



PTI Nebraska
Improved Outcomes for Children with Disabilities

UNK

Strengthening Special Education Support: Partnering with PTI for Better Outcomes and Breaking Down Barriers

CAMI BERGMAN AND HEIDI SOMMER – PTI NEBRASKA
DR. CHELSEA FEUSNER – UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA AT KEARNEY

Welcome Who are we?



Cami Bergman M. Ed.
Special Education
Information Specialist
PTI Nebraska



Heidi Sommer
Special Education
Information Specialist
PTI Nebraska



Dr. Chelsea Feusner
Assistant Professor
Educational Administration
University of Nebraska - Kearney




Session Objectives/Goals:

<p>01</p> <p>Learn about PTI and the services we offer for parents and professionals around the state of Nebraska.</p>	<p>02</p> <p>Learn how principals play a key role in helping parents and staff navigate the complexities of special education.</p>	<p>03</p> <p>Build strong relationships, foster collaboration, and encourage positive interactions between all stakeholders.</p>	<p>04</p> <p>Understand the benefits of collaborating with PTI Nebraska to promote better outcomes for students and IEP teams.</p>
---	---	---	---

What is PTI Nebraska?

Parent Training and Information Center of Nebraska
(PTI Nebraska)

Nebraska's resource for helping families who have children and young adults with disabilities and special health care needs.

Informed Parents, Improved Outcomes for Children with Disabilities

Parent Training and Information Centers

20 U.S. Code § 1471

Definition: Centers that provide resources and training to help parents, youth, and professionals that support students with disabilities.

Purpose: To ensure that parents of children with disabilities receive high-quality, relevant, and useful training and information to help improve outcomes for their children.

[Parent Training and Information Centers | U.S. Department of Education](#)



PTI Nebraska informs and trains parents of children with disabilities to be effective advocates for their children

- Increase parent knowledge
- Be informed about their child's disability/special health care needs
- Communicate more effectively
- Participate in decision-making through helping them learn and understand the process
- Offer assistance at MDT/EP meetings to clarify information, facilitate positive communication, etc...
- Partner with professionals to improve outcomes for all children with disabilities

Navigating Special Education with Understanding

Progressive Nature of Special Education:

- Ongoing changes in Special education laws and guidance
 - IDEA
 - NE Rule 51/52
- Special education is a process that evolves in response to student needs and advancing best practices.
- Staying informed about state policies and practices is essential to ensure special education programs adopt and apply best practices for their students.
- Provide ongoing training and professional development for educators to equip them with the latest special education strategies, empowering them to deliver instruction with confidence.

Helping Staff Navigate Special Education

Ongoing Professional Development

- Regular training on special education laws, IEP writing, and effective teaching strategies for students with disabilities.
- Support staff in understanding the importance of creating individualized, inclusive learning environments.
- Be sure all staff understand IEP and expectations to ensure FAPE

Support parent-teacher collaboration

- Encourage open communication with families and involve them in the decision-making process.
- Be supportive during hard conversations

Helping Staff Navigate Special Education

Support Collaboration Among Staff

- Schedule regular meetings with special education teachers, general education staff, and support staff to discuss student progress.
- Encourage a school culture where all staff see special education as a shared responsibility.
 - Promote inclusive practices that integrate general and special education.
 - Special education is a service not a place.

Lead by example

- Participate in IEP meetings and demonstrate a commitment to supporting all students.



Helping Parents Navigate Special Education

Perspective — Empathy/Sympathy — Optimism

- Respect parent perspectives, validate their concerns, highlight their child's strengths

Active Listening

- Carefully listen to parents' concerns, ask questions, clarify points of disagreement, and identify solutions with a problem-solving mindset.

Refer Parents to PTI

- Let us spend time walking parents through the process and helping them understand.

Helping Parents Navigate Special Education

Understanding the process is sometimes difficult for parents

- Validate emotions and difficult circumstances
- Reframe statements using neutral language
- Engage in "active listening"
- Don't be defensive
- Take a break
- Be honest, share data and have difficult conversations
- Focus on how to build on strengths — academic and functional. It all matters.

Use Parent-Friendly Language

- Simplifying jargon: Provide explanation of legal and educational terms in plain language.
- Ensure parents are informed about assessment results, accommodation options, and related services.

ASK QUESTIONS AND CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Building Strong Relationships and Fostering Collaborations

Why Relationships Matter:

- **Trust and Respect:** Strong relationships between parents, staff, and administrators are foundational to an effective special education program.
- **Inclusive Culture:** Promoting a school culture that values the contributions and perspectives of all team members leads to better student outcomes.
- **Open Communication:** Creating clear and consistent channels of communication helps to ensure everyone is aligned on student needs and goals.

