



306

**Helping Parents through the
Special Education Process**

A Training Outline

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**For the
Pennsylvania Child Welfare
Training Program**

**University of Pittsburgh
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306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

An Overview of the Curriculum

Rationale:

In order for Child Welfare Professionals to assist parents in meeting the educational needs of their children, it is crucial that they know about basic educational rights, the support systems for these rights, as well as how to work with schools in securing access to programs and services that benefit their child educationally, emotionally, and socially.

Competencies:

- 306-1: The Child Welfare Professional understands the roles and responsibilities of the Child Welfare agency and other community child and family service agencies in the identification, assessment, and planning of treatment for child abuse/neglect.
- 306-2: The Child Welfare Professional is able to work collaboratively and cooperatively with community agencies in a team approach to service delivery.
- 306-3: The Child Welfare Professional knows and can implement the basic components of an effective team to assure coordinated and timely services to families and children including a clear mission, common goals and identify, shared accountability for outcomes, interdependence, collaborative decision making.

Learning Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

- ✓ Explain the process to be followed when communicating with school personnel
- ✓ Explain the various means in which Child Welfare Professionals may advocate for parents in school settings
- ✓ Plan and develop a case plan for student assistance with school personnel for a shared child
- ✓ Explain the various levels of support services in schools available to students and their families as well as how to access them
- ✓ Explain the legal rights of parents in ensuring that their children receive an appropriate education

Length of Workshop:

6 Hours

Materials Needed to Present Workshop:

- ✓ Color Markers
- ✓ Name Tents
- ✓ IDEA Catchers
- ✓ Overhead Projector and Screen

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An Overview of the Curriculum (continued)

Materials Needed to Present Workshop (continued):

- ✓ Easel Stands and Pads
- ✓ Handouts for Participants
- ✓ Curriculum and Overhead Transparencies
- ✓ Masking Tape
- ✓ Sentence Strips
- ✓ Appendix A: Educational Jargon – Answers (2 pages – copy for every participant)
- ✓ Appendix B: Responsibilities of Key Players (4 pages – one copy for trainer)
- ✓ Book: Huefner, D. S. (2000). *Getting Comfortable with Special Education Law*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

Target Audience:

Child Welfare Professionals

Workshop Summary:

In this workshop, participants will learn appropriate strategies for helping parents to work with school district personnel in order to ensure that those responsible for the educational needs of their children meet those needs. The session addresses topic areas such as communicating with school personnel, the Multidisciplinary Process of assessment, special education rights and responsibilities, as well as school law as it applies to attendance and confidentiality.

Expectations of the Trainer:

The trainer should have a strong knowledge base in working and collaborating with school personnel through student assistance teams. Secondly, the trainer should have experience working with students who have been diagnosed with mental, physical, or social disabilities, as well as Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) and Special Education regulations. Finally, the trainer should have the ability to relate the process of the Multidisciplinary Process and Special Education in public schools to their families in Child Welfare.

PA Standards:

Assessment Standards:

- IA: Assess Inquiries
- IC: Make Investigative Decisions
- IE: Produce Family-Focused Assessment
- IJ: Complete Full Reassessment
- IK: Review Assessment Tasks of Service Providers

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An Overview of the Curriculum (continued)

PA Standards (continued):

Service Planning Standards:

- IIA: Establish a Planning Process
- IIB: Select an Appropriate Goal
- IIC: Write the Plan
- IID: Build on Continuing Assessments
- IIF: Share the Plan
- IIG: Include Formal and Informal Resources
- III: Meet Concrete Needs
- IJJ: Use the Plan

Service Delivery Standards:

- IIIA: Connect Service Plan and Delivery
- IIIB: Establish Service Linkages
- IIIC: Document Key Issues and Decisions
- IIID: Assure Service Needs
- IIIE: Implement Service Plan
- IIIF: Establish Consistent Contact
- IIIN: Conduct Outreach to Parents
- IIIO: Plan Family Visits
- IIIP: Monitor Services to Children
- IIIQ: Support Children
- IIIR: Support Caregivers

Monitoring and Evaluation Standards:

- IIVA: Monitor Service Delivery
- IIVB: Evaluate Service Delivery
- IIVC: Revise Plan
- IIVF: Collaborate with Family
- IIVG: Conduct Case Reviews

CFSR Issues:

Outcome WB 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
Item 21: Educational needs of the child

Diversity/Social Work Statement:

This workshop addresses social work values in a number of ways. From a collaborative and strengths focused perspective the session content addresses supporting parents through the process of getting the academic needs of their child met. The session also gives focus to tuning into the specific needs of a child with learning challenges and how to meet the needs of that child. The content addresses the Child Welfare Professional's role of advocate, mentor, resource person, and support person.

