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Transcript of teleconference call held November 15, 2000

Parent Participation and Students' Post-School Outcomes

presented by

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MS. SWORD: My name is Carrie Sword, and I am a technical assistance coordinator with the National Transition Alliance (NTA). NTA is the hosting entity for these topical teleconferences. We try to have them once a month, and today I am very happy to welcome you all and to introduce our speaker, Amy Pleet.

Amy recently received her doctorate, which was very hard earned, I must say. She is an assistant professor in the Department of Reading, Special Education, and Instructional Technology at Towson University in Maryland. She previously was the Transition Specialist for the State of Maryland, and she is going to talk to us about some research that she conducted in the process of doing her dissertation regarding parent involvement and student post-school outcomes, methods for measuring parent involvement, measuring parent involvement with the National PTA Standards, parents' views of methods to develop partnerships, and relationships between parent involvement and students' post-school outcomes.

What we are going to do is I'll have Amy take the floor, and she'll talk for about forty minutes, present her findings, and then we'll have some time for question-answer at the end for ten or fifteen minutes. So, I would ask you to hold your questions until the end, but please do feel free to ask questions at that point. And at the very end, we will give you contact information for Amy in case you want to reach her. So, without further ado, Amy, the floor is yours.

DR. PLEET: Thanks, Carrie. Welcome, everybody. We are getting the first of our fall-winter chill here in Baltimore, so I'm wondering if it's what you're feeling across the country. I hope you're in a nice warm place and ready to listen. I might recommend that you have a piece a paper. I'm going to give some numbers for you to jot down, because if you're a visual learner like I am, it's going to be hard to hold all of this in your mind.

I'm going to assume that having a background in research will be useful for what you're doing but that you are not coming to this as a researcher with a heavy statistical researcher point of view. So, I'm not going to be really detailed in the research part. That information is available, and I can talk to you privately. I want to give an overview for the methodology that I introduced as I was doing my research and why I came to do it the way that I did. I think it gives an interesting new twist to how we're looking at parent

involvement and how we link it with student post-school outcomes.

Let me say a little bit first about my background and why I'm so passionate about this topic. I've been an education professional for 30 years as an English teacher first in the secondary level and then as a special education teacher and then as a transition coordinator both at the local level and at the state level. More importantly, I am also a parent of a child with disabilities who is now in his senior year of high school. I have lived with the struggles and the uncertainties that a parent goes through, and I am very aware of the issues that come up as parents attempt to link to schools. I can't say that I have lived through every experience as a parent, but I have lived both sides of the issue. That's why I came to this issue.

In the literature and the research, everybody agrees that parent involvement is important in school. Schools may attempt to build partnerships with parents by looking at, "Gee, if only we could get the parents to sign the IEP, if only we could get them to come to the IEP meeting, we're making progress." But I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about a partnership at another level. So I asked, **"What if there's a way I could contribute some research to this field that would boost parent involvement to another level, not just about getting parents involved in the IEP process with their own child but actually having them be a partner in education?"**

As I was looking at the literature, I realized that we are in the midst of a paradigm shift. In the old paradigm of parent involvement, parents were responsible for the bake sales. They were the volunteers who came to school, doing the bulletin board letters or sitting with a student who needed somebody to listen to them read. They were the PTA leaders -- a few of them -- or most importantly, they were the home nurturers. They were the people at home who were taking care of making sure that by the time their child came to school, their child was ready to learn.

In the new paradigm we see something very different. We see parents being on advisory boards. We see parents being involved in program development teams or in program evaluation teams. We see parents being the lobbyists for program funding. We see them being thought of as the informed partner for education. We recognize that parents are the lifelong teacher for the children that they have raised.

When I looked back to see what has caused this paradigm shift, one of the main contributing factors was Goal Eight of Goals 2000, which, of course, now is called the National Education Goals. That goal said, "By the year 2000, every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children." Notice they use the word partnerships, not "We'll have parents involved," but "We'll actually have partnerships with parents." If you think of a business partnership, you think of having people who are considered equal partners, not that they each have expertise in everything but they each have something unique to contribute to the partnership, to a unified vision, to a unified goal.

