

Starting & Running Effective Special Education Parent Advisory Groups



The START Project is a collaboration of the
New Jersey Department of Education Office of Special Education (NJOSEP)
and Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)
Funded by IDEA Part B funds

What SPAN Provides

- TRAINING
- TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
- INFORMATION
- SUPPORT

...to parents of children with disabilities and special health and emotional needs, or who are at risk of inappropriate classification.

START Project

TOGETHER!

Families Can Make A Difference

Improve Special Education Programs & Services
Improve Student Outcomes

- Assistance is available for schools and districts and for parents and parent leaders to enhance family engagement to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

“The way schools care about children is reflected in the way schools care about the children’s families.

If educators view children simply as students, *they are likely to see the family as separate from the school.* That is, the family is expected to do its job and leave the education of children to the schools.

If educators view students as children, *they are likely to see both the family and community as partners with the school in children’s education and development.*

Partners recognize their shared interest in and responsibilities for children, and they work together to create better programs and opportunities for students.”

Dr. Joyce Epstein, “Caring for the Children We Share”

N.J.A.C. 6A:14-1.2(h)

Special Education Parent Advisory Group

“Each board of education shall ensure that a special education parent advisory group is in place in the district to provide input to the district on issues concerning students with disabilities.”

How Committed Am I to the Idea of “Parents As Advisors?”

For the Parent:

- Can I look beyond my own child’s and family experiences?
- Do I listen respectfully to the professional opinion?
- Do I bring a spirit of collaboration to the table?



How Committed Am I to the Idea of “Parents As Advisors?”

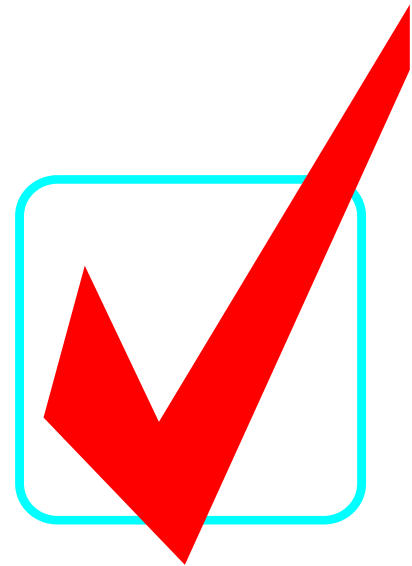
For the District:

- Do I believe that parents can look beyond their own families' experience
- Do I value parents' opinions as important?
- Do I work to create an environment where parents are supported and comfortable enough to speak freely?



Purpose/Function

- To provide suggestions and input to address system level needs identified by the district, students, and by families.
- To provide input and feedback to the district on proposed plans.
- To provide an opportunity to enhance and strengthen collaboration in the district.
- To advise on unmet needs of children with disabilities.