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An Overview of the Curriculum (continued)

Diversity/Social Work Statement (continued):

It is through these various roles that the Child Welfare Professional can address the process of developing a relationship with the family in order to ensure that their needs are met. Some specific interactional skills addressed in this workshop include tuning into self, tuning into others, tuning into the situation, and providing relevant data.

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306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Agenda for a Full-Day Curriculum on Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Estimated Time	Content	Page
30 Minutes	Section I: Overview and Introductions	6
45 Minutes	Section II: School Law	9
80 Minutes	Section III: Assessment of Students	13
130 Minutes	Section IV: Special Education	18
60 Minutes	Section V: Communication is the Key	26
15 Minutes	Section VI: Review and Evaluation	31

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section I: Overview and Introductions

Estimated Length of Time:

30 Minutes

Learning Objectives:

The participants will:

- ✓ Meet other participants
- ✓ Identify the PA standards, competencies, and learning objectives for the workshop
- ✓ List their learning needs and expectations for the workshop

Method of Presentation:

Lecture, individual activity, small group activity, large group discussion

Materials Needed:

- ✓ Name Tents
- ✓ Markers
- ✓ Sentence Strips
- ✓ Masking tape
- ✓ **Handout #1 (Pennsylvania Standards for Child Welfare Practice)**
- ✓ **Handout #2 (Competencies)**
- ✓ **Handout #3 (Learning Objectives)**
- ✓ **Handout #4 (Agenda)**
- ✓ **Overhead #1 (Competencies)**
- ✓ **Overhead #2 (Learning Objectives)**
- ✓ **Overhead #3 (Agenda)**

Resources Used:

None

PA Standards:

None

CFSR Issues:

None

Interactional Skills:

Tuning in to self

Tuning in to others

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Section I: Overview and Introductions

Outline of Presentation:

The trainer will:

- ✓ Welcome participants to the training
- ✓ Introduce him/herself and other workshop participants
- ✓ Review the Pennsylvania Standards, competencies, and learning objectives for the workshop
- ✓ Have participants identify their learning needs and expectations for the training
- ✓ Review the agenda for the workshop
- ✓ Ask participants to construct name tents
- ✓ Facilitate a small group discussion about participants' school experiences

Step 1:

Welcome participants to the training and introduce self. Have participants introduce themselves to the large group. Review the rules of the training program (i.e. 15-minute rule, sign-in sheet, and evaluation.)

Step 2:

Distribute **Handout #1 (Pennsylvania Standards for Child Welfare Practice)** and discuss the standards addressed in the workshop.

Step 3:

Distribute **Handout #2 (Competencies)** and **Handout #3 (Learning Objectives)**. Display **Overhead #1 (Competencies)** and **Overhead #2 (Learning Objectives)**. Discuss the competencies and learning objectives addressed in the workshop.

Step 4:

Distribute one sentence strip to each participant. Have participants individually write down something they hope the workshop will address. Tape the strips to the wall for display throughout the workshop. Tell participants the content that the workshop covers.

Step 5:

Distribute **Handout #4 (Agenda)**. Display **Overhead #3 (Agenda)**. Discuss the content that the workshop covers.

Step 6:

Have participants write their name on their name tents. In the top right corner, have participants draw a symbol or picture that represents how they felt about attending school as a student. In the top left corner have participants draw a symbol or picture that represents how they as parents feel about going to school for parent-teacher conferences. For participants that are not parents, have those participants relate how they think they may feel. Have participants discuss these feelings within the small groups. Explain that students and parents may experience many different emotions about their school attendance and experiences.

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Section I: Overview and Introductions (continued)

Step 6 (continued):

These emotions may impact on the working relationship between the parent and the school. Be sure to tune into how parents and students feel and engage them often so that you can redirect them back to the focus of their child's educational needs.