So, what did the Federal Government do to support this goal? Well, they gave grants to several organizations, leadership centers, and maybe some of you who are listening were part of those grants. Several publications were printed, and as I examined those, I saw that these publications earmarked the milestones as people started to shift from the paradigm of parent volunteers to the paradigm of parent partnerships. A lot of research was conducted.

One piece of evidence of the shifted paradigm is what we see in the new requirements for parent involvement in IDEA 1997. It goes beyond the requirements for parents being involved with their own child. It speaks about building partnerships with parents. I went with a highlighter through all the

IDEA regulations that came out in 1998. I grouped the requirements related to parent partnerships into five components:

1. The first component was a State Advisory Panel. The State Advisory Panel is made up of persons appointed by the governor in most states. More than 50% of the individuals on this board must be individuals with disabilities or parents of children with disabilities. They have the role of advising the state office of special education on the unmet needs of students with disabilities, they comment publicly on rules or regulations proposed by the state, and advise the state on developing evaluative measures and reporting the data to OSEP. The State Advisory Board also advises the state on corrective action plans in response to federal monitoring and advises the state on developing or implementing policies related to coordinating services for students with disabilities. Finally, the State Advisory Board submits an annual report to the state and conducts meetings available to the public. This advisory panel is a powerful group that has gained more significance with IDEA '97.
2. The second component of parent partnership under IDEA '97 relates to the State Improvement Plan and Local Improvement Plan. In both Improvement Plans, IDEA says there must be provisions for joint training of parents and special educators, related service personnel, and general education personnel. Notice that parents are included in this joint training requirement.
3. The third parent partnership component that I saw in IDEA '97 was "parent counseling and training," which is a new related service which can be specified on the IEP. Parent counseling and training is assisting parents in understanding the special needs of their child, providing parents with information about child development, and helping parents to acquire the necessary skills to allow them to support the implementation of their child's IEP. If the school team thinks that parents need parent counseling and training, that service could be written into the IEP, and there can be funding for that as well. Now, often this training is provided by the parent centers a number of you represent, but it could be done in other ways if there is a particular need for a particular parent.
4. The fourth component of parent activities in IDEA '97 is related to monitoring. Monitoring of local school systems and non-public placements is a complex process with many pieces. One of the things it must include is a parent questionnaire or other methods of giving parents' perspectives. They will be looking at satisfaction, they will be looking at suggestions and recommendations, and then they must use parents' input as they are designing how to improve the effectiveness of their program.
5. The fifth and final component of parent involvement is the one that has existed since P.L. 94-142. That is that states must ensure that the rights of parents are protected and that complaint procedures and safeguard procedures for their own child's IEP are disseminated and implemented. The requirements for IDEA are strengthened attempts to gain the parents' participation in IDEA '97, but other than that it's the same aspect of parental rights as previously.

So, there are five expanded ways that parents are to be involved in special education programming, and it goes much beyond what we have seen in the past where it was just related to their own child. The new components expand into program design, program evaluation, and leadership, and so educational leaders need to take a look at how we are going to extend a hand to the parents to welcome them in, to promote the kinds of activities with parents that will have parents ready to do that. Further, how are we going to measure how we're doing with parent involvement? How are we going to measure progress? Are we getting where we want to go?

So, I took a look at research studies that were done on parent involvement in

special education, and I found that there were a number of ways that they measured parent involvement. As I list them, think about whether these really are going to be adequate for the new definition of parent partnership. Many studies measured parent involvement by counting the number of parents who attended the IEP meetings. Many counted the number of parents who had signed the IEP. Well, I know of plenty of cases where the IEP was just mailed home, and I wouldn't call that a partnership.

But some studies looked at the number of intervals that parents were speaking at the IEP meeting as a way of measuring parent involvement. Some had parents rate their satisfaction levels. Did they feel that they had a high degree of participation, average participation, or low participation? But again, is this measure a reliable one? Many studies looked at satisfaction level, either teacher satisfaction or parent satisfaction, asking for an individualistic opinion of their level of parent involvement. It seemed to me that none of these were looking at the broader picture, of what parent involvement could mean as IDEA '97 redefined it.

