

COLLABORATION & ADVOCACY WITHIN THE IEP PROCESS

Building Authentic Family–School Partnerships

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Meet Your Presenters: *Alicia*

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Two perspectives:
professional
practice, advocacy,
and the parent
experience

Today's Conversation, *Alicia*

- The IEP through the family's eyes



- What authentic collaboration actually looks like



- Communication that builds—or damages—trust



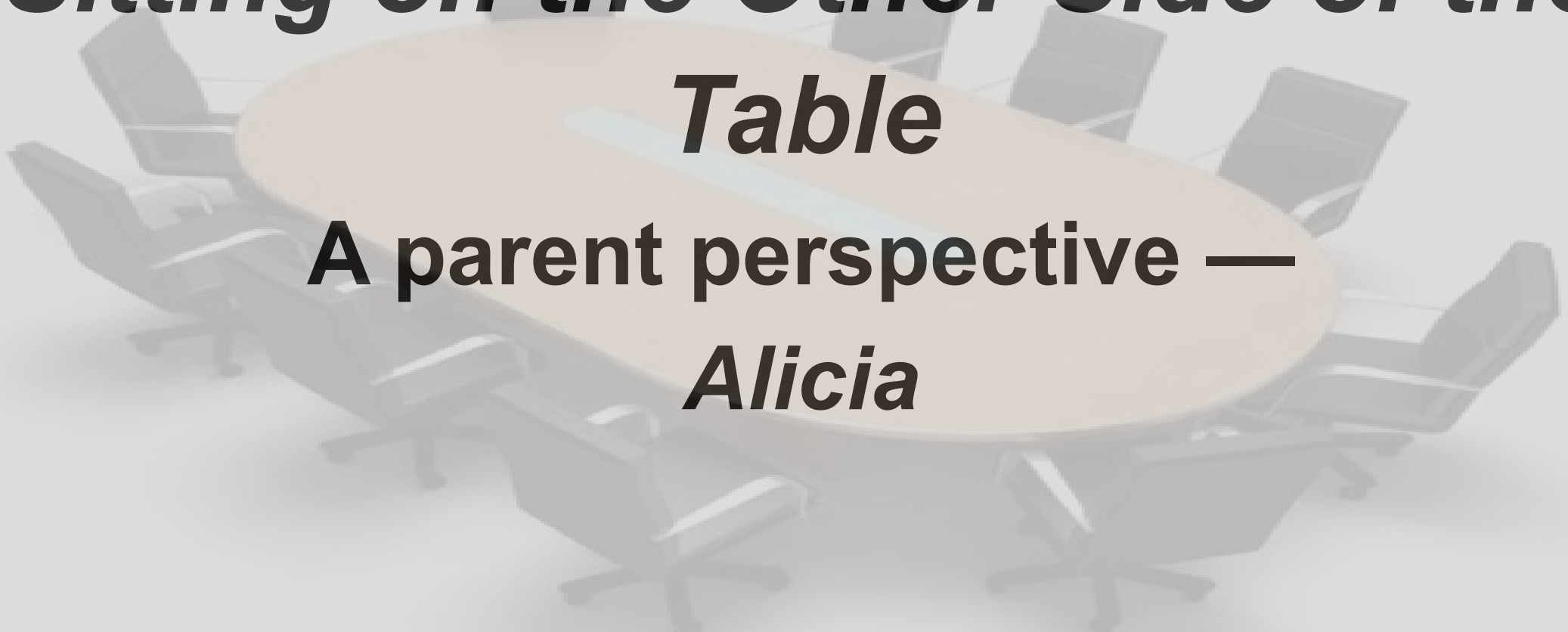
- Parent advocacy as part of the IEP process



- Practical ways educators can strengthen family partnerships

Sitting on the Other Side of the Table

**A parent perspective —
*Alicia***



What Parents May Bring Into the Room

- Hope
- Questions
- Expertise about their child
- Previous experiences with schools
- Fear of making the wrong decision
- A desire to be heard
- A vision for their child's future

What Parents Need From the IEP Team

Not simply a seat at the table — meaningful participation at the table.