Trainer Note: Participants frequently have a negative view of schools because of experiences they may have had with schools. Throughout this curriculum, frequent topics arise that may bring strong reactions from participants due to these experiences. It is important, as a trainer, to allow people time to express feelings if it is appropriate, but to bring the conversation back to the content of the training without spending too much time processing unrelated feelings.

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Section II: School Law

Estimated Length of Time:

45 Minutes

Learning Objectives:

The participants will be able to:

- ✓ Identify school attendance regulations
- ✓ Describe confidentiality issues as they apply to school personnel and Child Welfare Professionals
- ✓ Identify the basic services that schools are legally required to provide for children, as compared to those that are voluntary on the part of the district

Method of Presentation:

Lecture, small and large group discussions

Materials Needed:

- ✓ **Handout #5 (School Law – Attendance)**
- ✓ **Overhead #4 (Questions about PA School Attendance)**

Resources Used:

Pennsylvania School Code

<http://www.pacode.com/secure/data/022/022toc.html>

Huefner, D. S. (2000). *Getting Comfortable with Special Education Law*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

PA Standards:

None

CFSR Issues:

Outcome WB 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
Item 21: Educational needs of the child

Interactional Skills:

None

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Section II: School Law

Outline of Presentation:

Presenters will:

- ✓ Facilitate a small group activity about Pennsylvania's school attendance laws
- ✓ Facilitate a large group discussion about the issue of confidentiality
- ✓ Facilitate a large group discussion about ways school personnel and Child Welfare Professionals can work together to help children

Step 1:

Break participants into small groups. Have each group discuss what they believe to be the requirements for school attendance in Pennsylvania by answering the questions on **Overhead #4 (Questions about PA School Attendance)**. Allow 5 minutes for this activity. Then have the groups report their answers to the large group. Distribute **Handout #5 (School Law – Attendance)** which offers detailed answers to the questions. Tell participants they can refer to the Pa Code website listed in the bibliography if they want more information. Remind participants that it is important for them to know this information because many parents or students on their caseloads violate school attendance laws.

Many parents do not understand what “truancy” means, or the penalties involved if their child is missing a lot of school. Pennsylvania law states that all children enrolled in school are required to attend regularly. Every parent or guardian who is responsible for a child of school age is liable for making sure that the child attends school regularly. If the child does not attend school for three or more days without a valid excuse (such as an illness) for the absences, he/she is considered truant. Teachers are responsible for giving a list of truant students to the school district attendance officer who serves the parents with notice. The school district then files a truancy petition in Family court. Finally, a truancy hearing is scheduled. If a judge finds a parent or child guilty it is considered a summary offense and they can be fined up to \$300 or be required to complete a parenting education program. The judge can also decide that instead of, or in addition to, the fine or education program, the parent or guardian must perform community service in the school district where the child lives for up to six months. If they fail to comply with the court order, they can be sentenced to serve up to five days in a county jail. The Child Welfare Professional should understand the school attendance laws in order to help parents follow them and assure their children are attending school.

Step 2:

Explain to participants that children who are homeless also have the right to a free, appropriate education as guaranteed by Subtitle B of Title VII of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 et seq). The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, reauthorized in January 2002, ensures educational rights and protections for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

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Section II: School Law (continued)

Step 2 (continued):

Include the following information from Section 721, Statement of Policy, in the discussion:

- (1) Each State educational agency shall ensure that each child of a homeless individual and each homeless youth has equal access to the same free, appropriate public education (FAPE), including a public preschool education, as provided to other children and youths.
- (2) States have a compulsory residency requirement as a component of the State's mandatory school attendance laws or other laws, regulations, practices, or policies that may act as a barrier to the enrollment, attendance, or success in school of homeless children and youths. The State will review and undertake steps to revise such laws, regulations, practices, or policies to ensure that homeless children and youths are afforded the same free, appropriate public education as provided to other children and youths.
- (3) Homelessness alone is not sufficient reason to separate students from the mainstream school environment.
- (4) Homeless children and youth should have access to the education and services that they need to ensure that they have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State student academic achievement standards to which all students are held.

