# Fostering Collaborative IEP Processes

## Overcoming Barriers and Building Strong Partnerships

The breaking down of barriers in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process starts with teamwork and shared understanding. This resource aims to enhance collaboration within the IEP process by helping educators and families identify and address common barriers. Through effective strategies and meaningful communication, this resource promotes a more inclusive, productive IEP process that values everyone's contributions. Emphasizing structural solutions, the guide encourages the design of supportive systems, processes, and environments that overcome implicit and explicit IEP barriers, shifting the focus from individual blame to creating spaces that enable all participants to thrive.

### How to Use This Resource

This document highlights six common barriers in the IEP process: **collaboration**, **communication**, **conflicting perspectives**, **awareness and knowledge**, **relationships**, and **time/resources**.

### How to Navigate This Resource:

- **Explore Goals and Barriers**: Review each barrier and an accompanying goal that IEP teams can strive toward.
- **Learn and Apply Strategies:** Discover practical strategies to reduce identified barriers.
- **Pause and Reflect:** Reflect how these barriers have impacted your IEP experience and that of your IEP team members. Consider past challenges and explore additional strategies for overcoming persistent obstacles. Document these reflections in the "Let's Practice" section.

**Important to note:** Throughout this document, we use the term "parent(s)" in accordance with California Education Code.



# Collaboration

Collaboration means working with others to achieve a common goal. It involves sharing ideas, resources, and responsibilities, while valuing the contributions of all participants. In a collaborative effort, people combine their strengths, skills, and perspectives to solve problems, make decisions, or complete tasks more effectively than they could on their own.

## Goal

All IEP team members meaningfully participate in the IEP process—before, during, and after the IEP meeting.

## Potential Barrier

The environment lacks structures and strategies to foster meaningful participation throughout the IEP process.

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- **Foster meaningful participation** by providing training opportunities to educators and families on ways to cultivate participation throughout the IEP journey.
- Connect parent(s) to **Family Empowerment Centers (FECs)** for additional support.
- Ask the parent(s) for communication preferences using the **Family Communication Preference Survey**.
- Utilize prepared checklists to assist IEP team members throughout the IEP process:
  - ☐ **IEP Planning Checklist for Special Education Providers**
  - ☐ **IEP Planning Checklist for Administrative Designees**
  - ☐ **IEP Planning Checklist for General Education Teachers**
  - ☐ **IEP Planning Checklist for Parent(s)** (additional languages available)
  - ☐ **IEP Planning Checklist for Students**

**Pause and Reflect:** Think about the top IEP barriers experienced in your context. What has worked well to mitigate these barriers? Where might you implement additional strategies within your IEP process?

## Let's Practice:

| Barriers Related to Collaboration | Potential Strategies to Overcome Barriers |
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# Communication

Communication is the exchange of information, ideas, thoughts, or feelings between individuals through verbal or nonverbal means. Communication can occur through various channels such as speech, writing, gestures, facial expressions, or electronic media. Effective communication facilitates understanding, collaboration, and the sharing of knowledge throughout the IEP process.

## Goal

Effective communication to facilitate understanding, collaboration, and the sharing of knowledge throughout the IEP process.

## Potential Barrier

The environment prioritizes one language over others (e.g., insufficient or inappropriate interpretation, limited access to translated documents, misunderstandings during meetings).

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Explain the IEP and IEP related communications thoroughly in the native language of the parent(s).
  - ☐ Provide interpreters fluent in both the parent's language and special education terminology.
  - ☐ Upon family's request, provide translated IEP documents in a timely manner.
- Address questions and comments directly to the parent(s) rather than to the interpreter.
- Provide resources that support understanding of IEP terms in native language such as **English to Spanish Glossary of Special Education Terms**.
- Foster greater understanding of the **student's language development** and their **language developmental milestones**.

## Potential Barrier

The information is presented in a way that is overly technical and not accessible to all IEP team members (e.g., assessment reports and/or IEP forms).

