to See You Drown*. San Diego, CA: Dave Burgess Consulting.

Fullan, M. (2004). *Leading in a Culture of Change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

# Special Education Legal Alert

Perry A. Zirkel

© October 2017

This latest monthly legal alert summarizes two recent officially published federal court decisions that respectively illustrate (a) an unusually rigorous interpretation of the requirements for IEPs, and (b) the continuing relaxed application of the requirements for evaluations. The layout follows the usual format of a two-column table, with key rulings on the left and practical implications on the right. For automatic e-mailing of future legal alerts, sign up at [perryzirkel.com](http://perryzirkel.com); this website also provides free downloads of various related articles, including those specific to FAPE-parental participation.

**The Ninth Circuit's decision in *R.E.B. v. Hawaii Department of Education* (2017) included several rulings concerning the IDEA requirements for the contents for an IEP. The three judges split 2-to-1, and the majority's interpretation is only binding in the 9 states of the Ninth Circuit (AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, and WA). However, this officially published federal appeals court decision may affect the case law in other jurisdictions.**

First, the court held that where transition services between institutions or programs, whether public or private, are necessary to enable the child to participate in the new academic environment, the IEP must include these services to meet the IDEA's "supplementary aids and services" requirement. The dissenting judge observed that the team had prepared a plan for these services and disagreed with the interpretation that the IEP must specifically list them.

Although this case was specific to a child with autism transitioning from a private special education preschool to kindergarten in a public school, the court worded its ruling much more broadly. Moreover, the meaning of "transition services" here was beyond the special provision for the planned movement to postsecondary employment or education at least be age 16 (or a lower maximum age if required by state law).

Second, the court held that the IEP did not meet the FAPE requirements in terms of its provision for LRE: 1) the provision for general education for Science and Social Studies "as deemed appropriate" by his teachers was too vague and an improper delegation; and 2) the provision for special education for the other identified subjects and activities did not meet the regulatory requirement for "the anticipated frequency, location, and duration" and the case law factors for LRE.

This rigorous interpretation of the LRE requirements for IEPs and the accompanying conclusion that this procedural deficiency amounts to a denial of FAPE in terms of the parental participation stands starkly in contrast to the rather limited LRE provisions of many IEPs. This stark contrast applies not only to the brevity that is frequent in such provisions but also the delegation feature that is sometimes utilized. The majority's view contributes to the increasingly detailed length of IEPs.

Third, the court held that the IEP's failure to specify a particular methodology—here ABA—also constitutes a denial of FAPE where it plays a critical role to the child's education.

The contributing factor here was that the IEP team had discussed ABA at length and recognized that it was integral to the child's education. Again, the emphasis was on IEP specificity rather than professional discretion.

Fourth, the court rejected the parent's claim that the IDEA requires the IEP to specify the qualifications or training of service providers.

This ruling, in contrast to the other three, fit the traditional trend of judicial interpretations of the procedural requirements for IEPs.

**In *Richardson v. District of Columbia* (2017) the federal district court upheld the school's**

**initial evaluation that determined ineligibility under the IDEA Part B (ages 4–21) of a child upon transitioning from Part C (ages 0–3), despite its subsequent determination after an IEE that the child was eligible under the classification of autism or developmental delay. The parent claimed that the evaluation was not appropriate because (a) it lacked first hand observations and teacher interviews, and (b) the school psychologist relied on testing data that did not show the child’s current educational levels.**

For the first claim, the court concluded that the IDEA regulations did not require either first-hand observations or teacher interviews. Instead, the evaluation, in which the school psychologist relied on observations and teacher interviews by the district’s speech pathologist and occupational therapist, met the relevant requirements for comprehensiveness, including multiple sources and technical soundness.

The IDEA regulations do not require that the school psychologist conduct the observation, although observations are a required part of the evaluation data. Although the regulation for the classification of SLD, which was not at issue in this case, is more specific with regard to observations (34 C.F.R. § 300.310), it does not limit the required observation to the school psychologist. For other relevant case law, see, e.g., the 2013 “Law of Evaluations under the IDEA” article in the “School Psychologists” section of “Publications” at [perryzirkel.com](http://perryzirkel.com)

For the second claim, the court avoided a definitive determination of whether the failure to conduct updated testing was “needed” additional data under the IDEA regulations for evaluations, instead reasoning that even if this failure was a procedural violation, the parents did not meet their burden to prove that (a) the failure significantly impeded the parents’ opportunity for meaningful participation or (b) updated testing would have indicated that the child was eligible.

The deferential trend of the courts in relations to evaluations under the IDEA extends to not only the non-expansive interpretation of the rather skeletal criteria of the IDEA regulations (claim above) but also the application of the two-part test for procedural FAPE (this claim). For this second claim, the court stretched beyond the usual deference to school specialists to rely on burden of proof in terms of the testimony of the parent’s expert. Nevertheless, for both claims in this case, proactively following the best practice norms for evaluation would have significantly reduced the odds of the parents’ resort to litigation.

# The Art of Coaching Teams: Building Resilient Communities that Transform Schools: Book Review

By Louris Otero

## Purpose and Thesis

“Team building is hard work because there are few direct, prescriptive routes to take.” (Aguilar, 2016, p. 292). The Art of Coaching Teams: Building Resilient Communities That Transform Schools is described by the author as a “manual for building teams” (Aguilar, 2016, p. xxii). The purpose of her book is to offer a path toward lasting, transformational change, much like Michael Fullan (2014) in his book, Leading in a Culture of Change. Aguilar’s book is more like a how-to manual with worksheets, questionnaires, and reflections that are tailor made for helping anyone in a leader or facilitator’s position build a team with purpose, a work plan, and an end-goal. Aguilar gives strategies to handle the problems and navigate team-building by looking at the systemic and operational aspects that affect team building. She looks at the big picture to help leaders solve the little problems that crop up.

## Main Themes

Aguilar sets out to illustrate the main themes in coaching teams by offering reflections on her own leadership style. She gives a dual perspective as she reflects on what worked well for her and where she failed. Aguilar uses the distinct stories of two teams that she worked with and offers honest commentary and thoughtful reflections. She tells the reader right away that one team was “transformational” and that her experience with the other team perfectly illustrates her failure as a leader. Aguilar uses her own journey as a leader or a facilitator to teach others how to coach teams towards lasting change (Aguilar, 2016).

Aguilar begins by defining great teams as a team that “gets something done that is valuable, useful, and appreciated” (Aguilar, 2016, p. 3). She goes on to say that great teams have better collaboration skills as a result of working together, and finally, great teams learn (Aguilar, 2016). Fullan (2014) does the same thing in his book, Leading in a Culture of Change by offering a framework that stresses “learner leaders,” or leaders that learn along with their teams (p.4).

## Tenets of Team Building and Coaching

The Art of Coaching Teams culminates in a compendium of “truths” that Aguilar hold true when it comes to team building (p 292). Her work puts emphasis on building teams that work to serve the needs of children. She states that effective teams do many things in the process of completing their work, but the main objective should always be to serve children. Next, she echoes the work of Michael Fullan by stressing that the primary job of a team is to learn and to create a situation ripe with learning (Aguilar, 2016). Aguilar then goes on to say that trust and relationships are what makes a learning, thriving community resilient (p. 293) Trust and relationships allow a team to listen to feedback and learn from one another. Trust and relationships again reflect the framework offered by Fullan in his Framework for Leadership, (Fullan, 2014, p. 4).

