Tamika Riggs

November 6, 2014

Area 1-Collaboration Issues- Family

Introduction

I interviewed two parents of students with special needs. I felt this was important because I wanted to get a better understanding of a child with special needs through the eyes of a parent. I felt this was essential because as a teacher, I will be working with and on behalf of families so I felt I needed to be able to understand their point of view. I’m glad I had an opportunity to listen to these interesting viewpoints as I know it will help me be a better teacher.

Parent and Student Information

I choose to interview these two parents because they had children that had very different disabilities. I choose the first parent because I have worked with her student during afterschool for the last three years. During that time, we have fostered a relationship of mutual respect. I will refer to her as Parent 1 throughout this paper to protect her identity. The other parent I interviewed was referred to me by one of the special needs teacher. She said she thought this parent would be a great candidate because she is actively involved in her child’s education and growth. I will refer to her as Parent 2.

Parent #1’s child has Downs Syndrome. He is 16 years old in the 10th grade. Parent 2’s child has Cerebral Palsy. He is 15 years old, in the 9th grade. Both are in the same self-contained life skills classroom where I will be completing my intense field experience this upcoming Spring.

My goal for these interviews was to understand what it meant to be a parent of a student with special needs. So, I asked questions that I hoped would give me a better understanding of how they viewed their child in relationship to other students, how they felt about their child’s education so far and their expectations they had for their child’s teachers. I also wanted to understand how they felt about IEPs and whether or not they felt they really helped their child. I asked both parents the same questions. Some of the questions, they answered similarly; yet others they came up with very different responses.

Interview

To start off the interview, I asked both parents to describe their child to me. It seemed to me that they were both caught off guard by this question. Parent 2 actually asked to skip this question because she had to think about it before she could come up with an answer. Parent 1, on the other hand, started off her description with stubborn, strong-willed and lovable. I specifically asked this question to try to get their perceptive of their child. Plus, I wanted to see their child through their eyes.

Next, I asked them about their child’s strengths.

Parent 1- Described her son as active. She said he is very active in Special Olympics. He enjoys horseback riding, swimming, basketball, baseball, bowling and derby racing. He also knows how to speak Spanish. What’s interesting about this is that he learned it by communicating with a Spanish speaking friend from school.

Parent 2- Mentioned that his greatest strength is that he can lift you up when you feel down. She described him as very outgoing, loving and caring.

Next, I inquired about their challenges.

Parent 1- His biggest challenge is his speech. I agree with this as I have worked with him for the last three years and it is hard to understand some of his words.

Parent 2- His biggest challenge that mom spoke of was his memory. She mentioned how hard it is for him to remember information from one day to the next. This is particularly challenging because it hinders his ability to learn and progress in school. He often needs to be taught the same information multiple times and still doesn’t always fully grasp the concepts.

I then switched to asking questions to help me get insight into how they feel about IEPs, teachers and aids, and schools.

The first question I asked them about this was: What are your thoughts on IEPs, case conference meetings and your child’s progress toward the goals?

Parent 1- Said that she felt like the case conferences were a waste of time. She really didn’t feel like she learned anything new but just went over the same information each time. In fact, she mentioned that often the IEP was already filled out and rarely included any new progressive goals. She felt as if her son could achieve more if the teachers would push him harder.

In addition, she said that some of the services they proposed were unnecessary. For instance, they suggested that he continue to work with an Occupational Therapist yet she felt as if he should be spending more time with the Speech Therapist as this is the area that he is most deficient in. Eventually, they changed it to allocate more time with a Speech Therapist.

Parent 2- Said she appreciates the case conferences because it gives her a chance to hear how he’s doing and how he’s progressing toward his goals. It also gives here a chance to express what she feels he needs.

Next, I asked about their opinions on working with teachers/aids?

Both parents expressed they have had really good experiences with teachers throughout their child’s educational experience. They felt that the teachers cared about their child and communicated well with them.

What are you most thankful for as far as schools?

Both parents were grateful that their child was able to attend a “regular” school and was not separated because of their disability. Plus, they felt it was very important to give them the opportunity to interact with nondisabled peers. Most importantly, the school helped them learn independent living skills such as riding the bus, shopping, etc.

Last question I asked was what were the most important qualities a parent of a child with special needs should have?

Parent 1- Strongly believes the most important quality a parent of a child with special needs was to be a strong advocate for their child. She said that it’s important for a parent to be able to stand up for what they think is right for their child and not let others tell you any different.

Parent 2- Felt that you have to have patience and be in the right state of mind to ensure that the child gets everything they need to grow.

After talking with these parents, I feel I have a better understanding of how the parent of a child with special needs sees things. One of the things both of them mentioned is that they never treated their child or see their child as being less than other children. They want their child to know and understand that they can achieve great things in spite of their challenges. Now as a special needs teacher, my number one priority will be to help every one of the students I come in contact with excel beyond their limitations.