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Hold a pre-meeting to explain the IEP process and address any initial questions.
- Offer parent training sessions on identified area(s) of need.
- Minimize use of jargon and provide a list of **frequently used IEP/special education terms**.
- Connect parents to **Family Empowerment Centers** for additional support.
- Create a visual guide of the IEP forms and graphs to better understand assessment results and support learner variability.
- Engage your Community Advisory Committee (CAC) within your special education local plan (SELPA) to explore available resources.
- Ask open-ended questions to encourage participation and advocacy. (Learn more about Question Formulation Techniques (QFT) through this **video**.)
- Watch and share the following short videos, which describe the key components of educational benefit in the IEP process:

☐ **What Are IEPs?**
☐ **Component 1: Assessment**
☐ **Component 2: Present Levels**
☐ **Component 3 & 4: Areas of Need/ Measurable Goals**
☐ **Component 5: Supports and Services**

## Potential Barrier

The systems in place do not ensure that information is delivered promptly (e.g., assessment reports, progress, input from team members).

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Hold pre-meetings or share key information in advance to ensure families are well-prepared.
- Communicate through multiple channels—such as text messages, phone calls, or in-person meetings—to accommodate families' preferences and schedules.
- Implement a digital platform for real-time updates and document sharing among team members (e.g., Google Folder or shared document).
- Establish a clear **timeline** for assessment completion and report submission with built-in reminders.Use an **action plan** and designate a specific point person to coordinate information gathering, distribution, and next steps.
- Use collaborative online tools for ongoing communication between formal meetings (e.g., Parent Square, Class Dojo).
- Provide parents with a draft IEP in advance, clearly marked as "DRAFT".
- Understand **Report of Progress versus progress monitoring** and provide information to parents accordingly.

**Pause and Reflect:** Think about the top IEP barriers experienced in your context. What has worked well to mitigate these barriers? Where might you implement additional strategies within your IEP process?

## Let's Practice:

| Barriers Related to Communication | Potential Strategies to Overcome Barriers |
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# Conflicting Perspectives

Conflicting perspectives refer to differing viewpoints, beliefs, opinions, or interpretations on a particular topic. Conflicting perspectives often arise due to differences in values, experiences, cultural backgrounds, ideologies, interests, or objectives. Acknowledging and respecting diverse perspectives is essential for fostering understanding, collaboration, and constructive dialogue when addressing issues and achieving collective goals during the IEP process.

## Goal

Create safe and supportive environments that are respectful of multiple perspectives.

## Potential Barrier

The environment is shaped by past negative interactions, creating conditions that may prompt defensive responses.

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Assist the team in shifting focus from perceived weaknesses and limitations to an **asset-based mindset or strengths-based approach**, which emphasizes potential, strengths, and capabilities.
- Send a **quick questionnaire** home or have a conversation with parent(s) to learn more about the family and understand their need(s).
- Establish routines for positive communication, such as sharing successes or expressing appreciation with IEP team members.
- Build individual self-awareness. (See activities in **"IEP Success Companion Guide: A Place to Begin"**.)
  - ☐ **Iceberg Video**: This resource helps in understanding the complex nature of human behavior and experience.
  - ☐ **Ladder of Inference Video**: This resource helps in understanding how our minds move subconsciously from facts to conclusions.
  - ☐ **Mental Models Video**: This resource helps us understand how our beliefs impact our interactions with the world.
- After the IEP meeting, maintain **open communication and collaboration** with the IEP team members.

## Potential Barrier

The environment may not effectively support or encourage the expression of different emotions.

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Build individual self-awareness. (See activities in **"IEP Success Companion Guide: A Place to Begin"**.
  - ☐ **The Feelings Wheel**: This tool can help us more accurately identify and express emotions.
- Utilize **mindfulness activities** to be present in the here and now.
- Recognize and validate the emotions parent(s) may experience during this process.
  - ☐ **Emotional Reactions to Disability**
  - ☐ **Center for Parent Information and Resources: You Are Not Alone**
- Create space for check-ins: Intentionally schedule brief check-in periods before and after IEP meetings, giving participants an opportunity to express their feelings and promoting a more emotionally intelligent and considerate discussion.