So, I realized that I wouldn't get much help from looking at the research and the literature in special education. I turned to what researchers in general education had done to promote parent partnership and how they have measured it. I discovered the [National PTA Standards](#), which came out in 1994. The Introduction to the National PTA Standards includes this statement, "Over 30 years of research has proven beyond dispute the positive connection between parent involvement and student success. Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform." This statement caught my interest. Coming from a special education background, I didn't even know what they were talking about, and I had to dig a little bit. But since it was my dissertation I had to dig a lot, and I asked myself, "What is this 30 years of research they are talking about?"

I discovered the research that was coordinated by Dr. Joyce Epstein at Johns Hopkins University right here in Maryland. Their research over the 30 years coordinated the work of more than 300 researchers around the world. She had a federal grant to gather information from these 300 researchers. Part of the research led to the development of the Epstein Types of Parent Involvement. These Epstein Types provided a framework of six ways that a school can promote parent involvement in education. There were a number of research studies that investigated the implementation of these six types; the results for students, for parents, for teachers; the challenges for students, for parents, for teachers; and the terms that we have to redefine to really build partnerships with parents.

The National PTA Standards were published in 1994 based on the research coordinated by Dr. Epstein. Their six standards are based on her six types. The National PTA Standards have now been adopted across the country. Any school PTA is able to get copies of these Standards in a very nicely bound book, or you can go to the national PTA Web site and download the standards and a nice packet of information for schools on how to promote parent involvement using these standards. I based my research on the Epstein six types since I needed a research foundation.

Now, as I'm going through the rest of my presentation, I want you to jot down some numbers. If you are a visual learner, this will help guide you. I have been talking about six types of parent involvement strategies. You are going to hear me talking about "six." You are also going to hear me talk about "20" activities, and you want to jot that down. I'm going to talk about the numbers "5 of 24." That will make sense to you later. I will say "131 of 262." This is one of those advanced organizer strategies if you want to use it. That was "131 of 262," and then I will talk about "12 of 18."

Okay. Now, let's go a little deeper into the six types or the six standards. I'm

going to review them very briefly. Obviously I'm not going to cover everything about them, but there's a lot of information on the Web site or in other publications, and these National PTA Standards and the Epstein six types are cited in most of the literature you see coming out now about parent involvement.

1. Standard one is communicating. This is simply that communicating with parents must be two-way and regular, must be meaningful. It's not only sending newsletters home, but it's devising ways to listen to parents as well.
2. Standard two is parenting. Parents are not born knowing how to be a parent. They need some support on how to parent a child through the different developmental stages and especially how to parent a child with disabilities.
3. Standard three is student learning. How do parents support their child to be a learner in school and to be a learner at home and in the community? The Epstein work has a lot of information on interactive homework for students -- interactive with their families and community members in doing homework assignments. There are other community-based learning activities that students do on weekends and in the evening with their families; this also includes goal setting with their parents.
4. Standard four is volunteering. This includes helping the school to set a welcoming climate for parents when they come into the school. It involves seeing them develop strategies to recruit and train parent volunteers. Standard four also includes looking at the wide spectrum of parents who are able to volunteer for the school that are never able to come into the school. For example, these parents can set up work site linkages or job shadowing experiences.
5. Standard five is school decision-making and advocacy. This is having parents be on the PTA as well as having parents be leaders in the school. We need to redefine what a parent leader is. IDEA '97 talks about Advisory Boards, program development, and evaluation roles for parents as well as being the advocate for their child.
6. Standard six is collaborating with the community. This involves interagency collaboration, employer partners, and linking parents with community services. Implementing this standard is especially important during the transition years for students with disabilities.

So, this was a very quick overview of the six standards for building parent school partnerships. Based on those six standards, I developed a list of 20 parent involvement activities. I told you 20 activities was one of the numbers you were to write down. For three years I presented my findings, having workshops and conferences in an informal focus group format. I invited participants -- whether they were parents, educators, administrators, transition specialists, social workers, or advocates -- to develop a list of parent involvement activities for the Epstein types.