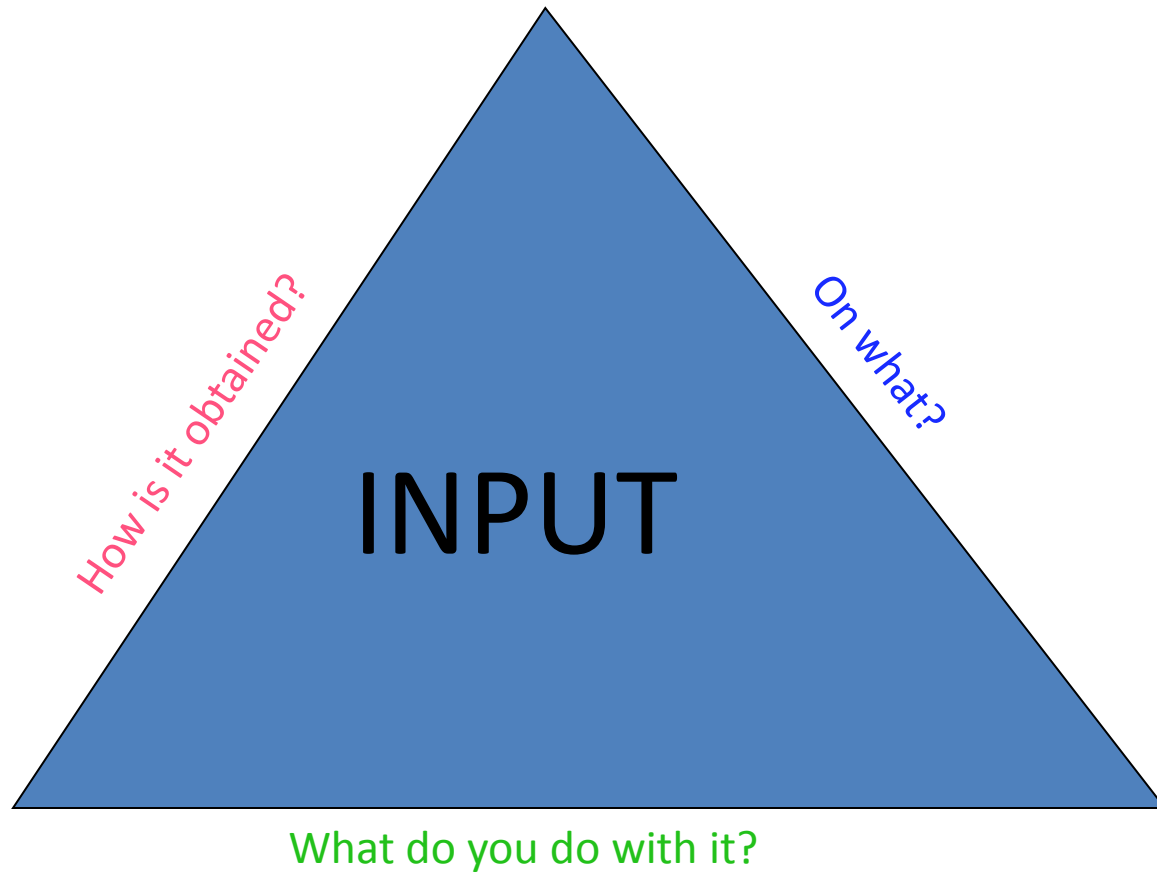
Key Role: Input



“There is a significant statistical relationship between the level of family involvement and improved outcomes for children and young adults. Acknowledging families as assets in our schools (and other systems) contributes to our children’s and young adults’ success as learners, future leaders and productive citizens in our communities.”

Parents Reaching Out, Spring 2006

Key Role: Input



Keeping the Focus on Input

- Keep a *systems focus*: make sure the group keeps its focus on improving policy, services & programs.
- An Advisory Group is not a *support group*, or a place for a *gripe session*.
- Avoid getting bogged down in busy work; such as doing carnivals, information fairs, fund raising, organizing speakers, etc.



Parents as Advisors

- Help families understand their role as “advisors”
- Discuss the difference between individual vs. systemic issues