He puts relationship building at the foundation of any team looking to make lasting change because it encourages a team to buy into new ideas and concepts (Fullan, 2014). Aguilar goes on to say that team building takes time, is subject to operating within systems and power structures, and takes effective communication at all levels.



Aside from learning, both Fullan and Aguilar agree that the team's emotional intelligence plays an important part in the level of performance (Aguilar, 2016) (Fullan, 2014). Fullan describes it as a "constellation of hope, enthusiasm, and energy" (Fullan, 2014, p. 7). Aguilar talks about the leader having the greatest influence on a team and having the job of paying attention to and increasing the team's emotional intelligence in an effort to affect the quality of the work (Aguilar, 2016).

Finally, Aguilar packs *The Art of Coaching Teams* with worksheets, conversation starters, and inspiring quotes and meditations. Her book reads like a novel that can be used as a text book or handbook for leaders or facilitators at all levels. There 7 appendices with activities, group strategies, tools, plans for meetings, observation tools, and a comprehensive list of core competencies. *The Art of Coaching Teams* also offers additional printable resources on the author's website.

## Conclusion

The one drawback would be that the book is a bit long at 295 pages. Also, because it reads a bit like a novel, the reader may feel like the story moves slowly. Unlike Fullan's book, Aguilar is writing about her experience with leadership from a personal perspective. Fullan spends more time quoting others and telling stories of corporations and their anecdotal experience. As a whole, *The Art of Coaching* is better suited as a workbook that offers inspiration and tools to facilitate leaders towards a path to effective leading.

## References

- Aguilar, E. (2016). *The art of coaching teams: Building resilient communities that transform schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (2014). *Leading in a Culture of Change*. Hoboken: Wiley.

## About the Author

Louris Otero has been teaching first grade for 14 years at Carrollton School of the Sacred Heart in Miami, Florida. She is currently pursuing her MS in Special Education with an endorsement in Autism from Florida International University. Ms. Otero has been happily married for 20 years and is the mother of two teenagers, Serena, 18 and Justin, 16. This is her third publication.

# Parent Engagement Practices Improve Outcomes for Preschool Children

Supporting parents' efforts to help their children develop during the preschool years improves child school readiness, reduces child behavior problems, enhances child social skills, and promotes academic success. Effective parent engagement programs can help close the gap in school readiness associated with family income.

Many effective parent support programs focus on the earliest years of life (ages 0-3). To address children's school readiness needs, however, parent engagement efforts need to intensify during the preschool years. The following approaches, based on randomized-controlled trials, provide the strongest evidence that focused parent engagement programs during the preschool years can improve child outcomes.

**Programs that promote positive parenting practices and parent-child relationships.** During multiple sessions, parents are taught how to focus attention on their children, set clear expectations, use praise to reinforce positive behavior, and effectively set limits to reduce parent-child conflict and negative parenting practices.

**Programs that promote home learning activities and effective teaching strategies.** These programs are typically delivered individually during home visits, or through a series of school-based parent group meetings. Parents are given learning materials and shown how to use them to help their children enjoy learning.

**Programs that strengthen parent-teacher partnerships.** By facilitating communication and collaboration between parents and teachers, these programs boost child academic and social-emotional skill development.

**Programs that emphasize child physical health.** These programs are designed to increase parent knowledge about nutrition and/or physical activity, build parenting skills (particularly parenting strategies around healthy eating and exercising), and restructure the home environment to facilitate healthy and active lifestyles.

With 32 million children in the United States living in poverty or low-income homes, it's imperative that we come together and build on what works to promote parent engagement, reduce the income-based achievement gap, and give all children the opportunity for school readiness.

This 10-page issue brief, which is accompanied by a 2-minute video, was created by The Pennsylvania State University with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

**Begin with the 2-minute video, then access the brief, at:**

<https://www.rwjf.org/en/library/research/2017/02/parent-engagement-practices-improve-outcomes-for-preschool-child.html>



## Buzz from the Hub

All articles below can be accessed through the following 2 links:

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-september2017-issue2/>

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-october2017-issue1/>

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### **Supporting Children by Improving Family Outcomes**

This 13-minute video describes the importance of supporting families, collecting data on family outcomes, and using the data to improve the program. The video highlights how three families who received early intervention benefited from support to their family. From the DaSy Center, the ECTA Center, and collaborating partners.

### **Succeeding on the Job: Using Technology to Boost the Skills Employers Want**

This webinar of the Center on Technology and Disability and the PACER Center presents tools and strategies to support essential work performance, such as being on time, communicating, following directions, staying organized, and completing tasks. A wide range of technology is explored, including smartphone apps, wearable devices, a smart pen, and alternative computer access.

### **Easy Branch Orientation & Guide to Staff Training**

The Branch Military PTAC has created a guide to its most useful materials on military families: their culture, their unique needs, and the military systems that support them when they have a child with a disability. The guide also includes links to parent handouts, including 3 handouts you can brand with your Parent Center logo!

### **Student-Centered Transition Planning**

This IRIS module explores the benefits of student-centered transition planning. It identifies ways to involve students in collecting assessment information and developing goals, as well as how to prepare them to lead their own IEP meetings.

Have you explored what's available from the **four equity assistance centers** funded by the U.S. Department of Education? We highly recommend taking a stroll through each center's offerings. Here's a taste of what you can find:

### **Youth Rising: Centering Youth Voice in the Quest for Equitable and Inclusive Schools**

Interested in partnering with youth in creating school change?

### **Introduction to Tribal Education**

This is a free, online, self-directed course designed as an introductory primer for those interested in learning about the complexities of tribal education systems.

### **Creating an Inclusive Halloween**

Sensory-friendly Halloween tips, allergy/food-free tips, anxiety-friendly tips, and other great tips.

### **Exceptional Parent's Annual Transition Issue**

Articles galore, including: Group Empowerment Groups and Self-Advocacy, Transition for Young Adults with Complex Care Needs, and Employment and Transition.

**Are You Ready for Transition to Adult Health Care?**

Take the quiz! It asks about important issues surrounding the transition years and provides guidance on topics such as what legal changes happen at 18 years old and how to sign up for health insurance.

**Looking for Early Childhood Resources in Arabic, Spanish, or Portuguese?**

Visit the Center for Developing Children at Harvard. At the link above, you'll see available resources in Arabic as "featured" and to the right are links to Spanish and Portuguese resources.

**Best Practice in Outreach** | *Online for Your Viewing Pleasure*

This CPIR webinar was held October 9, 2017. It featured Parent Center presenters who elaborated on the **high-quality resource collection** they assembled for Parent Centers.

We invite you to read, enjoy, and share the latest blog from the U.S. Department of Education: **Things People Say**.

## **Mindset: The New Psychology of Success. How Can We Learn to Fulfill Our Potential: Book Review**

**By Christine Williams**

Is success reserved for the talented few, or can it be achieved by all, through hard work and perseverance?