I then refined that long list to 20 activities that were the most common activities or the easiest activities for schools to implement. I assembled a four-person panel of parent involvement and transition experts. I asked them to "type" each of those 20 activities, to say for each activity the Epstein type that it met. Most activities fall under the description of more than one type. For example, holding a parenting workshop where you would invite a speaker in the community to come in and talk about transition meets more than one type. That would be communicating (standard one), parenting (standard two), and collaborating with the community (standard six). In this way, I had my expert panel type each of the 20 activities. If three or four of them agreed, then I considered that decisive. I now had a list of 20 activities that schools could do to promote parent involvement during transition which I could categorize into the six types. I needed to find out how many of those were being implemented by the schools, whether parents were participating in the activities, and whether parents considered those strategies important.

I had one of those moments that all researchers have sooner or later. I considered, what good is all this information? Who could use it? What would they want to know? I suppose I will find that out. I went to some transition coordinators. They told me no school is going to do 20 different activities to involve families. They wanted to know which activities were more likely to increase students' post-school outcomes. They reminded me that's what we are about. That information would be useful and would justify the time for my research. It would also justify them putting time and effort into implementing some activities in the schools.

So I said, "All right. If I am going to link parent involvement with student post-school outcomes, I must consider what other variables are involved here." The research shows that students who participate in career-related training or paid work experience are going to have stronger outcomes than those who do not. I have to control for those variables if I want to look for a relationship between parent involvement and post-school outcomes.

Now, let me go back to Epstein's theory of overlapping spheres of influence. She says there are three spheres of influence that impact a student: their school, their family, and the community. She pictures it as three ovals that overlap with the student in the center in her diagram. There's not a clear boundary between the school's influence, the family's influence, and the community's influences. They all overlap. In transition we have those same three ovals. We have the transition components that are happening in the school. We have parent participation, what parents consider important or how they are being involved, and then we have students' post-school outcomes in the community. These three formed the tripod of my research. Let me say them again: transition components in the school, parent participation or parent views of what is important, and then post-school community outcomes as the third.

If I were going to look at post-school outcomes, I had to figure out how I was going to measure them. I reviewed the literature on students' post-school outcomes, and I went to the old standard, the National Longitudinal Transition Study. I looked at how they measured employment, further education and training, community activities, residence, and transportation, and then I added linkages to supportive organizations in the adult community.

Now I was ready to design my survey. I've got my framework set up -- the three parts of the conceptual framework -- and I was ready to design the survey. I made two two-part categorical surveys. The first survey was for parents, and it was designed in two parts. In one part I would give them the list of 20 parent involvement activities. I would ask them which of these transition activities were offered to them, did they attend or not, and how important did they think they were. In the second part of the survey I asked what were their students doing now one year after graduation so that I would have their post-school outcomes.

Then I designed another two-part survey for professionals. I was looking for the one professional in each of the high schools who had worked with the students before they graduated. I asked those professionals about the students in my sample. This included the transition activities they offered those students and how many parents participated in them. In the second part of the professional survey I asked them to provide demographic data on students, including what transition components they had completed in their program and whether they were in a work-study program or a career course.

Now, I did the usual things that you need to do to get content validity and reliability, and for people who are researchers I can go into that in more depth. The population that I was looking at was all of the students in the State of Maryland who had graduated in 1998 with a Maryland diploma and who were receiving special education in their last year. This was 2,525

students in the total population. I invited the 24 local school systems in Maryland to participate in the research study. And since I was the Transition Specialist at Maryland State Department of Education, I had a little bit of advantage over some other doctoral students. Five school systems ultimately said yes, they would be interested in pursuing this.

Now, I couldn't say that this was a representative sample. I would have to call it a convenience sample. I can't generalize my findings to all schools in Maryland nor all the schools in the nation. Of the five school systems that worked with me, some of them that were smaller chose to use every high school in their system. Some of them chose to select certain high schools. Let me be clear that this was a pilot study, and I was interested in establishing a methodology and establishing a baseline for other people to build on. The voluntary sample was appropriate for my purposes. This was not intended to be a study that was generalizable. Out of the five school systems that volunteered, 18 high schools participated in my study with a total of 262 senior special education students. You wrote down 262 and you wrote down 18, right?

