Findings from the Evaluation of the Minority Family Support to Improve Education Outcomes

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Objectives:

1. Identify effective methods for the practical application of concepts related to improving the delivery of services for persons with developmental disabilities

Notes:
Findings from the Evaluation of the
Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council’s
Minority Family Support
To Improve Education Outcomes Initiative
Today, we’ll share with you........

I. Purpose of the initiative

II. Funded projects

III. Cross-project evaluation
   A. Focus Groups
   B. Parent Surveys
   C. Staff Interviews
PURPOSE OF INITIATIVE
Purpose of Initiative was to:

- Improve educational services, retention, and postsecondary outcomes for minority students with disabilities.

- Fund minority family support programs to help families to:
  - Find their way through the educational services available for their students with disabilities (emphasizing ages 3 to 26);
  - Assure that their students with developmental disabilities receive the educational services they need; and
  - Become active participants in their students’ educational experiences.

Source: DDC RFP #2009.A.1
Projects in minority communities were charged with **creating support programs** that would:

A. **Support and assist** at least 20 families/year with:

1. **Understanding** the developmental and educational needs of their students;

2. **Taking active part** in their students’ educational experiences;

3. **Finding their way** through the educational services and assuring that those students get:
   a) Better **IEPs**;
   b) Appropriate special education **supports and services**; and
   c) Placements in **inclusive** general educational **settings**.
   d) For students over age 14, **transition plans** with all the required elements.

Source: DDC RFP #2009.A.1
Projects in minority communities were charged with creating support programs that would: (cont.)

B. **Use native languages and culturally appropriate activities** to provide families and students with:
   1. Information and referral,
   2. Training,
   3. Mentoring, and
   4. Individual assistance.

C. **Participate in a cross-program network** among project communities to share resources, experiences, and activities (e.g., speakers, conferences, train-the-trainer events).

D. **Comply with cross-project evaluation requirements.**

Source: DDC RFP #2009.A.1
EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE INITIATIVE
Expected Outcomes

1. **Increased involvement** of minority families with their school.
2. Minority families’ **increased satisfaction** with their child’s educational program.
3. Minority youth, in the projects that serve older students, achieve desired and functional **post-secondary outcomes**.
4. Minority youth in funded communities have **improved IEPs**.

Source: DDC RFP #2009.A.1
What is an IEP?

“The IEP is a legal agreement between the school and the family detailing the educational services, goals and objectives, instructional modifications, and timelines for services for students identified as having an educational disability.”

The IEP has two general purposes:

1. Set reasonable learning goals for a child
2. State the services that the school district will provide for the child.

Why focus on IEPs?

According to the literature...

Adequate family preparation for IEPs will:\(^1\):
- Reduce stress involved in IEPs
- Increase their confidence which will lead to their being more involved in the discussion and decision-making process.

The involvement of parents in the IEP process has many benefits:\(^2\):
- Increasing teacher understanding of the child's environment
- Increasing the school's understanding of the child
- Adding to parents' knowledge of the child's educational setting
- Improving communication between parents and the school
- Increasing likelihood that mutually agreed upon educational goals will be attained.


What is family involvement?

Parent and family involvement includes the opportunity 

- to participate in the student’s evaluation, IEP team meetings;
- to understand the family’s legal rights;
- to receive timely notice of meetings and changes in the IEP; and
- to receive progress reports and to be aware of their rights under IDEA.

“Three decades of research have demonstrated that parent/family involvement significantly contributes, in a variety of ways, to improved student outcomes related to learning and school success.”

Why focus on family involvement?

Studies have shown:

Parent and family involvement significantly contributes to improved student outcomes related to learning and school success\(^1\) and more positive postsecondary outcomes.\(^2\)

Greater involvement has been associated with:

- completing more grades in school,
- lower rates of high school dropout, and
- increased on-time high school completion.\(^1\)

While this involvement is important for everyone, it may be particularly important for children with disabilities.\(^3\)

**Relationship Between Parent Involvement and Postsecondary Outcomes**

**Overall**
Parent involvement in school was significantly associated with lower rates of high school dropout, increased on-time high school completion, and highest grade completed leading to more positive postsecondary outcomes. *(Miedel Barnard, 2004)*

**Employment**
Families have great influence on students’ career aspirations. *(Morningstar, 1997; Lindstrom, et al, 1997; Penick & Jepson, 1992; Whiston & Keller, 2004)*
In general, “family support and advocacy and intentional career activities are positively related to career development”. *(Lindstrom, et al., 2007, p. 362)*

**Postsecondary Education**
Parents who had expectations for their children to attend a postsecondary education program had children who had a tendency to identify postsecondary education as a future plan. *(Hossler & Stage, 1992)*

According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS), students who attended some postsecondary education or training program tended to have parents that were significantly more involved in their child’s education than those students who had parents who were less involved. *(Newman & Cameto, 1993)*
### Outcomes and Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>As measured by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Increased involvement</strong> of minority families with their school.</td>
<td>the families’ own reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority families’ <strong>increased satisfaction</strong> with their child’s educational program.</td>
<td>the families’ own reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority youth, in the projects that serve older students, achieve desired and functional <strong>post-secondary outcomes</strong>.</td>
<td>e.g., graduation; continued education; job; own living arrangement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Outcomes and Indicators (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>As measured by:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minority youth in funded communities have improved IEPs.</td>
<td>A. More IEP meetings where all the people who are required and needed are present.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B. More IEPs that include measurable goals and are:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Functional, i.e., address the routine activities of everyday living;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Goal oriented, i.e., with all activities relating to the students’ goals;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Focused on building the skills that will enable students to access the general education curriculum; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Community referenced, i.e., address practical outcomes in adult life, like independent living, community participation, and employment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C. Educational services are provided as specified in the IEPs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DDC RFP #2009.A.1

WSU Center for Urban Studies 16
FUNDED PROJECTS
Funded Projects

Disability Connection
Muskegon & Oceana County

The Arc Kent County
Grand Rapids

WSU Developmental Disabilities Institute
Detroit
Commonalities across Projects

Similarities in project design:
- they offered training sessions;
- provided mentoring and one-on-one support; and
- distributed informational materials.