## Potential Barrier

The environment does not adequately consider or incorporate culturally diverse family perspectives.

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Assess how you promote cultural diversity and cultural competency (e.g., sample self-assessment, self-assessment checklist).
- Build individual self-awareness. (See activities in "IEP Success Companion Guide: A Place to Begin".)
  - ☐ Reflect on personal biases and learn about diverse cultural values.
- Acknowledge varied views on disability and family involvement preferences.
- Practice cultural humility, learning from and respecting cultural differences.
- Set aside time to meet with the parent(s) to understand family goals, values, and perspectives.
- Ensure diverse representation on committees.
- Value family input and build trust through respect.
- Commit to equitable practices that honor and respond to cultural differences.

**Pause and Reflect:** Think about the top IEP barriers experienced in your context. What has worked well to mitigate these barriers? Where might you implement additional strategies within your IEP process?

### Let's Practice:

| Barriers Related to Conflicting Perspectives | Potential Strategies to Overcome Barriers |
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# Awareness and Knowledge

Lack of knowledge or limited awareness refers to a situation where an individual possesses insufficient information, understanding, or awareness about the IEP process. This can arise due to limited access to education, lack of exposure, or cognitive limitations. Recognizing and addressing areas of limited awareness is crucial for making informed decisions and engaging effectively in the IEP process.

## Goal

Recognizing and addressing areas of limited awareness/knowledge while enhancing meaningful parent(s) participation.

## Potential Barrier

The systems in place provide insufficient foundational knowledge about the IEP process.

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Connect families to additional resources for support, such as:
  - ☐ **Family Empowerment Centers**, advocacy groups, or community organizations.
  - ☐ **High Quality IEP Toolkit: Parent Edition**.
- Engage your Community Advisory Committee (CAC) within your SELPA to explore available resources or develop new support options.
- Provide materials in multiple formats (e.g., print, digital, video) to ensure accessibility for all families.
- Explain key **special education timelines** related to the IEP process, including important deadlines and steps.
- Offer transition support to help families navigate changes, such as moving between school levels or post-secondary planning.
- Host or connect parents to  parent workshops or webinars to educate families about the IEP process and empower them to participate effectively.
- Share the following short videos, which that describe the key components of educational benefit in the IEP process:
  - ☐ **What are IEPs?**
  - ☐ **Component 1: Assessment**
  - ☐ **Component 2: Present Levels**
  - ☐ **Component 3 & 4: Needs and Measurable Goals**
  - ☐ **Component 5: Supports and Services**



## Potential Barrier

The environment lacks clear guidance for families on how to prepare for and understand the IEP process.

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Assist parent(s) in **preparing for the IEP** with resources developed in the **High Quality IEP Toolkit (Parent Edition)**. Resources include, but are not limited to: **Building on My Strengths (Parent Edition)**, **IEP Planning Checklist (Parent Edition)**, etc.
- Connect parents to **foundational information and resources related to disabilities**.
- Provide an overview of the IEP with the **IEP Tip Sheet**.
- Throughout the IEP meeting, check for understanding and encourage parents to ask clarifying questions. Create a safe and welcoming environment where families feel comfortable asking questions and expressing concerns.
- Actively seek **input from families** about their experiences with the IEP process and use their feedback to improve support strategies and communication.
- Offer additional opportunities to meet individually throughout the IEP process to address specific questions or concerns and offer personalized guidance.
- Pair new families with experienced parents who can provide peer support, share insights, and offer encouragement throughout the IEP journey.

**Pause and Reflect:** Think about the top IEP barriers experienced in your context. What has worked well to mitigate these barriers? Where might you implement additional strategies within your IEP process?