Here's how I gained responses. In the 18 local schools, personnel mailed out my surveys to the parents of their graduates. I did not have access to the names of the graduates or their addresses; that was kept confidential. I only had a student number assigned to them. So, they mailed out surveys to their graduates with a cover letter that I had drafted for them that was on the high school letterhead. They wrote a handwritten note in the corner from somebody at the school who was known to the parent to encourage them to respond. The survey went from the high school directly to the family. The high schools also followed up with phone calls. Now, in some cases, someone from the high school made the follow-up phone calls; someone from the central office in the smaller areas made phone calls to the families. In the inner-city school system that participated there were a number of families with no phones, so someone made home visits to increase the response rate.

Differences in the way the data was collected made the conclusions of questionable reliability, but I think I have established a pattern that could be used in other research studies. Someone who replicates this study would want to tighten up the way that the data was collected. I did get a 50% percent response rate, so 131 of the 262 parents replied to this study. This is really pretty amazing.

Now, here are the findings when I was comparing what parents and professionals said about these 20 parent involvement activities:

- The surprise is the number of parents who were unaware of activities that were offered. In other words, there was a high percentage of parents who said, "No, this activity was not offered," while the professionals said that it was.
- Another interesting finding was which activities the parents ranked as most important. They valued activities that fell under the categories of student learning or parenting for decision-making. The activities that parents ranked as least important were in the volunteering type.

Next I looked at the transition components in which the students had participated. I wanted to know whether they participated in paid work experience or unpaid work experience and looked at whether they participated in a vocational exploration course or they had a whole sequence of career courses in a program.

- Of the 18 high schools, 12 of them had high transition components. This meant that more than 60% of the graduates had successfully completed two or more of those transition components. In those 12 high schools, there were 106 graduates, a very high percentage of my total sample. One of the school systems, however, selected only their vocational schools -- this skewed the number of graduates with a high

transition component. If we had done every high school in every school system, I'm sure it wouldn't have been so high. This was a nice number, however, for the next step in my research. So, 12 of the 18 high schools had high transition components and 5 of the 18 had low transition components.

Now, remember that -- 12 of 18. I used those 12 high schools in comparing student outcomes. I could now control for the variables of career preparation. If I could say the students in those 12 high schools had strong transition preparation, then I could use those students to compare other variables. I could compare what was different in their outcomes and how their outcomes related to whether parents were involved in those 20 parent involvement activities.

First, I looked at students' post-school outcomes from the parents' survey. I did find some research studies that showed that if you surveyed the parents versus surveying the graduates you would get the same response. They found that there was no statistical difference, so I thought it was safe to survey the parents.

1. I looked at the percentage of graduates who were successful in employment. I used the National Longitudinal Transition Study definition of successful and used my panel of experts to confirm my definition. If they were involved in paid full-time or part-time work with or without benefits, I called them successfully employed.
2. If the graduates were involved in college or some kind of training program full time or part time, I called that successful in further education and training.
3. If they were involved in organized outside activities or outside of the family, I called that successful in community participation.
4. If they were living in a dorm, apartment, or a house with or without a roommate or a spouse or in military housing or paying rent at home, I grouped all of those as successful in residence. That was one of the lower areas, but that is not surprising one year after graduation. How many students *without* disabilities are living on their own one year after high school graduation?
5. And then the last area was transportation. If they had a driver's license, they used public transportation, or they were able to walk or bike independently to work or to shopping, then that was considered successful in transportation.

Out of the five categories for success, if students were successful in three or more, then my committee said that I was safe in calling them successful overall -- overall success. Now, I examined the 12 high schools with high transition components. I looked at each of the six types of parent involvement, and I separated the schools that had high parent involvement or low parent involvement for each type.