Carol Dweck, in *Mindset, the New Psychology of Success* whose background is in Psychology, provides research and evidence to argue the latter is the case. Dweck suggests that individual success is not defined by how intelligent or talented you are. This premise, she identifies as a fixed mindset, because there is a belief that success is influenced by your talents and abilities which are fixed, or limited. The relationship between effort and success is not acknowledged. On the other hand, the growth mindset which Dweck identifies, believes that there is no such cap or maximum to an individual's potential. Success is based on an individual's commitment or effort level to work hard to achieve whatever goal they have set. Therefore, success is limitless, as it based on the what Dweck calls, 'Stretching Beyond the Possible'. (p.22)

Dweck sets out in her book that developing a growth mindset for leaders show how the effects of having either a growth mindset, or fixed mindset impact the pursuit of success. She provides examples of leadership that emulate the fixed mindset and those that thrive in response to a growth mindset. She also provides examples of how adopting the growth mindset versus the fixed mindset in areas of sports, businesses, parents, teachers, coaches and in relationships, can affect personal development and success.

Dweck therefore provides support for her argument that having a growth mindset enables everyone, which includes leaders, the opportunity to develop a 'can do' attitude and motivation to be successful in whatever goals they set. "The passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset." (pg.22)

One of the benefits of the book is Dweck does a great job providing examples and evidence as to what mindset qualities enhance the chances of a successful leadership and what mindset qualities leaders should emulate to lead. "The emphasis is on team work – not the royal I." (p.126) This point is elaborated by her discussion of several famous business leaders. Those with a fixed mindset, tended to lead from the position that they were superior to others (fixed mindset). This she argued was the case at Enron (pg. 111). Those who lead with a growth mindset, such as in the case of Alan Wurtz, the CEO of Circuit City, who held debates in his boardroom (Pg. 110), had greater success because they had confidence in their staff and members, to make decisions, and work through issues. This is similar to Fullan's examples of disturbance. (pg. 109)

Both Dweck and Fullan discuss the importance of relationships. Dweck focuses more closely on the development of personal relationships, whereas Fullan identifies the need to develop a moral purpose which is identified and modeled by leadership. Dweck's focus on relationships, identifies personal traits that can be identified either as a fixed or growth mindset.

Therefore, when considering relationships, Dweck's focus is more on the individual development of the growth mindset, whereas Fullan mentions the change in mindset in relation to the bigger picture of the relationships established in larger forums.

However, both authors agree that irrespective of the type of relationship, parties and/or members need to collaborate to achieve their goal. This point is supported by Fullan when he refers to the need to develop relationships in which members work collaboratively to strive to achieve the end goal. This involves acknowledging connections between moral purpose, relationships, and organizational success. (pg.51)

However, it could be argued that there is a difference in the philosophies of Dweck and Fullan as to the purpose and/or definition of success. Fullan clearly focuses on the correlation between student achievement and school success and the need to develop effective collaborative relationships to achieve such success.

Whereas, Dweck focuses more on the motivation and effort levels of individuals, who develop a growth mindset, that can influence the success, not just of themselves but of others over whom they have influence. As Dweck says, "A growth minded manager – a guide, not a judge". (p.127)

In conclusion Dweck provides strong research-based evidence that supports the theory that individuals who adopt a growth mindset, understand that effort and motivation can be the keys to encourage success for all, irrespective of an individual's talents and abilities. This shift in mindset, especially when adopted and implemented by leaders, can provide a transition in the culture of a school, company, community, or any other setting in which members have a collective goal to be successful. Adopting a growth mindset, can provide the motivation and effort that all members can use to unravel their true potential.

“When you enter a mindset, you enter a new world. In one world – the world of fixed traits – success is about proving you’re smart and talented. Validating yourself. In the other – the world of changing qualities – it’s about stretching yourself to learn something new. Developing yourself”. Dweck, 2006 (p.15)

## References

Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success: How We Can Learn to Fulfill Our Potential*. New York. Random House.

Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a Culture of Change*. California. Jossey-Bass.

## About the Author

Christine Williams is currently a fourth grade ESE teacher, working within the co teach model. She has 15 years of teaching experience within Title 1 elementary schools in South West Florida. Her experience spans teaching diverse students in grades two through five, and undertaking the role of Reading Coach for four years, within the elementary school setting. She earned her Bachelor’s degree in *English Literary Studies and Education Studies*, at Middlesex University in the United Kingdom, where she was born. She is currently certified to teach elementary grades 1-6, ESE grades K-12, and has earned both her Reading and English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) endorsements. She became a National Board Certified Teacher in *Literacy: Reading and Language Arts* in 2009, and is currently pursuing a Masters of Science degree in *Special Education with an endorsement in Autism* through Florida International University. Her passion is to continue striving to make a difference for students with disabilities, and providing the best opportunities for all students to become life-long learners.

# Requesting Mediation: Model Letter Handout for Parents

Anytime you have a serious disagreement with the school and you feel it isn't getting resolved, you may request mediation. In mediation, you and school personnel sit down with an impartial third person (called a mediator), talk openly about the areas where you disagree, and try to reach an agreement. Mediation is voluntary, so both parties must agree to meet with a mediator.

There are benefits to mediation, both for you and for the school. One of the chief benefits is that mediation allows you and the school to state your concerns and work together to reach a solution that focuses on the needs of the student and is acceptable to both of you.

For more information on mediation, visit **CADRE**, the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education, at:  
<http://www.cadeworks.org/>

We also offer detailed information about mediation under IDEA, beginning at:  
<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/mediation>

## General letter-writing tips

When writing any business letter, it is important to keep it short and to the point. First, start by asking yourself the following questions and state the answers in your letter:

- Why am I writing?
- What are my specific concerns?
- What are my questions?
- What would I like the person to do about this situation?
- What sort of response do I want: a letter, a meeting, a phone call, or something else?

Each letter you write should include the following basic information:

- Put the date on your letter.
- Give your child's full name and the name of your child's main teacher or current class placement.
- Say what you want, rather than what you don't want. Keep it simple.
- Give your address and a daytime phone number where you can be reached.
- Always end your letter with a "thank you."

## What are some other tips to keep in mind?

You want to make a good impression so that the person reading your letter will understand your request and say "yes." Remember, this person may not know you, your child, or your child's situation. Keep the tone of your letter pleasant and businesslike. Give the facts without letting anger, frustration, blame, or other negative emotions creep in. Some letter-writing tips include:

- After you write your first draft, put the letter aside for a day or two. Then look at it again and revise it with fresh eyes.
- Read your letter as though you are the person receiving it. Is your request clear? Have you included the important facts? Does your letter ramble on and on? Is it likely to offend, or is the tone businesslike?

- Have someone else read your letter for you. Is your reason for writing clear? Can the reader tell what you are asking for? Would the reader say “yes” if he or she received this letter? Can your letter be improved?
- Use spell check and grammar check on the computer. Or ask someone reliable to edit your letter before you send it.
- Keep a copy for your records.

## Model Letter

Today’s Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of person to whom you’re writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (Person’s name),

My son/daughter, (child’s name), currently attends (name of school) and is in the (\_\_\_\_) grade in (teacher’s name) class. I am writing to inform you that the school and I are in disagreement concerning (BRIEFLY state what the disagreement is about). We have been unsuccessful in resolving this dispute, and I am requesting mediation so that we may resolve our differences.