- Respect for what families know about their child
- Plain language and honest explanations
- Real opportunities to ask, question, disagree, and contribute

Getting Parents Involved: Use Your Seat at the Table

- Share your student's strengths, interests, needs, and goals.
- Ask questions when something is not clear.
- Discuss what the data mean—not just what the numbers are.
- Discuss what you are seeing at school, in the community, when you talk with other teachers and staff members.
- Discuss: “What will this support look like day to day?”
- Discuss how progress will be measured and communicated.

KEEP GOING...

Remember, Parents are the Experts TOO.

REFLECTION • SHARE IN THE CHAT

REFLECTION #1 • CHAT

**Imagine walking into an IEP meeting as a parent.
What is ONE thing an educator could do in the
first five minutes that would communicate:
“You belong at this table.”**

Drop one thought in the chat.

A top-down view of a group of people sitting around a long wooden table, eating a meal. The table is set with various dishes, including spaghetti, salads, bread, and small bowls of vegetables. The people are engaged in conversation and eating. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent grey box containing the title text.

Collaboration: More Than Being in the Same Meeting *Beth*

Effective IEP Collaboration

Build strong working relationships among team members:

- Share responsibility for goals and decisions.
- Focus on the student's strengths and needs.
- Invite the expertise of every team member—including families.
- Use respectful communication and follow through on agreed actions.

Family-School Partnerships (Pearson et al., 2023)

Characterized by team members and families/ caregivers BOTH contributing expertise that support their students, families, and professionals who support them

Strong partnerships show increased IEP goal attainment and daily living skills

Weak partnerships can impact interactions with families, student achievement, and educational placement decisions

Communication Can Build Trust—or Defensiveness

Listen actively to remember what is said and convey respect.

- *Monitor* verbal and nonverbal communication.
- *Ask* questions that invite precise, meaningful feedback.
- *Use* language that demonstrates respect and openness.
- **Remember:** the words we use can support understanding—or create defensiveness.

Say This, Not That: IEP Edition

- *Instead of “Do you understand?”*

→

“What questions do you have about what we’ve discussed?”

- *Instead of “We’ve already decided...”*

→ “

Here’s what we’re recommending and why. What are your thoughts?”

- *Instead of “He doesn’t do that at school.”*

→

“Tell us more about what you’re seeing at home.”

- *Instead of “That’s our policy.”*

→

“Let’s talk about what your child needs.”

REFLECTION • SHARE IN THE CHAT

REFLECTION #2 • CHAT

A parent disagrees with the team's recommendation.

What is one response that keeps the conversation collaborative rather than defensive?

Share a response in the chat.