Let me give you an illustration. Parenting activities: out of those 12 high schools with high transition components, 4 had high parent involvement in parenting activities, while 6 had low parent involvement in parenting activities. Then I compared the percentage of students in those two groups who had successful outcomes.

What I have learned was that for all types of parent involvement, the schools with high parent involvement had a greater percentage of successful outcomes than the schools with low parent involvement. None of the differences were statistically significant.

However, there was a pattern that I could point to: if you had parent involvement that was more than 60%. That is, if more than 60% of the parents were involved in those activities, then there was a higher indication of students' successful outcomes after graduation. The type that had the highest rate of difference, closest to being significant, was parenting. This

tells me that if you are engaged with working with parents and you ensure that there are elements designed to enhance parenting skills in any activities that you do, that it assists them in being more effective parents, and it is likely to improve the students' post-school outcomes.

Overall, I have six recommendations.

1. First, schools may want to examine their method of communicating with parents. A large number of parents in the study were not aware of the activities they were offered. So, what do we need to do to make sure that information is communicated to parents?
2. Second, schools that are building strong parent involvement activities and are achieving high rates of participation are great resources to other schools. It would be beneficial for them to share what they are doing at the national level or the state level or even at the local level between schools.
3. Third, parents request activities that assist them in parenting, with student learning at home, and decision making. These are the types of activities that they say are most important. How can schools increase parent involvement at the advisory, the advocacy, and the evaluation levels? Schools need to give parents opportunities to become better parents and to learn strategies to support student learning and to be involved in their decision-making at the individual and program level.
4. Fourth, students' post-school outcomes are becoming of increasing importance to schools. The high stakes testing that we are seeing, the national standards, the monitoring efforts are all aimed at post-school outcomes. If states proceed where local school systems left off in developing post-school outcome studies, they need to consider how outcomes are linked with how students were prepared. They need to identify which activities were effective. They also need to identify which strategies were used to engage parents and to what extent the parents are involved. Otherwise, we have no way of knowing how to improve or which methods are working or not working.
5. My fifth recommendation is that teacher preparation programs need to infuse parent involvement throughout their coursework. Teachers generally, in my experience and in my reading, are not aware of the research-based strategies to involve parents. These are not skills that teachers are born with, and they are not likely to invest the time and energy to develop them with so many other priorities in schools today. These strategies, developed through the Epstein research and promoted through the National PTA, need to be incorporated into teacher preparation programs, but so do awareness of cultural differences in families and the other pressing issues for families of children with disabilities.
6. My sixth recommendation has to do with further research. Those of you who are thinking of research, here are some ideas to get you started.
 - o A larger or broader study could be done in the state of Maryland or any other state to confirm or dispute the findings and patterns that I saw but could not statistically confirm. I think if we want to be able to speak to legislatures or to policy makers about the importance of parent and family involvement, we need a body of research that we can show that indicates a relationship between families' involvement and students' successful post-school outcomes.
 - o Research could examine the demographic variables in this study or in other studies. For instance, research could be done on family involvement for students in certain gender groups or ethnic groups or disability categories.
 - o I would like to see some qualitative research done involving anecdotal reporting and investigation into activities that are done to promote family involvement.
 - o Some of my high schools conducted incredible activities and had quite a strong response rate from families. I would like to see some research that examines what they accomplished, their steps, their challenges or barriers, and their approaches. In other words, what can we learn from what they have learned?
 - o There could be further research in post-school studies examining the relationship between parent involvement with transition components. If there are certain schools that have strong transition and parent involvement components, then we should look at how that is linked with post-school results. And then relationships between parent involvement and outcomes and other variables. Does it make a difference if a student is in a segregated setting versus an inclusive setting? Does it make a difference if the student has strong self-determination skills or not?

In closing, there is a quote from Charles Darwin that says, "It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most responsive to change." When there is change upon us, we have an opportunity to be left behind or to move forward. I was hoping that the research that I conducted is the way to take a different look. The research can give us a different perspective on parent involvement. It can link parent involvement with post-school outcomes and give people in schools tools that they can use to build stronger parent involvement programs.

That is what I have to say. Carrie, I am open for questions if people have any.