All projects also focused on supporting and assisting minority families (African-American and Hispanic populations), and operated in areas with strong demonstrated need for minority family support: Wayne County, Kent County, and Muskegon and Oceana Counties.
Program Activities

- Varied across projects
- Included:
  - Training and skill-building workshops
  - Parent mentoring
  - Fostering peer support
  - Home visits
  - Distributing informational materials
  - Translating existing materials to Spanish
  - Attending IEP and other meetings with families
    - Other support in navigating the education system
  - Direct technical assistance with IEPs
The three projects served over 184 families over the three years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>English-speaking</th>
<th>Spanish-speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training Participants</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials Distributed</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families Mentored</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs Reviewed</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP Meetings Attended</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The three projects served over 184 families over the three years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of</th>
<th>FEI (Grand Rapids)</th>
<th>LEADS (Muskegon/Ocean County)</th>
<th>SEAM (Detroit)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distributed</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentored</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEPs Reviewed</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP Meetings</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CROSS PROJECT EVALUATION
Purpose of Evaluation

- To evaluate the demonstration projects in *Minority Family Support to Improve Education Outcomes*. Provide formative and summative evaluation across the projects, developing information that:
  
  A. Assists the projects in improving their operations;

  B. Involves consumers, students and family members who are participating in the local projects in every aspect of the evaluation;

  C. Assesses the projects’ processes;

  D. Evaluates the projects’ outcomes and analyzes the factors associated with achieving the targeted outcomes;

  E. Allows the Council to compare the effects of different approaches in different communities; and

  F. Is suitable for dissemination to others interested in developing similar programs.

Source: DDC RFP #2009.A.1
Technical assistance to projects, with tasks such as creating logic models and tracking logs.

Focus groups to gain understanding of parents’ experiences, needs and concerns with special education, especially along program outcomes.

- Prior to implementation of key project activities, in order to help:
  - the projects refine project designs and activities; and
  - the evaluation develop cross-project evaluation instruments.
- Held 6 focus groups, with a total of 58 people
• **Parent surveys** to measure the effect of program participation, per grant outcomes.
  ◦ Conducted before and after program participation
  ◦ Compared responses between pre- and post-surveys to measure change (outcome/summative) along program outcomes:
    a) parent involvement;
    b) parent satisfaction; and
    c) the IEP (participation, IEP goals, access to gen ed)
  ◦ Post-survey included questions on experiences with individual projects (formative)
  ◦ Conducted a total of **128 pre-program** and **81 post-program** surveys
FOCUS GROUPS
Purpose of Focus Groups

- To gain understanding of parents’ experiences with special education, especially along program outcomes.
- Prior to implementation of key project activities – to understand parents’ needs and concerns.
  - Contributes to pre-program needs assessment
  - Exploratory
- To help projects refine project designs and activities.
- To help evaluation develop cross-project evaluation instruments.
Focus Group Topics

1. Parent Involvement
2. Satisfaction with Educational Program
3. IEP Development
4. IEPs with Measurable and Functional Goals, and Goal-Oriented
5. Access to: Gen Ed Curriculum, Extra-Curricular Activities, Community Resources
6. Postsecondary Outcomes
7. Recommendations from Parents
PARENT INVOLVEMENT
Parent Involvement Across Projects

• All parents indicated some level of involvement.

• More than half (52%) felt their level of involvement was not “about right”.

• None of the parents in the Spanish language focus groups felt their involvement was enough, with language being the main barrier.

  • In the Detroit focus group, no parents had received paperwork in Spanish — they had to see out translators at community organizations.

• More than a third (36%) of African-American parents described acting as advocates for their children.
Parent Involvement, In Parents’ Own Words

• “It’s just an ongoing struggle to meet his educational needs and not be intimidated by the professionals who think they know your child better than you.”

• “Because they think we are Hispanics, we don’t have questions about our children.”

• Parents contrasted high schools’ and K-8 schools’ efforts to keep parents engaged/involved…
  • In high school, it “seems like they’re just trying to push them through.”
Some parents felt the school was not interested in their involvement:

- “I was more of a nuisance.”
- “The response of the administration…they don’t want you there.”
- “The teachers plan what they are going to do for the children. They don’t ask for any opinions, parents have to comply with what teachers have set up for the child. Teachers ask for parents’ help with the child, but they don’t ask for parents’ opinion.”

One parent reported being told she “intimidated” teachers and was asked to stay away.
SATISFACTION WITH EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM
Parent Satisfaction Across Projects

• One in five (22%) parents reported being completely satisfied with their children’s education.

• LEADS (Muskegon) had both a high number of satisfied parents and a high number of complaints regarding children’s education.

• About one-third (30%) mentioned the importance of individualized attention for students.

• Several parents were concerned about students not progressing, yet advancing to next grade.
“But he still doesn’t know how to read. I feel my child is going to graduate not knowing how to read.”

Some said special education helped their children “since there are less children in the classroom, they get help one-on-one.”

“Even though the program is not at the level it needs to be, he’s still making progress.”

“I want teachers to treat my child the same as regular education students, to expect and push him as any other student. I tell social worker and teachers to treat him as not so fragile because this makes him feel less capable than his ability.”

“If your kids aren’t considered the norm, you got problems.”