I would like the mediation to be done as soon as possible. Please let me know when this can be arranged and send me a copy of the school’s guidelines on mediation. My daytime telephone number is (give your phone number). Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: your child’s principal  
your child’s teacher

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# Article from the Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals (JAASEP)

## *Let's Get Parents Ready for their Initial IEP Meeting*

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**Keywords:** parental involvement, IEP meeting, special education, preparing parents for special education, parental perceptions regarding special education

### Abstract

Parental participation in the initial Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting is a critical component of the process. Even though parents have rights to be equally involved in making decisions at the IEP meetings, frequently parents aren't prepared to be equal members on the team with school personnel. This study focused on a preparation program for parents who were to be attending their child's first IEP meeting. The research was conducted in three phases through an interview and training process with 298 parents. Phase one consisted of asking parents a series of questions on their knowledge and perceptions regarding the meeting. Phase two involved an intervention of preparing the parents for the meeting. Phase three entailed asking the initial set of questions from phase one to determine gains parents had made in knowledge and attitudes about the meeting. Results indicate parents benefited greatly from the preparation prior to the meeting.

## Let's Get Parents Ready for their Initial IEP Meeting

### Preparation of Parents for the Meeting

Parents are a very important team member at the Individual Education Program (IEP) meeting. The IEP meeting is intended to assure students with disabilities have appropriate educational services and supports. A parent's involvement is especially critical for the initial IEP meeting as this meeting sets the tone for the partnership between the parents and the school personnel. Parents have a great deal of knowledge about their children and thus can provide valuable input on decisions being made about their child's special education program. Not only is parental involvement a vital component of the IEP meeting due to parents' knowledge, it is a parent's right to participate and to be engaged in making decisions about their child's education.

Parental participation and shared decision making are two of the basic principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Findings from studies on the IDEA which resulted in The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 emphasized that after 30 years, research has shown that children with disabilities can benefit from the involvement of their parents in their education. The findings from these studies continue to focus on the need to help parents get stronger in their role and responsibility with school personnel in providing meaningful educational opportunities at school and at home.

Although parental participation at the IEP meeting is a mandated right through the IDEA, parents are often unprepared to participate in the initial IEP meeting. Hammond, Ingalls, and Trussell (2008) studied parental perceptions of their experience at attending the initial IEP meeting for their child who had a disability. Over a four year period, 212 parents were interviewed to determine their reactions to the initial IEP meeting. From these interviews, only 28% of the parents believed they were prepared for the meeting and 72% of parents felt very anxious and overwhelmed at attending the initial IEP meeting. Additionally, only 27% of the parents reported they understood the professional terms used in the meeting and the remaining 73% of parents stated they understood none/some of the terms..

In a follow-up study conducted by Ingalls, Hammond, Paez, and Rodriguez (2016), 323 parents were interviewed to determine parental perceptions regarding the initial IEP meeting. Forty-seven percent of parents indicated they believed they were prepared for the meeting and the remaining 53% of parents revealed they were unprepared. This study also looked at how comfortable parents were in attending this initial meeting. Only 19% of the parents felt comfortable in attending the meeting and 69% of parents stated they were overwhelmed and anxious about attending the meeting. Other studies on family involvement in the IEP process reported other types of issues for families. Bezdek, Summers, & Turnbull (2010) found that many school personnel stated they valued family-centered practices but did not follow these practices with families. They discussed some of the problems family members face when beginning their involvement in the IEP process. As a result of their findings they provided suggestions for teachers to use to help develop and strengthen a relationship with parents. Turnbull et al., 2010 described how many parents are intimidated by the IEP meetings and do not feel adequately prepared for participation. This research provided specific strategies to help prepare families to be equal decision makers and to partner with others in their child's education. Additionally, Wright, Stegeline, and Hartle (2007) and Thatcher (2012) identified many reasons why parents are not as involved as they could be in their child's education and the IEP process. They offered practical solutions to use to try to overcome some of these challenges and to help build a family, school, and community partnerships.

Dabkowski (2004) reported how some elements of the school team culture could actually negatively affect parents and discourage their involvement in their child's education. Lo (2012a) discussed how Chinese immigrant families are very hesitant to ask school personnel for help with their child with a disability. They see the teacher as the expert and that they themselves can contribute very little to their child's education. Lo (2012b) discussed some of the common problems parents from diverse backgrounds, who have a child with a disability, have in developing a partnership with school personnel. The findings from this research offered a variety of suggestions to improve family-teacher relationships. In later research Lo (2014) studied the readability of a number of IEPs. She found the reading level of a majority of IEPs were at the high school/college level. Lo stated this high reading level can be a barrier for some parents at attaining a partnership with school personnel particularly if English was their second language. Mueller, Milian, & Lopez (2009) studied Latina mothers who had children with severe disabilities. The mothers reported they experienced a gap with school personnel in developing a partnership but felt very positive about the support groups they attended. The groups provided the mothers with effective communication, information, and emotional support.

The intent of the IDEA was to lay a foundation for parents of students with disabilities to have an opportunity to participate with school personnel in planning an appropriate program for their child who has a disability ("Questions and Answer about IDEA: Parent Participation." 2016). In order for parents to actively participate on the team at the meeting, they need to be prepared for the meeting. Applequist (2009) and Kayama (2010) stated in order for parents to be active and equal members on the team, they need to have an understanding of special education law and their options regarding services. Included in the preparation process, parents must understand the purpose of the initial IEP meeting, who will be attending the meeting, the roles of the people who will be in attendance, jargon and professional terminology that will be used at the meeting, and the agenda of the meeting. Most importantly parents should realize their importance on the team and that they will be encouraged to ask questions, make comments, and provide suggestions of/to team members. This preparation must be very direct and meet the needs of the parent prior to attending the first IEP meeting.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to determine if parents would benefit from an intervention training program to prepare them for the upcoming initial IEP meeting for his or her child. The focus of this study was to prepare parents for various aspects of the initial IEP meeting so that each of them would be more familiar with terminology, roles, the meeting's agenda, and participants who would be attending. An additional purpose of this study was to obtain parental suggestions for other parents and to school personnel on ways to improve the IEP process. The research was designed and based on the theoretical foundation that supports the importance of parental involvement in a child's education and the importance of empowering parents with knowledge and skills to increase and improve their involvement. The results of this study can be compared to two previous similar studies by Hammond et al. (2008) and Ingalls, Hammond, Paez, and Rodriguez (2016) which also looked at parental perceptions of the IEP process, their knowledge of the process, and their attitudes about attending the initial IEP meeting.

## Method

### Participants and Setting

The participants of this study involved 298 parents who had been notified to participate in an upcoming initial IEP meeting for their son or daughter. All parents agreed to volunteer their participation in this study. The parents consisted of individuals who resided in a southwestern community in the United States. This region borders the United States and Mexico and consists of a population of approximately 85% of individuals coming from a Hispanic background. The individuals involved in this research mirrored the region's population with 85% of participants identifying themselves as being Hispanic. The parents came from one urban and six rural school districts within the region. The participants had varying levels of education that ranged from less than a high school degree to a master's degree. Their knowledge of the IEP meeting was limited for a majority of participants as approximately 73% of participants indicated they had very little knowledge as to what the IEP meeting entailed.

### Procedure

Data were collected over a 3 year period through a semi-structured interview process (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). The samples size included 298 parents who met the following criteria: (a) parents of children from early childhood and elementary school programs, (b) parents with children who had recently been referred for the initial special education evaluation, and (c) parents who were scheduled to attend the initial IEP meeting. The criteria and selection process assured a strong representative sample of parents would be involved in the study and provide the data needed to determine if an intervention training phase would be beneficial to parents attending their initial IEP meeting. Parents were selected for the study based on the sampling criteria.