## Let's Practice:

| Barriers Related to Awareness and Knowledge | Potential Strategies to Overcome Barriers |
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# Relationships

Relationships refer to the interpersonal connections and interactions between educational partners, including students, teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, and community members. Positive relationships among members of the IEP team are characterized by mutual respect, trust, understanding, and collaboration.

## Goal

Promote positive relationships among members of the IEP team.

## Potential Barrier

The environment does not provide the opportunity to foster meaningful relationships between school and family partnerships.

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Maintain ongoing **communication** with parent(s), not just at the IEP meeting. Use apps or platforms, such as Class Dojo, Remind, Parent Square, or Blackboard.
- **Foster family-school partnerships** through activities intended to connect with families prior to IEP meetings, such as:
  - ☐ Introducing yourself prior to the meeting, sending home a welcome letter/email, conducting home visits, and/or offering to hold a conference.
  - ☐ **Employing additional parent engagement strategies**.
- Utilize various communication channels, including technology, and ensure all materials are provided in the family's preferred language.
- **Encourage parent involvement** by:
  - ☐ Keeping families informed about school events and actively inviting their participation.
  - ☐ Sharing information about volunteer opportunities within the school, including Local Control Accountability Plan input, School Site Councils, and Community Advisory Committees.
- Use parent questionnaires or informal meetings to collect valuable insights and preferences from families. Consider the following example for English Learners: **English Learner Extrinsic Factors** questionnaire.
- **Cultivate meaningful participation throughout the IEP journey**.

**Pause and Reflect:** Think about the top IEP barriers experienced in your context. What has worked well to mitigate these barriers? Where might you implement additional strategies within your IEP process?

## Let's Practice:

| Barriers Related to Relationships | Potential Strategies to Overcome Barriers |
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# Time/Resources

Key resources in education refer to the various means, assets, and supports available to facilitate teaching, learning, and the overall functioning of educational institutions. Sufficient time and funding contribute to the effectiveness and success of the IEP process.

## Goal

Ensure that adequate time and resources are allocated throughout the IEP process.

## Potential Barrier

The scheduling constraints do not allow for adequate collaboration among colleagues before the meeting.

**Strategies to Reduce the Potential Barriers:**

- Integrate IEP discussions into already scheduled school events or parent-teacher conferences when appropriate.
- Utilize platforms like Google Drive, Forms, or Docs for interactive collaboration, email communication, and digital information sharing among team members.
- Set aside time before IEP meetings for team members to:
  - ☐ Gather input regarding meeting agendas.
  - ☐ Share ideas and concerns.
  - ☐ Assign and complete pre-meeting tasks.
- Gather relevant observational data from teachers' perspectives in advance.
- For English Learners, utilize the English Learner Teacher Questionnaires for additional insights:
  - ☐ English | Spanish | Arabic | Vietnamese
- Have staff members complete and share relevant student information and data prior to the meeting:
  - ☐ Building on My Strengths (Educator Edition) | Present Levels Packet

**Pause and Reflect:** Think about the top IEP barriers experienced in your context. What has worked well to mitigate these barriers? Where might you implement additional strategies within your IEP process?

## Let's Practice:

| Barriers Related to Time/Resources | Potential Strategies to Overcome Barriers |
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**California's Statewide System of Support (SSOS)** comprise a variety of initiatives to support various areas of education. Within the SSOS are **Special Education Resource Leads**, which includes **High Quality IEPs**, **Open Access**, **Multilingual Students with Exceptional Needs (MuSE)**, and **Pathways to Partnership**. Together, these projects review the IEP process and identify barriers and potential solutions based on each initiative's area of expertise.

High Quality IEPs

Contact us at: **info@highqualityieps.net**
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OPEN ACCESS
Learning & Participation for ALL

Contact us at: **openaccess@placercoe.org**
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MuSE
Multilingual Students with Exceptional Needs

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Pathways to Partnership
Connect • Collaborate • Support

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