MS. SWORD: Okay. Does anyone have questions of Amy? Amy, I have a question.

DR. PLEET: Okay.

MS. SWORD: You talked earlier about parenting being important to post-school outcomes. In my experience working in the schools sometimes it is difficult for a parent to say, "I need help with parenting." It is already hard enough for them to go into the schools where they feel that maybe the school staff are the authority figures. And I wonder if you have any ideas of how parenting information could be offered to the schools in a non-threatening manner for parents?

DR. PLEET: That is a great idea. I am teaching a course as an adjunct at Johns Hopkins University on building parent partnerships. Each of my students is doing a project where they have to find a family that is least engaged with the school. Then they do an experiment on what would they need to do to have this parent be more engaged. And what they have discovered is exactly what you are talking about. The parents that are not engaged felt threatened, intimidated by the professionalism of the people in the school and are not likely to approach the school and say, "Please help me with parenting."

What they are more likely to respond to is someone at the human level talking to them and just building a friendship with them, getting to know them, getting to know their issues. And the students that have engaged in this both last year and this year have had very amazing results. The results excited them, engaged that parent, and also spilled over into the way that these teachers have worked with other families.

Now, the kinds of things that they talked about were things that teachers basically do not have time to do. They talked about making home visits with parents for a cup of coffee. They talked about setting up a time after school to chat or talk to the parent on the phone. They talked about informal kinds of things that they used to do back in the old days, that in our busy schedule we do not have time to do.

So, it is not that there is one right way to do it. A teacher has to figure out a way to have this work so that they can still have a life outside of school, but they can also get to know parents as human beings. When educators come across as the experts who are unapproachable, they are less likely to do this part in building a partnership.

MS. SWORD: I think that last statement you made was really good because you said that the parents did not approach the schools because of the teachers' professionalism. Was that a study that was done or is that your interpretation?

DR. PLEET: There have been a couple of studies. A number of the Epstein studies talk about that, studies that she reviews. Also, Sharon DeFur at William and Mary is doing research into the professionalism of the educator and the response of the parents. She and I were talking about her research

and what she is discovering.

I had a similar experience when attended the IEP meeting for my son and I have quite a strong educational background. I sit at that IEP meeting and I notice the pull to wait until the school team invites my input, until it is my turn to speak. When I sit at that IEP team as an educator, I don't wait for my turn. If I have something I want to say, I say it. The experience is quite different but when I'm sitting there as the parent, I feel that it's my place to wait. Of course, I resist the pressure and speak up anyway, but many parents comply.

MS. SWORD: And the parents are supposed to be a full part of the team, but a lot of times they feel exactly the way you are describing.

DR. PLEET: And that is not only the parents' fault. I have been in teams as a parent where it is established from the beginning that I am a full partner by the tone of the person leading that meeting. I am relaxed enough that I can pitch in whatever I have to say. Whoever starts that meeting in that tone has a lot of power with regard to whether parents are going to be a partner or just a participant.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: I have two questions. What has been done, what is being done, what was done to help parents in their advocacy skills? What is being done to empower them with the feeling that they are part of that team? Being that team member that you felt like is professional, you could just speak right up but when you are sitting there as a parent you felt that you needed to wait your turn. Was there anything -- any kinds of advocacy skills or --?

DR. PLEET: There are a number of programs going on across the country -- the Beach Center in Minnesota, the PEATC Center in Virginia. Each state has a federally funded parent center, and many states also have state-funded parent centers. These centers have the job of educating parents so that they are fully formed members. They are ready to come to the team. In Maryland every county has a parent center that has been funded by the state as well as a center that is funded by the federal government. Each one of these centers has been trained in the Next Steps training so that they can give these workshops for parents.