To minimize selection bias, the interviewers identified parents with whom they had limited professional or personal interactions. The steps utilized to complete the semi-structured interviews were predetermined by the researchers of this study. The individuals completing the interviews with the parents were graduate students in a master's degree program within the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Services. Each of the individuals was seeking a degree in either special education or educational diagnostician. The interviewers, who also became the data collectors, were trained in using a semi-structured interview process which included both structured and unstructured questions. This type of interview process increases validity and reduces bias (Gay et al., 2006).

Standardization across interviews was assured by providing the interviewers with a set of nine predetermined interview questions. Seven questions were structured with a closed-ended design and two questions were unstructured with an open-ended design. Additionally, each parent was asked to provide the interviewers with two suggestions for other parents and school personnel to help improve the IEP process with parents.

The interviewers were trained to use a particular sequence and wording of the questions during the administration of the interview questions. They were instructed to write down the parents' responses verbatim. Each of the nine questions was written on a paper with adequate space in between each question for the interviewer to write the parents' exact responses. The additional two items for parental comments were also included on the interview sheet with ample space to write comments. The researchers of the study reviewed each of these questions/items with the interviewers to assure they were familiar with the interview sheet and that they understood the interview process (following the sequence, using the exact wording each interview item, and writing down the parents' answers verbatim).

The researchers of this project were university faculty within the Department of Educational Psychology and Special Services. Each researcher was very familiar of parental involvement in the IEP process and were instructors of both the graduate special education and educational diagnostician programs. Additionally, both researchers were familiar with the semi-structured interview process and the system of data analysis.

The parents' responses were analyzed by the researchers using a system of organizing, categorizing, and interpreting the data. The organization of the data involved tallying the data from closed-ended questions and assigning percentages of similar responses. The data from open-ended questions were compiled according to verbal responses and then were categorized according to themes. Initially, the data were analyzed by the two researchers independently. In the final phase of analysis, the researchers reviewed and revised the categories/themes of parental responses to achieve agreement. Data were then interpreted to determine the parents' readiness for the upcoming initial IEP meeting both prior and after the intervention.

## **Phases of the Study**

In an attempt to address the need for preparation of parents prior to the initial IEP meeting and to determine the success of the preparation activity, parents involved in this study participated in three phases of study. All phases of this study were completed prior to the parent's attendance at the initial IEP meeting. Phases one and three were approximately 30 minutes each in length and phase two was approximately 2 hours in length. All three phases occurred on the same day at one meeting and individually with the parent.

Each parent was interviewed asking him or her questions and each parent verbally responded to the interviewer's questions. Each of the parent's responses was written down verbatim. The questions addressed such issues as the parent's comfort level of attending the meeting, the parent's knowledge of special education terms and the law, what the parent believed the IEP meeting would entail, who would be attending the meeting, and the parent's understanding of people's roles at the meeting including their own role. Additionally, parents were asked if they had been prepared in any way by school personnel to attend and to be actively involved in the initial IEP meeting. This stage of the study was referred to as phase one.

Following this interview activity with the parents, the interviewer provided the parent with an informal training on each of the issues discussed in the interview. This stage of the study was referred to as phase two. An example of this training would be teaching the parent specific terms that may be used during the IEP meeting and their meanings. Another example of training was to inform parents on who will be at the meeting and the person's role. Many topics were discussed with the parents, questions were answered, and handouts were given to provide additional information.

The training was intended to prepare the parent for the upcoming IEP meeting. With this preparation, it was believed the parent would be more comfortable, knowledgeable, and involved in his/her participation with the school personnel. Additionally, the preparation was intended to assist the parent in developing a positive attitude and perception of the upcoming initial IEP meeting. The training program remained consistent all three years. Each interviewer, who completed the training, was told to have the training session be thorough to cover topics that parents had questions on and also cover the basics of the IEP meeting. The basics included helping the parent to understand what an IEP meeting was, the purpose of the meeting, who would attend the meeting, each person's role at the meeting, the meaning of terms and vocabulary that may be used, the purpose of the child's assessment, what special education services are, and the importance of the parent's participation and involvement in the meeting.

Following the training session, the trainer completed a post interview with the parents asking the same questions of the parent but from a different reference point as questions focused on their knowledge and perceptions following the training session. Figure one provides a listing of these follow-up questions. This stage of the study was referred to as phase three. For example in the initial interview (phase one), the parent was asked “What are your feelings about attending the initial IEP meeting that is coming up?” In the post-interview phase, parents were asked the same question but from the reference point that followed the training, i.e. “We have spent a lot of time talking about your upcoming IEP meeting. How do you now feel about attending the IEP meeting?” A listing of the nine questions initially asked of the parents are included in table one.

## Figure 1

### Questions Asked of Parents After the Training

- Q1: Since we have had a chance to talk and prepare you for the IEP meeting, what are your reactions now regarding your child’s referral for assessment?
- Q2: We have spent time talking about what a special education evaluation entails. Do you now feel like you know what the evaluation will involve?
- Q3: We have discussed what the IEP meeting is and the purpose of the meeting. Do you now feel like you are more familiar with what this meeting is?
- Q4: After our discussion regarding the IEP meeting, do you now know who will attend the meeting and what the people’s roles are?
- Q5: Do you also have a better understanding of what will happen at the IEP meeting?
- Q6: We have spent a lot of time talking about your upcoming IEP meeting. How do you now feel about attending the meeting?
- Q7: Do you have a good understanding of what your role will be at the meeting?
- Q8: If you are given the opportunity, do you now feel more comfortable asking questions, disagreeing with suggestions, and making comments at the IEP meeting?
- Q9: Do you feel prepared to attend and to participate in the upcoming IEP meeting?

Data were gathered over a three year period on parents' responses to each of the questions asked in phases one and three. Training also occurred with each of the parents (phase two) to cover any types of information parents needed to know to better prepare them for the initial IEP meeting. Parental preparation was thought to be a key to empowering parents with knowledge and thus increasing positive participation in the IEP process. Table one shows the results of data collected for each of the two interview phases, i.e. initial interview prior to attending the IEP meeting (phase one) and the post interview following the parents' involvement in a training session regarding the IEP meeting (phase three). An average score for each of the nine questions for the three years was calculated and displayed in table one. The table shows the percentage of responses prior to training (phase one) and following the training (phase three).