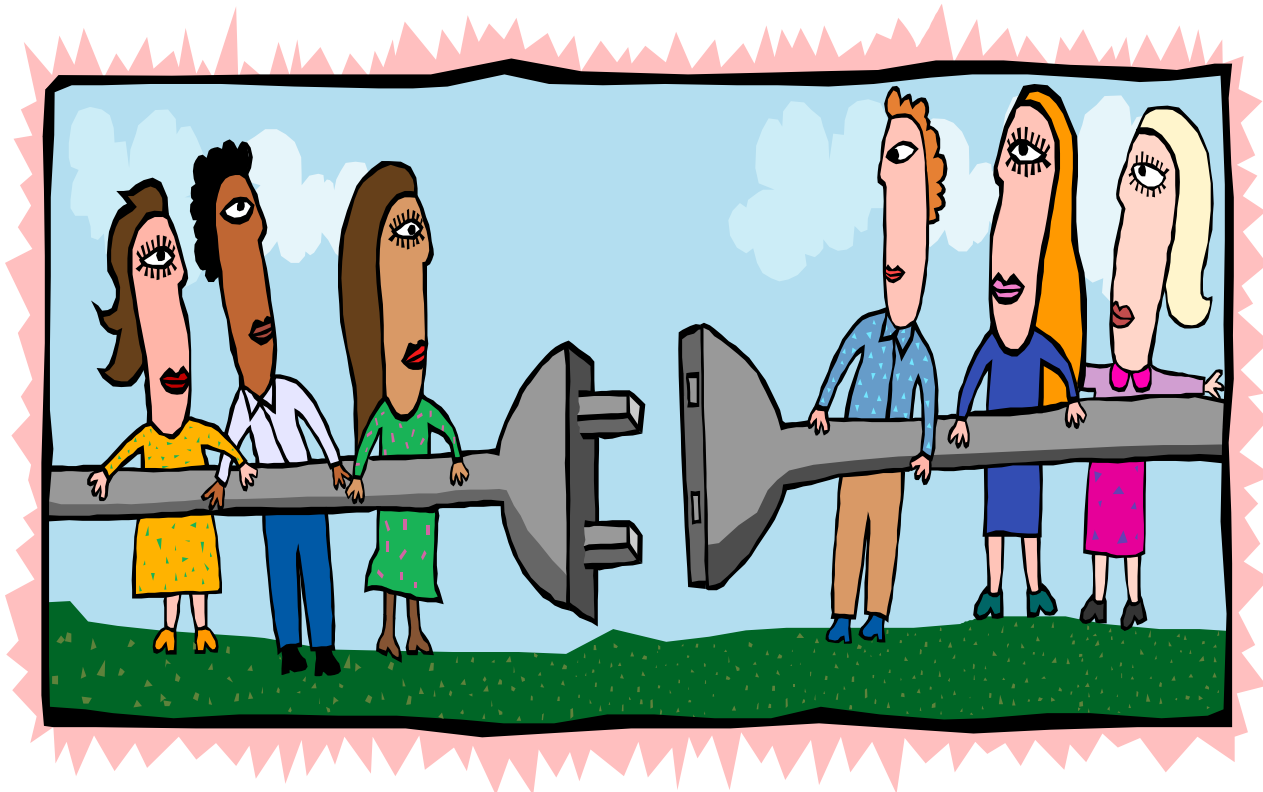
Additional Examples of Issues to Provide Input:

- District policies and procedures
- Funding issues
- Staffing
- Professional development needs
- Facility issues; such as accessibility, location of programs
- Strategic plans and district goals
- Curriculum development



Potential Barriers

- Professional attitudes
- Families' reluctance
- Administrative barriers
- It is hard work



What is a Steering Committee?

- A “steering committee” is a “**governing body**” used to organize committed stakeholders and empower them to “steer” a project (or group of projects) to successful conclusion(s).
- *Steering determines what the job is.*
 - ***purpose and vision*** must be clearly defined
 - must be monitored
 - must be maintained.
- Role of the Steering Committee:
 - to deliberate
 - make decisions
 - advise provide strategic oversight and to
 - serve as the primary “advocate” for all the initiatives/actions
- **Four (4) Keys Actions to Steering Committee Success**
 - you must define the mission,
 - you must conduct committee business you need to organize properly to get the job done,
 - you must live by the (3) C's of quality committees - ***Collaboration, Cooperation and Communication..***

Developing & Implementing Effective Education Advisory Groups

1. Review district's history.
2. Create Vision/Mission
3. Discuss/develop operational structure.
4. Define membership.
5. Set goals and priorities.
6. Identify resources & supports.



Thank You
for joining us for this presentation

For more information contact us at:



35 Halsey Street, 4th Floor
Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: 973-642-8100
Toll Free: (800) 654 - SPAN
Fax: (973) 642 - 8080
www.spannj.org