What I see as a problem is that parents then come to the team feeling they are ready and they are informed. I am not saying every parent comes because this is not true universally, but when parents come and they are fully informed, they sit down at the table ready to talk. If educators are still living in the paradigm that we are the educators and we are the expert and we will ask each parent if we want your opinion, if they are approaching it that way, then we have antagonism, we have unhappy results, and not fully developed IEPs frankly because it doesn't get all the sides out on the table. Also we have an increase in lawsuits and hearings because an informed parent gets irritated when professionals try to block their input. We need to approach it so these efforts to educate parents are important. They have to move forward. But I think we have to work on the other side of the table and make sure we are educating the educators so that they are ready to be partners as well.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Okay. That brings me to a question. The position that I hold is of parent partner. I am a parent of a child with a disability. I am employed by the school system to connect with parents on that parent-to-parent level but also in the transition process. Moving from entitlements to eligibility is a difficult process for both students and families and the school system or the adult system. So, I am just wondering if there is anything else like that you have heard about or are we unique?

DR. PLEET: The Next Steps training that PEATC offers is out of Virginia. They have developed six modules that are set up to be -- actually I have them

right here on my shelf. There is a workshop on preparing for work. There is a workshop on planning ahead for families. There is a workshop on life in the community, independent living. There is a workshop on self-advocacy. They have added two more so there are now eight workshops that come to you in a ready package. They include the overheads, the handouts, the activities that you do, the list of materials you need before you sit down with the families. You could do these on eight different evenings or you can do them on Saturday. You could figure out a way that works in your local area. Some school systems combine them. In Maryland we have training every year in March. Every school system is welcome to send a team of people to the training. The team must be an educator-and-parent partnership. They come to the training with the commitment to go back to their local school system and conduct these trainings for other families.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: And what are these workshops?

DR. PLEET: They are called [The Next Steps: The Transition Series](http://interact.uoregon.edu/NEXTStep/NextSTEPintroduction.html), developed by PEATC of Virginia. [Or <http://interact.uoregon.edu/NEXTStep/NextSTEPintroduction.html>]

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Oh, right. The Next Steps. Right. We just did that, but unfortunately I could not attend, but you are about the third or fourth person that --

DR. PLEET: Well, they are great because they are designed exactly for what you are talking about. There probably are plenty of others. That is just the one I am most familiar with. The problem with that is you give parents information and you have them ready but you do not have the educators ready to be the other side of the partnership. As a result there is friction. And it does not take much. My experience is one or two workshops, and the educators are ready.

So, I see part of your role as not only educating the parents but also working somehow within the system at staff development phase. It has to do with people's awareness and attitude. They need to see that they are being the know-it-all expert and that that is shutting off openness for parents. Then they go, "Oh, my gosh, I never really realized that is how I approach" and then they calm it down and they become human beings with parents.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Amy, do you have an email address that we could reach you at?

DR. PLEET: Sure.

MS. SWORD: Actually, Amy, if you want to give your telephone number as well and whatever contact information you would like to share, we have got about five minutes.

DR. PLEET: Okay. Email is simply my first initial and last name: apleet@towson.edu

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: And your phone number?

DR. PLEET: 410-704-6001.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Okay. Thank you very much.

DR. PLEET: I am especially interested in hearing from anybody who wants to pick up and do the next piece of research. I think we need some documentation, some proof that parent involvement really does impact students' outcomes. This is the age of outcomes. Everybody wants to know how students are doing and if we can show a relationship with parent involvement, we are more likely to get some priorities and attitudes changed.

MARY: Amy, this is Mary from the Wisconsin Statewide Parent Educator

Initiative. This is a brand new grant for the State of Wisconsin. There are three project coordinators who are all parents of children with disabilities. We have located a parent in every one of our area educational agencies, which breaks it up into 12 areas of our state. And we are trying to do some of that research, and so we would be real interested in talking to you more about that.

DR. PLEET: Great.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Is there a way to connect with the person from Wisconsin about that project?

MARY: Yes, we have a toll free number: 1-877-844-4925.

UNIDENTIFIED PARTICIPANT: Okay. Great.

MS. SWORD: Well, thank you everyone for being on the line, and thanks to you again, Amy, for sharing your information and on behalf of the National Transition Alliance, I wish you well in furthering your parent involvement efforts.

DR. PLEET: My research has been published through Dissertation Abstracts so if anyone wants to look at the details, it is available.

(End of Teleconference)

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