**Table 1**

***Parental Responses Regarding IEP Meeting***

| Questions   | Scores Before Training<br>(N=298) | Scores After Training<br>(N=298) |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Q1: Your child was referred for a special education assessment. Please tell me what your initial reaction to this referral was. |                                   |                                  |
| Ready/Prepared  | 31%                               | 70%                              |
| Shocked   | 68%                               | 29%                              |
| Q2: Your child is scheduled to be evaluated. Do you know what the evaluation will involve?                                      |                                   |                                  |
| Yes   | 13%                               | 46%                              |
| No  | 86%                               | 54%                              |
| Q3: You have been asked to attend an IEP meeting. Do you know what the IEP meeting is?  |                                   |                                  |
| Yes   | 21%                               | 64%                              |
| No  | 78%                               | 35%                              |
| Q4: Do you know who will attend the IEP meeting?  |                                   |                                  |
| Yes   | 15%                               | 60%                              |
| No  | 84%                               | 40%                              |
| Q5: Do you know what will happen at the IEP meeting?  |                                   |                                  |
| Yes   | 29%                               | 66%                              |
| No  | 71%                               | 34%                              |
| Q6: What are your feelings about attending the IEP meeting?   |                                   |                                  |
| Positive Feelings   | 18%                               | 65%                              |
| Negative Feelings   | 81%                               | 28%                              |



Q7: Do you know what your role will be at the IEP meeting?

|     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|
| Yes | 50% | 97% |
| No  | 50% | 3%  |

Q8: If given the opportunity, would you be comfortable asking questions, disagreeing with suggestions, and making comments at the meeting?

|     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|
| Yes | 62% | 89% |
| No  | 38% | 10% |

Q10: Has anyone prepared you for the upcoming IEP meeting?

|     |     |     |
|-----|-----|-----|
| Yes | 23% | 83% |
| No  | 73% | 17% |

As an additional component of this study, the interviewers asked the parents to provide two suggestions that could be given to other parents or school personnel regarding ways to improve the IEP process. It is very useful to have parents provide feedback based on their personal experiences regarding the process and especially on their attendance at the initial IEP meeting. Their ideas and comments can be vital in structuring or restructuring the IEP process from beginning to end. Figure two “Let’s Hear It from the Parents” contains specific feedback.

## Figure 2

### Let’s Hear it from the Parents

- Parents need to TALK to someone. Reading about the IEP process was not helpful.
  - I couldn’t seem to keep the terms straight and it was tedious sifting through mounds of information. Having someone explain it in plain English, without the lingo, during back and forth conversations made a huge difference.
- I think school personnel should talk to parents more about what the tests are and why they are being tested. This would make it a lot easier to get ready for the IEP meeting. Teachers should really explain to parents what the IEP process is from beginning to end. It sure would have taken a lot of stress off of me.
- Well I think it would be nice for all of the parents to receive a pamphlet for what to expect of the meeting because it can be very overwhelming for parents. It was definitely overwhelming for me at first because I was not sure what to exactly expect. Parents need the information because they are so worried about what is going to happen to their child. Learning about the IEP meeting will ease some of the tension for parents. Parents should be informed of what they can do prior to the meeting so they can prepare.
- It is important for school staff to understand where the parents are coming from. They deal with this all the time plus the children they are talking about are not their children. Therefore they should be caring and patient with parents. Many times parents are not educated so explaining the process in detail is crucial so they understand the IEP process. Also letting them feel like the parent is part of the team and the team is working together for the best interest of the child.
- I think it is so important for parents to meet with someone prior to the meeting because I didn’t know what was going to go on. I was really scared. If I had not met with you to talk about the IEP meeting, I probably wouldn’t have asked any questions. It’s uncomfortable for me to be in a room with people who know so much but I finally realized that nobody knows my son more than I do and I need to be his voice.

## Final Thoughts

It is interesting to view the changes in averages across the three years from phase one to phase three. In question one, data shows an increase in parents' rating of feeling prepared for the meeting. This increase went from 31% to 70% (39% increase). Likewise in question one, parents decreased their feelings of being nervous or feeling shocked about their child's referral for the special education assessment. This decrease went from 68% to 29% (39% decrease).

Similar patterns across the rest of the questions showed a positive increase or decrease with each question item. The findings for question six were very critical as parental perceptions about attending the meeting could set the tone for the parents for future meetings and involvement. When parents were asked about their feelings of attending the initial IEP meeting, a majority of parents, 81% stated they were experiencing negative feelings about attending the meeting. But after receiving the training, their feelings regarding their attendance changed in a positive direction. The negative feelings regarding their participation in the meeting decreased from 81% to 28% which is a decrease of 53%.

Another interesting finding in this study was how parents began to see they had a right to be actively involved in the discussion with school personnel regarding their child's education program. When asked during phase one if they would be comfortable to ask questions, disagree with suggestions, and make comments at the IEP meeting, 62% believed it was appropriate for them to have this type of involvement. After the training in phase three, the percentage increased to 89% (an increase of 27%) believing they had a right to participate in the discussions at the IEP meeting.

A critical question asked of the parents at phase one and three involved the preparation of the parent for the initial IEP meeting. Parents were asked if school personnel had prepared him or her for the IEP meeting. Prior to the training session, only 23% of family members responded positively regarding their preparation for the meeting. In contrast, following the training in phase three, parents' ratings made a dramatic increase. The positive responses jumped to 83% feeling prepared (60% increase).

Although one of the purposes of this study was to determine if parents would benefit from attending a training session to learn about the IEP process, it would have been beneficial to have interviewed parents after the initial IEP meeting. This would have given data on the long term benefits of the training and the actual success parents had in the initial IEP meeting. Another consideration that may have strengthened the results of this study would be the use of a one or two week delay in implementing phase three. This delay would allow parents time to reflect on the training information and perhaps have the needed time to digest their newly acquired knowledge. Consequently data may have been different in the post interview, i.e. parents may have reported a higher level of being prepared for the meeting and having less anxiety. A third point of consideration was whether or not the interviewers should have probed the parents on their responses to the questions in phase three. The interviewers were instructed by the researchers to maintain the process of asking each of the identified questions in a particular order and wording. If the interviewers had strayed away from this research design, the standardization of the procedures used in this study would have been compromised.

Overall the specific training the parents received appeared to have positively impacted the parents' attitudes and perceptions of the initial IEP meeting. Parents revealed they were more accepting of their child's referral for the special education assessment. They stated they had more knowledge about the meeting's agenda, who would be at the meeting and the details of their roles, what their child's evaluation involved, and what the IEP meeting was. It appears these types of information successfully opened the door for the parents to begin their collaboration and to become equal partners with the school personnel.

This research is very important to the field of special education and early intervention. For years, school personnel, family members, and various other professionals in the field have discussed the value of empowering parents and family members to become more involved in the IEP process (Bezdek, et al., 2010; Ingalls, et al., 2016; Questions and Answers about IDEA, 2016). As noted earlier in the literature, individuals have suggested reasons why parents are not as involved in the process and included suggestions to increase parents' and family members' involvement.

A study of this type provides both parents and school personnel with an example of an intervention program that appeared to increase the parents' knowledge and consequently their involvement in their child's initial IEP meeting. From the findings, individuals can begin to take the model used in this study and expand on it with possible more trainings with the parents prior to the meeting, follow-up sessions with the parents to monitor their knowledge and answer questions, and additional meetings with the school personnel to assure they are preparing parents adequately for the initial IEP meeting. This parental preparation model is a beginning step for parents and school personnel to use to improve their partnership.

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# Latest Employment Opportunities Posted on NASET

## Licensed Special Education Teacher

Memphis, TN

Job Category: Teaching

### Description:

**\*\*Now Offering \$2,000 sign on payment\*\* and **\*\*\$2,000 relocation allowance (if applicable)\*\*****

### Program Overview:

Youth Villages' Residential Treatment programs serve children with emotional and behavioral problems. Our residential campuses provide the setting for an intensive treatment program that combines the unique balance of structure and freedom. This enables children and their families to identify, understand and cope with their individual needs and develop the skills necessary to succeed in less restrictive settings. We have three different types of facilities—Intensive Residential Centers, Open Campuses, and Group Homes. Located in Tennessee, Georgia, and Oregon, all of these facilities utilize the Re-Education of Emotionally Disturbed Children therapy model (Re-Ed). The majority of these youth attend the fully accredited schools which are located on our residential treatment campuses.

