

Handout: Application of the Sunshine Model

**Ann Turnbull
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According to the Sunshine Model, Table 1 provides a definition and exemplar indicators for each of the five principles of trusting partnerships.

Consider Alfredo, a 5-year-old who has recently been evaluated to determine if he has a disability based on attention and behavioral concerns. The psychological, educational, and behavioral assessments indicate that he experiences ADHD. The next step in the IDEA process is to have a meeting with Alfredo's mother, Ms. Perez, to review the evaluation results and develop his IEP. Ms. Perez is a single mother who immigrated from Mexico without documentation, speaks Spanish as her primary language, and works in a meat-packing factory on the night shift. She lives with her aunt who cares for Alfredo when Ms. Perez is at work. She does not have access to a car.

Table 2 provides illustrations of how the five principles of partnership can be infused into the process of conducting the initial IEP meeting with Ms. Perez. These partnerships strategies transform the IEP meeting from merely having Ms. Perez present at the meeting in a passive role to creating the opportunity for her to experience a trusted partnership.

Table 1

Definitions and Sample Indicators of Partnership Dimensions

Equity: Moving beyond “equality” to apply intensive levels of support calibrated to needs, concerns, and resources that typically occur in light of systemic barriers

- Get to know families’ preferences for communication
- Capitalize upon specialized resources
- Make the least dangerous assumption about likely outcomes

Respect: Conveying a sense of admiration for good or valuable qualities; having genuine concern for families’ needs and feelings

- Celebrate student and family strengths
- Be empathetic by relating to families’ feelings and experiences
- Honor families’ culture by reflecting on and addressing your own cultural lens

Communication: Engaging in culturally responsive and positive interactions that are reciprocal, frequent, and regular

- Listen through nonverbal and verbal listening behaviors
- Connect through validating perspectives and emotions
- Express by letting families know what to expect

Advocacy: Taking action to solve problems or remove barriers in order to accomplish valued outcomes

- Develop viewpoints on key issues
- Pinpoint and document concerns
- Take action to find reasonable solutions

Commitment: Making deliberate choices to prioritize and value partnerships, as well as to assume responsibility for partnership outcomes

- Define goals and rationales for expanding your partnership commitment
- Develop and implement reasonable action plans to improve partnership outcomes
- Evaluate outcomes

Table 2

Definitions and Indicators of Partnership Dimensions: Infusing Dignity into Trusting Partnerships

Equity: Moving beyond “equality” to apply intensive levels of support calibrated to needs, concerns, and resources that typically occur in light of systemic barriers

- ***Get to know families’ preferences for communication***—At parent-teacher conferences at the beginning of the school year, schedule extra time for parents who don’t speak English, including Ms. Pérez; explore preferences for her communication from the outset rather than waiting until preparing for the IEP meeting
- ***Capitalize upon specialized resources***—Become familiar with community resources, especially those for families who face systemic barriers; ask Ms. Perez if, prior to Alfredo’s IEP meeting, she would like to meet with a Spanish-speaking parent from a parent advocacy program who could share her previous experiences in IEP meetings
- ***Make the least dangerous assumption about likely outcomes***—Examine and work to eliminate your own implicit biases; believe that Ms. Perez as a Spanish-speaking, single mother will be a valued partner in ensuring that Alfredo receives an ambitiously appropriate educational program and that Alfredo will meet high expectations

Respect: Conveying a sense of admiration for good or valuable qualities; also having genuine concern for families’ needs and feelings

- ***Celebrate student and family strengths***—Make a habit of starting interactions with a focus on strengths; begin the IEP meeting by sharing with Ms. Perez positive things that Alfredo says at school about her and his family life, as well as highlighting Alfredo’s strengths
- ***Be empathetic by relating to families’ feelings and experiences***—Be sensitive to the emotional impact of the evaluation results and disability labels; relate to Ms. Perez’ worry about Alfredo and the implications of ADHD on his educational and adult success
- ***Honor families’ culture by reflecting on and addressing your own cultural lens***—Expand your own non-biased knowledge about diverse cultural circumstances and their educational impact; regarding Ms. Perez, expand your knowledge of the impact of immigration on family life and the pressures of working the night shift in a meat-packing plant

Communication: Engaging in culturally responsive and positive interactions that are reciprocal, frequent, and regular

- ***Listen through nonverbal and verbal listening behaviors***—Ask families open-ended questions and give undivided attention when they respond; invite Ms. Perez to share her concerns about Alfredo’s education
- ***Connect through validating perspectives and emotions***—Affirm families’ perspectives by expressing understanding and being non-judgmental; address Ms. Perez’ priority concerns, even if they differ from professional concerns

- **Express by letting families know what to expect**—Share information with families in advance of the IEP meeting to enable them to lower anxiety and to be more confident; meet with Ms. Perez with an interpreter in advance of the IEP meeting to explain what will happen and to answer her questions; encourage her to consider inviting her aunt or anyone else to the meeting whose presence can result in an appropriately ambitious plan for Alfredo

Advocacy: Taking action to solve problems or remove barriers in order to accomplish valued outcomes

- **Develop viewpoints on key issues**—Recognize the systemic barriers many families face concerning the logistics that typically accompany families' roles in the education of their children and recognize the accountability of professionals as well as families in overcoming these; ask Ms. Perez her views on Alfredo's communication in Spanish and English
- **Pinpoint and document concerns**—For IEP conferences, develop a non-judgmental understanding of systemic barriers to trusting partnerships; for Ms. Perez talk with her about her access to transportation and her time availability, given her sleep schedule during the day in light of her night working schedule.
- **Take action to find reasonable solutions**—Work with the principal and school social worker, as well as community resource agencies, to find transportation options for families to attend school meetings and activities; and work with Ms. Perez individually to ensure she can attend the meeting at school or hold the meeting at a community location for which public transportation is available or at her home; schedule the meeting at a time that is convenient for her

Commitment: Making deliberate choices to prioritize and value partnerships, as well as to assume responsibility for partnership outcomes

- **Define goals and rationales for expanding your partnership commitment**—Recognize that developing trusting partnerships with families for the IEP process requires continuous reflection and learning; seek to “stand in Ms. Perez's shoes,” as well as the “shoes” of other families, and determine what professional partnership approaches/skills would have the most favorable outcomes for them
- **Develop and implement reasonable action plans to improve partnership outcomes**—Given one's own need for improvement with partnerships, locate and engage with opportunities and resources for professional development to expand competence and confidence; regarding Ms. Perez ensure competence and confidence in working with interpreters and being responsive to her need to sleep during times that many school activities are scheduled
- **Evaluate outcomes and make improvements**—Seek feedback from families on partnership strategies and outcomes and act on their input; specifically ask Ms. Perez what partnership strategies she finds most and least helpful and what difference or not partnerships are beneficial for her and Alfredo; respond to her feedback with responsive enhancements