Building Strong Relationships and Fostering Collaborations

Setting Up the Meeting

The way the school reaches out to families to schedule the IEP meeting sets the tone for their partnership.

- Call ahead to discuss the meeting rather than only sending home a letter
- Describe what the meeting will entail, how the family can prepare, and who will be attending.
- Identify needs of the parent
 - Interpreter, ability to attend virtually, transportation

Building Strong Relationships and Fostering Collaborations

Planning the Meeting

Implement strategies to avoid the dynamic of "school versus family"

- Think about where the meeting will be held.
- Arrange seating in a way that is collaborative.
- Send a draft copy before the meeting
- Brainstorm ways to encourage active-participation from the family.
- Ensure all members of the team are prepared to participate in the meeting.
- Encourage all staff members to provide input for the meeting

Building Strong Relationships and Fostering Collaborations

Holding the Meeting

- Offer the parents a water when they arrive
- Provide parents and staff an agenda
- Begin meetings with introductions to ensure the parents know who is interacting with their child throughout the day and what their role is.
- Start the meeting with the team listing off the child's strengths and all the things they do well and are good at as well as the things they enjoy.
- Explain jargon and acronyms, explain what they mean and provide examples
- Reconvene if needed

Building Strong Relationships and Fostering Collaborations

After the Meeting

The meeting is one piece of a partnership. Here are some questions families might have after a meeting:

- Tell families the next steps in implementing the new IEP.
- Let families know when they can expect to receive the finalized IEP.
 - Ask how they would prefer to receive paperwork (paper version or email)
- Indicate when they can expect the Prior Written Notice.
 - Same time and method? Sooner than IEP?
- When can families expect to hear from the school next?
- Follow up communication on progress since the IEP.
 - Don't wait until the quarter progress report
- Make sure families know who they can contact if they have any questions after the meeting.

Benefits of Partnering with PTI

- Expert Guidance and Resources:**
 - PTI Nebraska provides valuable information and professional development for both school staff and parents, ensuring everyone is well-informed and empowered.
- Strengthening Parent-School Partnerships:**
 - By collaborating with PTI Nebraska, principals can build stronger, more positive relationships with families, resulting in more engaged and active parent participation in IEP processes.
- Conflict Resolution Support:**
 - PTI Nebraska can help neutralize disagreements between parents and schools, promoting more effective communication and collaboration in meetings.
- Improving Outcomes for Students:**
 - By engaging PTI Nebraska, schools can ensure that they are meeting the needs of students with disabilities and improving their academic, behavioral, and social outcomes.

Shift in Mindset – State Complaint

Positive Impact on School Districts

1. Improves Practices and Policies
 - o A state complaint can help identify gaps in district practices, leading to policy changes that improve services for all students, not just the one filing the complaint.
 - o Schools often implement corrective actions based on state complaint findings, which can lead to better systems for evaluating and supporting students with disabilities.
2. Professional Growth for Staff
 - o The process can serve as an opportunity for professional development, as staff may receive training or guidance to better understand and implement special education laws and practices.
 - o Helps school identify areas of improvement in their special education services, leading to better outcomes for students.
3. Clarification of Expectations
 - o Provides clear guidance on what is expected in terms of compliance, ensuring that schools know the exact standards they must meet.
 - o Supports better understanding between parents and school districts, reducing misunderstandings about rights and responsibilities.

Shift in Mindset – State Complaint

Promoting Better Outcomes for Students

1. Ensures Appropriate Services for Students
 - o When state complaints are filed, schools are forced to reassess whether the services, accommodations, and supports provided to the student meet their needs.
 - o Can result in better individualized services for the student and adjustments that better align with the student's IEP (Individualized Education Program).
2. Support for At-Risk Students
 - o Can help bring attention to students who might not be receiving the appropriate services or are falling through the cracks of the educational system.
 - o Addresses systemic issues that may disproportionately affect students with disabilities.

Key Takeaways

1. Help Parents and Staff Navigate Special Education:
 - o Provide training, clear communication, and resources to empower both families and school staff.
2. Build Positive Relationships and Foster Collaboration:
 - o Create an inclusive meeting environment for all members of the team by building a culture of trust, respect, and open communication.
3. Utilize PTI Nebraska for Support:
 - o Collaborate with PTI Nebraska to strengthen parent-school partnerships, mediate conflicts, provide resources on the latest guidance and enhance student success.
4. Encourage a Shift in Mindset Around State Complaints:
 - o Understand the positive impact state complaints can have on school districts and outcomes for students.



NE State Principals Conference
Strengthening Special
Education Support:
for Better
Learning Down

kska
Children with Disabilities
NK
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

Thank You!

Heidi Sommer
hsommer@pti-nebraska.org

Cami Bergman
cbergman@pti-nebraska.org

Please provide feedback about this presentation on the survey linked to the QR code.