### Position Overview

- Plan for individual and group activities to stimulate growth in language, social, and other skills.
- Participate in training and in-service activities.
- Administer and interprets testing to determine academic needs.
- Develop and uses a variety of teaching techniques.
- Produce lesson plans that reflect the individual educational needs of students.
- Prepare reports in compliance with school guidelines.
- Maintain progress notes, attendance records, and grade scores in a timely manner.
- Other essential duties as needed.
- Candidates may have the opportunity to teach in specialized subjects
- Monday – Friday, 7:30am to 3:30pm.

### Additional Information:

Small Class Sizes to allow more one on one attention to individual students and their educational needs. The standard Youth Villages class size ranges from 8-15 children. Tuition & Licensure reimbursement, and training for your career growth and advancement. Our schools operate year-round

## Requirements:

- A Bachelor's degree in education with appropriate certification is required (K-12)
- Active Licensure in TN with an endorsement in Special Education is required
- Experience in special education or teaching experience in a clinical environment is preferred
- Experience working with at-risk youth a major plus
- Experience working with youth is required
- Excellent written, verbal, and oral skills
- Ability to manage multiple priorities simultaneously
- Basic computer knowledge
- Ability to maintain a flexible schedule
- **Benefits:**
- Medical, Dental, Prescription Drug Coverage and Vision
- Retirement Savings Pension Plan
- 403 (b)
- 2 weeks paid vacation
- 12 paid sick days per year
- 10 paid holidays
- Mileage & Cell Phone Reimbursement (when applicable)
- EOE

## Contact:

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\*\*\*\*\*

## **Director of Student Services**

**Peterborough NH**

Job Category: Director

### **QUALIFICATIONS:**

- Master's Degree from an accredited college/university.
- Three years successful teaching experience or equivalent.
- Three years successful administrative experience or equivalent
- NH State Certification #0006.
- Demonstrated evidence of excellent written and oral communication skills.
- Excellent interpersonal skills, including group facilitation.
- Such alternatives to the above qualifications as the School Board may find appropriate and acceptable.

### **SUMMARY:**

The Director of Student Services is a Central Office 12-month position. The Director plans, directs, and reviews the activities and operations of student services. The position is responsible for Special Education staff, Guidance, 504, and District Nursing, as well as assessing needs, developing programs and implementing services. The Director coordinates assigned activities with outside agencies, psychologists, speech language pathologists/therapists and speech assistants, OT/PT, social workers, nurses, Transition Coordinator, Crisis Prevention Counselor, and Section 504 accommodations. The Director is responsible for homeless, home education, ELL and provides support to the Assistant Superintendent for instructional services.

### **APPLY:**

For more information, and to apply, please go to [www.convalsd.net](http://www.convalsd.net), click Careers and begin the application process.

### **BENEFITS:**

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## **Teacher of the Visually Impaired**

### **New Orleans**

Job Category: Teacher of the visually impaired

### **Description:**

Help Lighthouse Louisiana to build a better tomorrow for our students with vision impairment, while living in an exciting city with food, fun, and festivals galore.

Lighthouse Louisiana is seeking a Certified Teacher of the Visually Impaired who is eager to use his/her skills and creativity to provide itinerant vision services and to develop youth programs for children with vision loss in the Greater New Orleans area.

Lighthouse Louisiana is dedicated to ensuring that our youth are receiving well-rounded opportunities to learn through quality instruction and play. Our programs expand beyond the classroom to include Goal Ball, recreation, transition skills training, and a summer camp. If you want to make a difference in the lives of children who are blind in a holistic environment with an interdisciplinary team, contact Lighthouse Louisiana today.

Applicants who do not meet the following requirements listed need not apply.

- Education: BA in Education or M.Ed. with VI certification from an accredited university.
- Special Knowledge or Skills: Proficiency with Braille, Assistive technology for the blind, magnification, and adaptations for children with varying degrees of vision loss; Able to screen for referral to O&M services; excellent written and verbal communications; proficient in use of Internet, email, and standard software applications (i.e. Microsoft Word, Excel, and PowerPoint); proficiency with Nemeth code Braille and methods of teaching math to blind students.
- Experience: At least 1-year teaching as a TVI. Itinerant experience preferred.

### **Requirements:**

See the job description.

### **Benefits:**

Signing Bonus - \$2000/ Health, Dental, Vision, Flexible Spending Account, Basic Life, Voluntary Life, Short and Long-Term Disability, Retirement, Vacation, Sick and Holiday.

### **Contact:**

Terri J. Brown

HR Manager

P. 504-899-4501, x229

F. 504-895-4162

[tbrown@lighthouselouisiana.org](mailto:tbrown@lighthouselouisiana.org)

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## Private Teacher

**Chicago, IL**

Job Category: Education

### **Description:**

Flexible start date between now and Spring/Summer of 2018! Family based in Lincoln Park, IL seeks a Private Teacher to co-develop, manage, and implement the education plan/home school program for an elite student athlete who is entering high school next year. Must have a four-year degree, with a special education or learning disability certification; advanced degree in special education strongly preferred. Experience with individualized education plans (IEPs) and at least two years of classroom teaching experience is required. The family is looking for someone who is excited about this opportunity and has a passion for what they do! If you have experience teaching at a Jesuit school or other private school environment, working as a private tutor or specialized camp counselor, or teaching in another unique learning environment, please apply! Must be happy to travel to Florida and Arizona during the winter months. The family is willing to hire the right person immediately for a full-time role to perform tutoring until the 2018-19 school year. The family is also willing to wait and hire the private teacher to start this Spring/Summer. This is a full-time position with compensation of \$90,000 to \$110,000 offered, depending on experience, with benefits. Relocation assistance is available; must be willing to live within a reasonable commute to Lincoln Park. For consideration, please apply for position #410 at [www.mahlermatch.com](http://www.mahlermatch.com). Qualified applicants will be contacted.

### **Benefits:**

This is a full-time position with compensation of \$90,000 to \$110,000 offered, depending on experience, with benefits. Relocation assistance is available; must be willing to live within a reasonable commute to Lincoln Park.

### **Contact:**

For consideration, please apply for position #410 at [www.mahlermatch.com](http://www.mahlermatch.com).

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## **Special Education - Bard High School Early College**

**New York City**

Job Category: Teaching Position - Special Education in mathematic

### **Description:**

Bard High School Early College (BHSEC) Queens, a ten-minute subway ride from central Manhattan, is founded on a partnership between Bard College and the New York City Department of Education. We invite applications for a full-time special education faculty position in mathematics and/or science beginning immediately. BHSEC, a national model in the field of public school reform, enables talented and highly motivated students to move in four years from the ninth grade through the first two years of college, earning an associate of arts (A.A.) degree from Bard College as well as a New York State Regents high school diploma. The academic program emphasizes small class size and a commitment to teaching a diverse student body in a liberal arts environment.

