

Partners in Decision Making:

# Parent Priorities for Action

Partnerships  
Toward a  
Quality  
Education  
For All of  
California's  
Children



Focus Group recommendations out of the

## **The Family Leadership Development Project**

California Services for Technical Assistance and Training  
Sonoma State University

# Priorities for Action

## THE PROCESS

An effective educational system requires an active parent voice. For several years, parent leaders across California have been meeting with their peers in an effort to determine, from their experience, how to make sure they have influence in the decisions made about their children's education. Included in the process were parents from socio-economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and from ethnically diverse communities: indigenous, native born, immigrant, and refugee. The following recommendations are the result of this effort.

## THE VISION

Parents in California envision an integrated community of educational and family support services that ensures a free and appropriate education for every child. It is the hope of parent leaders that local coalitions of parents and educators will choose at least one of the following recommendations, give it high priority, and tackle it together.

The parent priorities for action are grouped into six categories, based on the categories in the 2001 report "Partners in Decision Making: Parents Tell Us How" (this report is available on the Web at <http://www.calstat.org/focusreport.pdf>). The top priorities for the recommendations in each category are listed in order.

## CATEGORY 1

### STRUCTURE

#### STAFF & RESOURCES

- Have qualified translators available in appropriate languages and education levels to help parents during meetings and with forms.
- Have mentor parents/advocates/parent liaisons available for parents at IEP (Individualized Education Program) and IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan) meetings, funded independently by the California Department of Education.
- Have a mechanism outside CDE to hold schools more accountable for following children whose IEPs are out of compliance.
- Have at least 50 percent parent representation on all education decision-making bodies.
- Allocate funds to reimburse special education teachers to allow for additional trainings, prep time, reports, and staff trainings as specified in a child's IEP.
- Achieve full federal funding of IDEA to realize the promises made by legislative bodies.
- Provide financial aid for parents to increase participation in education activities: childcare, transportation, attendance stipends for IEPs, trainings, conferences, and notification of meetings and events via website/email.

## CATEGORY 2

### PATTERN/PLAN

#### GOALS, OBJECTIVES, STANDARDS, & LAWS

- Assure that information on special education is included in school handbooks.
- Assure that the voices of children and parents are reflected in all written policies.
- Establish a process so that the CDE makes no decisions without parent input.
- Enforce the laws already in place—follow the spirit of the law.
- Evaluate the High School Exit Exam, and whether or not to eliminate it.

*Provide information*

### CATEGORY 3

## PROCESS

### PROCEDURES, METHODS, & PRACTICES

- Hold pre-IEP meetings for parents to obtain test results and brainstorm options, dreams, and concerns regarding their children.
- Ensure that all decisions are made at the IEP meeting with a parent present, not before the meeting or during the meeting with no parent present.
- Hold meetings at various times to accommodate parent schedules, and allow more time for IEP meetings.
- Use all media outlets (e.g., newsletters, radio, TV) to reach out to families.

### CATEGORY 4

## IDENTITY/ ROLE OF PARENTS

### SUPPORT NEEDED

- Provide resources for parents, e.g., information on finances and connections.
- Create a school system you can trust, with teachers, administrators, and specialists who are welcoming, accepting, respectful, and compassionate and who respect the expertise of parents.

### COPING SKILLS FOR PARENTS

### FROM PARENTS

- Follow through and stay involved to ensure that everyone does what he/she is supposed to do; be assertive and don't be afraid or intimidated; get support early—ask for help.

### CATEGORY 5

## INFORMATION AND TRAINING

- Assure parents of receiving copies of assessments prior to, not during, IEP meetings and provide parents with full explanations of test results.
- Provide education for all parents, students, and educators on laws, rights, resources, contacts, processes, documentation, choices, assertiveness, working in collaboration, advocacy, funding sources, the IEP process, 504 plans, transition, and mental health issues.
- Create all fliers and print information so that they are easy to read—family-friendly, culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- Provide education for the general education population (parents, educators) on special education services, supports, and handbooks.

### CATEGORY 6:

## RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS

### AMONG PARENTS & PROFESSIONALS

- Build and strengthen mutual support and advocacy assistance for the IEP and IFSP process and the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) network.
- Provide more support from the school system for general education teachers who work with children in special education.
- Improve negative attitudes/relationships through trainings on sensitivity, cultural, and communication issues for parents, teachers, administrators, specialists, and other professionals.
- Strengthen connection and coordination between schools and parent organizations.

*Stay involved*



*Follow through*

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## CALSTAT FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

CalSTAT is a special project of the California Department of Education that helps schools and families effectively educate children and young adults with special needs. The project brings research-based training to schools and families, using workshops, online conferences, and publications.

CalSTAT promotes activities that model and encourage family participation and partnership with educational agencies to improve education for all children. The project supports activities that involve families from ethnically diverse communities to ensure their voices guide important issues in special education and general education reform initiatives.

During 2001, parents from across the state met in focus groups to answer the question "What has to happen for your voice to be heard regarding your child's and other children's education?" Their recommendations were compiled into a report. During the spring of 2002, parents convened a second time to prioritize the recommendations. This publication highlights parents' best thinking. We invite parents and educators to unite in action to pursue these strategies to make real improvements in the education system and the lives of all children in California.

*Involve parents*