When Collaboration Breaks Down, *Beth*

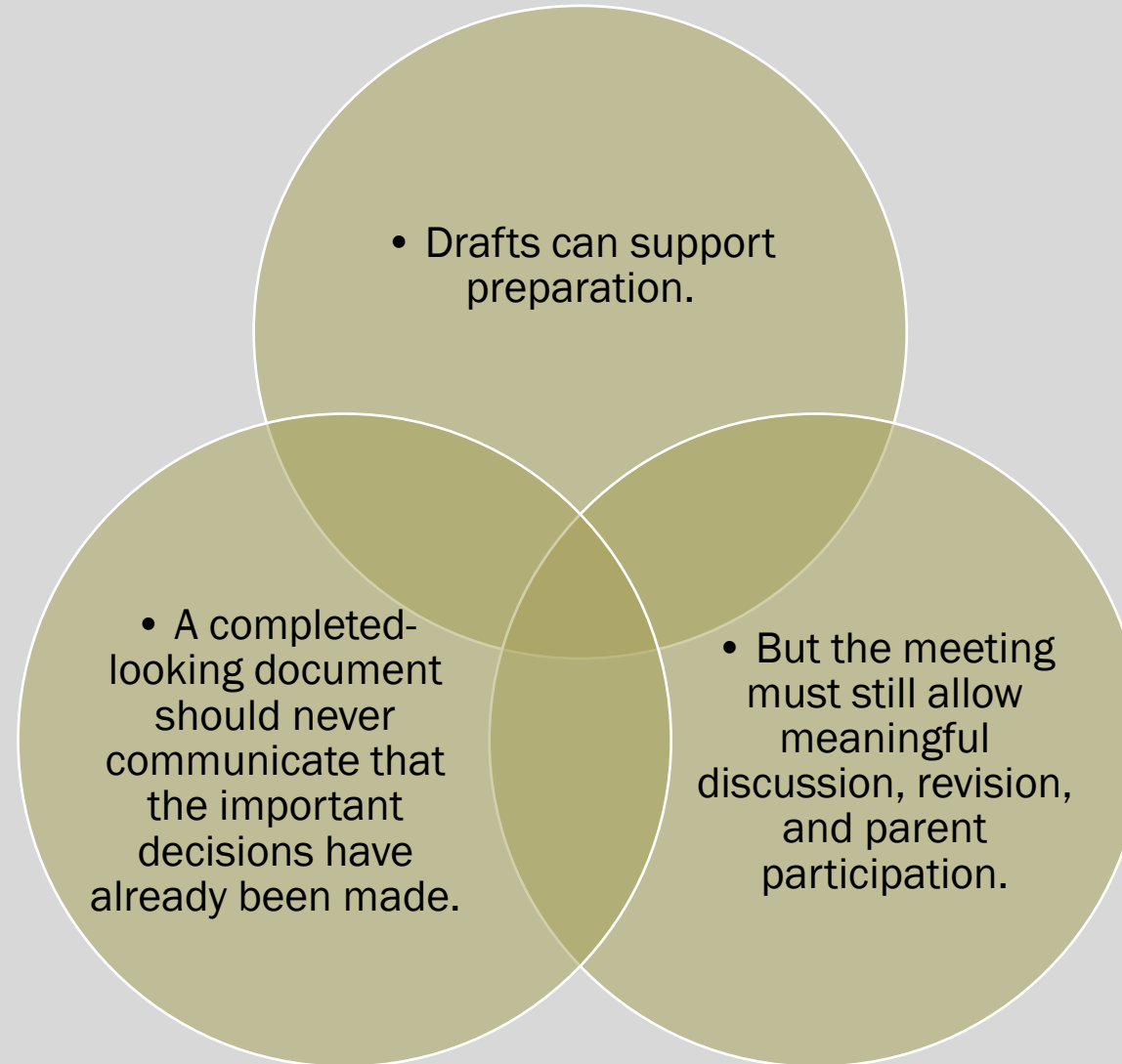


When Parents Do Not Experience Partnership

Key decisions may be made outside of meetings.

- Team members may defer to the perceived “experts” leading the meeting.
- Parent input may be experienced as ignored or secondary.
- Draft IEPs can limit within-meeting collaboration when they feel predetermined.
- Team culture can shape which options families perceive as available.

A Draft Should Start a Conversation—Not End One





Advocacy Can be the Beginning of Collaboration

Beth

Parent Advocates (Pearson et al., 2023)

Students with families who advocate:

Receive more services (Burke et al., 2018)

More inclusive educational placements (Trainor, 2010)

BETH'S EXPERIENCE TIP:

Before you even begin to draft an IEP, reach out to parents to get their input about all IEP components.

Be proactive in including their expertise.

Family Advocacy (Pearson et al., 2023)

Under IDEA, parents are to provide a check on school-based IEP decisions

Ensure their students educational needs are being met (Trainor, 2010)

“us” vs. “them” feeling based on numbers at meetings (Mortier et al., 2021)

Educators should help build families’ capacity for advocacy (Pearson et al., 2023)

Historically marginalized families express lack of skills and knowledge for advocacy (Burke et al., 2018; Pearson et al., 2020).

What Do We Do Differently?

Alicia



Before the IEP Meeting

Ask families for concerns, priorities, and strengths.

- Explain what to expect and who will be at the meeting.
- Invite parent input before drafting IEP components.
- Share information in accessible language.
- Identify questions before everyone enters the room.

During the IEP Meeting

Speak with families—not at them.

- Pause intentionally for parent input.
- Explain jargon and data in plain language.
- Welcome questions and disagreement.
- Keep the child—not the system—at the center of the conversation.

After the IEP Meeting

Follow through on agreed actions!

- Communicate progress in ways families can understand.
- Continue the relationship outside the annual IEP meeting.
- Revisit concerns when needed.
- Do not wait for a crisis to communicate with families.

REFLECTION • SHARE IN THE CHAT

REFLECTION #3 • CHAT

Think about your next IEP meeting or family interaction.

What is ONE thing you will do differently?

Put your comment in the chat.

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Thank You • Questions

Put your questions in the chat.