

## **Collaboratively Getting to Yes**

Collaboration – The action of working with someone to produce or create something<sup>1</sup>

Collaboration, through the lens of special education, means parents working with school divisions to create an IEP that will produce the result of providing their student with a free and appropriate public education. So how do we accomplish this task? How do parents and school divisions collaboratively get to yes?

Let's start with what we know, we know that school divisions are filled with experts. Experts in education, experts in educational programming available within a particular school district. Even experts on disabilities and how they impact the educational environment in general. What you must also realize is that parents are experts too! Parents are experts regarding their own child. School experts are knowledgeable on what services are available within their particular district. Parents, however, possess expert knowledge on what techniques have and have not demonstrated success with their particular student. School experts are knowledgeable about characteristics generally associated with particular disabilities in the educational environment. Parents however, are experts on how their student's disability impacts his or her everyday functioning specifically.

So when all of these experts come together everyone must respect the different levels of expertise and work together to support the student. Collaboratively working with the school to meet the needs of your student can be accomplished. A few suggestions for helping foster an atmosphere of collaboration include:

- Have an agenda for each meeting you attend (see key questions below)
- Have the points and ideas you want to share printed and ready to share with the team.
- Respect the expertise the school members of the team bring to the table.
- Confidently remind the school team members that you bring your own expertise to the table.
- Be open to the ideas of the school team members.

---

<sup>1</sup> Courtesy of Oxford Dictionaries available online at:  
[http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/collaboration](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/collaboration)



Finally, here are some key questions to drive productive, student centered IEP Meeting conversations:

- Where is the student now? (Evaluation data, PLOP)
- Where do we want the student to be? (Parent concerns, evaluation data, teacher input)
- How will we get the student there? (Goals, accommodations and related services)
- How will we know if we are on the right track? (Data collection/progress reporting model and frequency)
- How will we know when the student “makes it?” (Progress reports)
- How do we make sure the student keeps it? (ESY?)