We seek to hire an individual with experience working with special education students who has significant background in mathematics and/or science. The successful candidate may work in one of our ninth or tenth grade integrative co-teaching classrooms and as a one-on-one special education teacher for a student with severe physical disabilities. The position allows close work with colleagues to find avenues for students to enjoy learning and to prepare students to enter the college curriculum at the end of the 10th grade.

### **Requirements:**

The successful candidate must have either a Ph.D. in special education or certification to teach special education in any state, and be available to start as soon as possible.

### **Contact:**

All applications are submitted through Interfolio com at: <http://apply.interfolio.com/41835>. To apply, upload a letter of interest, a curriculum vitae including contacts for references, and a brief (c. 250 word) description of an experience you had as a student or as a teacher that has influenced your teaching. For relatively recent graduates, please also include a copy of your undergraduate and graduate school transcripts.

Inquiries may be directed via email to: Valeri Thomson, at [thomson@bard.edu](mailto:thomson@bard.edu)

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# Lead ED Special Education Teacher

Washington, DC

Job Category: Special Education Teacher - Secondary

## Description

The Lead Special Education Teacher for Cornerstone is an integral member of the academics team whose focus is to guide students in their social-emotional and academic development. In this role, the Cornerstone Lead Teacher will serve as a case manager for all students enrolled in the program (6-10 students), they will ensure compliance with all special education regulations and timelines and ensure all students are receiving services. The ED teacher is responsible for all students engaged in academic experiences guided by high expectations, research-based pedagogy and care for each child's developmental needs.

The Lead Special Education teacher is responsible for ensuring the services are delivered with fidelity. This teacher will collaborate with the academic, wellbeing and student life teams, external partners and services providers as well as parents to provide an unparalleled personalized academic experience.

Monument Academy values the personal well-being and professional growth of our staff. The Lead Special Education Cornerstone teacher will create a personalized development plan collaboratively with the Principal and will receive weekly coaching to ensure progress toward personal and professional growth.

## Key responsibilities include, but are not limited to the following:

- Promote Monument Academy's core values and model the highest behavior standards for staff and student at all times
- Create and implement personalized learning plans for each student that are data-informed and Common Core State Standards aligned.
- Deliver grade level curricula identified by Monument Academy with fidelity and consult on strengths and challenges of the curricula
- Collaborate with the Academic Team to improve lesson plans and instructional materials
- Assist in the development of IEP goals and objectives and ensure appropriate implementation of student interventions through collaboration with the Classroom Teachers
- Utilize provided supplemental resources for intervention and enrichment and identify or create additional resources, as necessary
- Demonstrate commitment to the implementation of Positive Behavioral Supports and Interventions and Positive Action to maintain a positive, safe, productive, and child-centered learning environment
- Utilize data to assess student learning and the effectiveness of teaching practices
- Collaborate with academic team members as well as other teams within the school to share student information
- Implement student-specific interventions and track related progress for both academic and social-emotional needs
- Communicate regularly with parents and caregivers regarding student progress and challenges
- Conduct home visits with another staff member as needed
- Fully participate in professional development opportunities on and off property throughout the year
- Provide and seek feedback from other members of the Academic Team and Monument Academy staff and leadership

## Requirements

- Three or more years of classroom teaching experience in an upper elementary or middle school in an urban setting, inclusive classroom and/or co-teaching experience preferred
- Experience working with at-risk youth, foster youth, or youth with high social emotional needs highly desired;
- Demonstrated ability to set ambitious goals with students and data-supported evidence that these goals were met;
- Experience with the IEP process from assessment to identification and creation to monitoring and review;
- Thorough knowledge of special education laws and regulations;
- Cultural competency in working with students and families from different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and sexual orientation backgrounds;
- Ability to connect with families/caregivers;
- Highly qualified designation as recognized by District of Columbia Public Schools
- Bachelor's degree required. Special Education certification required

## Benefits

- Relocation package available plus a signing bonus of \$1000
- Competitive compensation commensurate with experience. Monument Academy is committed to its policy of full inclusion and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation or national and ethnic origin in hiring and employment, nor in the administration of its educational policies, or admissions policies.

## Contact

Marcia Sandifer, Recruiter

[Marcia.Sandifer@monumentacademydc.org](mailto:Marcia.Sandifer@monumentacademydc.org)

[www.monumentacademy.org](http://www.monumentacademy.org)

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## Assistant Professor of Education

Bethlehem, PA

Job Category: Assistant Professor in Special Education

## Description

The Moravian College Education Department invites applications for a tenure-track position in educational psychology with a focus on special education, inclusive education, and/or disability studies in education, beginning the Fall Term 2018. Members of the Moravian College Education Department view and carry out their work in the context of the College's liberal arts ethos.

Preference will be given to candidates who demonstrate expertise in and a commitment to inclusionary practices and critical disability studies. The Department seeks candidates with experience and knowledge in multicultural education and culturally and linguistically diverse students. Candidates must be ready to share in the work of a thriving Education Department with a clear commitment to social justice, critical perspectives in education, and strong communities of practice.

## Requirements

Qualified applicants must have a record of at least three years of successful child-centered, public school teaching experience and hold an appropriate doctorate degree. ABD considered. In addition, successful candidates must demonstrate a genuine desire to participate fully in a liberal arts environment and be committed first to teaching and next to scholarship and service. All positions are subject to budget availability.

## Benefits

Successful candidates will have opportunities to teach additional undergraduate courses in early childhood/elementary, middle level and secondary education. Other instructional opportunities exist, including the teaching of foundations, Social Studies methods, and educational research. The undergraduate program offers certificates in early childhood education (PreK-Grade 4), middle level education (Grade s 4-8), most areas in secondary education (Grades 7-12), as well as certification in the PreK-12 areas of art, music, and world language.

Opportunities to teach in other undergraduate areas in support of the liberal arts curriculum, as well as within the graduate education program, are also available. In addition to awarding the Master of Education and Master of Arts in Teaching degrees, the graduate education program offers certification for principals, supervisors of curriculum and instruction, reading specialists, ESL teachers, and special educators.

## Contact:

Dr. Joseph Shosh

[search.education@moravian.edu](mailto:search.education@moravian.edu)

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## Acknowledgements

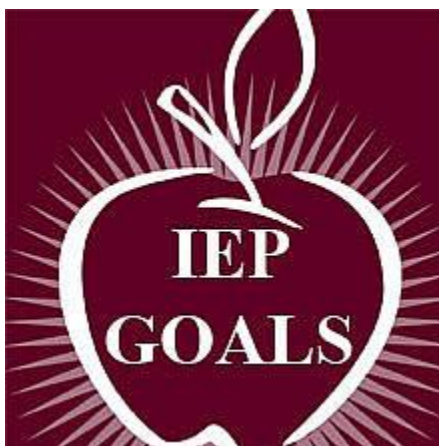
Portions of this month's *NASET's Special Educator e-Journal* were excerpted from:

- Center for Parent Information and Resources
- Committee on Education and the Workforce
- FirstGov.gov-The Official U.S. Government Web Portal
- Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals (JAASEP)
- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- National Institute of Health
- National Organization on Disability
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Education-The Achiever
- U.S. Department of Education-The Education Innovator
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- U.S. Office of Special Education

The **National Association of Special Education Teachers** (NASET) thanks all of the above for the information provided for this edition of the Special Educator e-Journal

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