Step 3:

Facilitate a discussion about confidentiality issues with the large group regarding both the Child Welfare Professional and school personnel. Include the following points:

- School personnel working with Child Welfare Professionals and their families have a right to know certain information that might affect the child's ability to focus in school.
- One should never discuss a mutual family in a public area such as a teacher's room, hallway, school office, supermarket, et cetera.
- Remind participants that it is okay to tell school personnel that information concerning a student is confidential. In addition, they should not share this information with others.
- School personnel who received information from a student in confidence may reveal that information to the student's parents, the principal, or other appropriate authority where the health, welfare, and/or safety of the student or other persons clearly stands in jeopardy.

Step 4:

Discuss with the large group the rights that Child Welfare Professionals have in regards to investigations in the school. Ask the participants for any experiences they may have had interviewing children on school property and how they handled the situation.

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Section II: School Law (continued)

Step 4 (continued):

Remind participants that the law permits Child Welfare Professionals to meet individually and privately with children on school property; however, many school districts have established protocols in place for these meetings with students. If this is the case, it may be in the collective best interest of everyone involved simply to follow the protocol. In extreme allegations of abuse, the Child Welfare Professional may want to remove the child from school premises rather than meeting with him/her on school property.

Step 5:

Facilitate a large group discussion on strategies a Child Welfare Professional may use to gain a working relationship with school personnel. Remind participants that it is important for them to be able to work with school personnel because times arise when it might be necessary to work with them to determine what is best for their mutual child. Sometimes school personnel may seem reluctant to work with Child Welfare Professionals. This might be because school personnel do not have a clear understanding of the legal mandates Child Welfare Professionals are governed by. It is always best to establish a good working relationship with any school that is responsible for the education of your child. In the course of the discussion, be sure to include the following strategies:

- Introduce yourself to the school principal, the school nurse, and/or your child's teacher. Explain your role and purpose as a Child Welfare Professional. Clear up any misconceptions that the school may have about the role of a Children and Youth Agency during an investigation of abuse or neglect.
- Define the meaning of "child abuse" for school personnel. Again, many misconceptions exist in public schools.
- Ask the school personnel to share with you any information or behaviors they might have noticed in school, especially concerns about child safety, well-being, abuse, or neglect.
- Leave your telephone number and business card with the child's teacher or guidance counselor along with the kinds of incidences for which they should notify you.
- Mandates hold school personnel legally liable to report evidence of child abuse within 24-hours.

Remind participants that the best approach to working with school personnel is to establish an ongoing relationship with them. Stress the idea that it takes time to build trusting relationships, but it will benefit the child when teachers and Child Welfare Professionals are working together to assure their safety and well-being. The key is communication!

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Section III: Assessment of Students

Estimated Length of Time:

80 Minutes

Learning Objectives:

The participants will be able to:

- ✓ Describe the various levels of student assistance
- ✓ Articulate to parents questions they should ask the school personnel prior to testing
- ✓ Explain the multidisciplinary process to parents
- ✓ Explain the various kinds of tests that school personnel administer

Method of Presentation:

Lecture, small group activity and discussion, and large group discussion

Materials Needed:

- ✓ **Handout #6 (Levels of Student Assistance)**
- ✓ **Handout #7 (Multidisciplinary Process of Evaluation)**
- ✓ **Handout #8 (Types of Assessments and Evaluations)**
- ✓ **Handout #9 (Case Study – Eddie)**
- ✓ **Handout #10 (ER for Eddie)**
- ✓ **Overhead #5 (Levels of Student Assistance)**
- ✓ **Overhead #6 (Process of Evaluation)**
- ✓ **Overhead #7 (Types of Assessments and Evaluations)**

Resources Used:

Huefner, D. S. (2000). *Getting comfortable with special education law*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

PA Standards:

Assessment Standards:

IG: Recognize Assessment as Basis for Planning

II: Document Assessment Process

IK: Review Assessment Tasks of Service Providers

CFSR Issues:

Outcome WB 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Item 21: Educational needs of the child

Interactional Skills:

Tuning in to others

Providing relevant data

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Section III: Assessment of Students

Outline of Presentation:

Presenters will:

- ✓ Facilitate a discussion on the reasons a teacher may initiate student assistance
- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about the kinds of questions a parent should ask their child's teacher
- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about the multidisciplinary process
- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about the types of tests school personnel might use to evaluate a student
- ✓ Facilitate a small group activity to process a case study

Step 1:

Have participants break into small groups and ask the participants to discuss reasons why school personnel would contact a parent about a child. Allow a few minutes for this discussion and ask them to offer their reasons to the large group. Write the answers on a piece of flipchart paper. Be sure to include the following reasons in the discussion:

- To discuss the academic progress of their child
- Poor test scores or incomplete work
- Changes in behavior
- Health concerns, such as head lice or Pink Eye (Conjunctivitis)
- Disruptive behavior
- Drug and/or alcohol use
- Problems learning
- Violent behavior

When school personnel notice a reason for concern about a child (academic or behavioral), they should contact the parents to initiate a meeting between the parties. Discuss with participants that teachers might also initiate a process of student assistance for students who exhibit behaviors that cause concern. The difference between student assistance and a parent-teacher conference is the number of people invited to the meeting to discuss their concerns. A student assistance team would involve everyone who works with the student so they can brainstorm ways for improving the behaviors. Remind participants that they should be familiar with the process used in their local school districts because it may vary from district to district. Regardless of the process, school personnel will illustrate reasons for their concern by sharing the child's schoolwork with the parents through a variety of assessments and evaluations.

Step 2:

Distribute **Handout #6 (Levels of Student Assistance)**. Display **Overhead #5 (Levels of Student Assistance)** and discuss the different levels of interventions. The level of intervention will depend on the severity of the child's problem, the length of time the problem has been observed, the number of meetings already held concerning the issue, the lack of progress in school, as well as the age of the child.

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Section III: Assessment of Students (continued)

Step 3:

Explain to participants that assessments and evaluations are some of the tools used by school personnel to ensure students have an opportunity to succeed. Assessment may take many forms. The most typical forms are:

- formative (constant assessing on a daily basis, typically informal),
- summative (assessment that takes place at the end of something, such as a unit test), or
- psychological (formal evaluations conducted by a clinical or school psychologist).

Parents can become confused about the assessments of their child and might ask their Child Welfare Professional for an explanation of the recommended actions for their child. It is important for them to understand the process of assessments because parents might question the recommendations of the school and they can help their parents formulate questions to ask the school about the tests.

Step 4:

Facilitate a discussion about questions that participants could formulate to help a parent ask their child's teacher at the meeting. Write the questions on a piece of flipchart paper. Explain that if parents feel uncomfortable asking questions, the Child Welfare Professional might encourage the parents by helping them write down questions prior to any meeting. They might even role play/practice with the parent asking appropriate questions. For example, if a teacher told a mother that her child constantly disrupts the class, the mother might want to ask the teacher the following questions.

- In what ways is the child disruptive?
- How often (specifically) is the child disruptive?
- Is the child disrupting anyone else?
- Is the child in danger of hurting him/herself or others?
- Are the child's academics suffering as a result?
- What steps have you taken so far to help the child stop the behavior?

Step 5:

Ask the participants to share some of the reasons parents give for not attending meetings at their child's school. Be sure to include the following reasons in the discussion.

- ✓ They feel uncomfortable in school because of their own experiences as a student.
- ✓ They feel that school personnel talk "above their heads."
- ✓ It is "painful" to hear bad comments about their child.
- ✓ They cannot take time off from work.
- ✓ They do not have transportation.
- ✓ They have preschool children and no babysitter.

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Section III: Assessment of Students (continued)

Step 5 (continued):

Ask the participants how they, as Child Welfare Professionals, might help parents overcome these barriers and allow them to feel both empowered and more comfortable in attending meetings about their child, for example a meeting about student assistance.

Step 6:

Distribute **Handout #7 (Multidisciplinary Process of Evaluation)** and **Handout #8 (Types of Assessments and Evaluations)**. Discuss the information on the handouts while displaying **Overhead #6 (Process of Evaluation)** and **Overhead #7 (Types of Assessments and Evaluations)**.

Explain that when a student is recommended for further assessment because of academic concerns, a multidisciplinary team (MDT) is assembled which consists of the parents, student (if appropriate), teacher, school psychologist, and any other person who knows and works with the child.

Trainer Note: When a permanent legal custodian has been awarded care and control of the child, the legal custodian has the duty to enroll the child in school pursuant to 24 P.S. §13-1327. When a child in substitute care requires special education services, a “Surrogate Parent” must be appointed pursuant to Federal Special Education regulations as the child is a “ward of the State” (34 C.F.R. §300-515(a)(3). 34 C.F.R. §300-20(a)(2) involves guardian in the definition of parent unless the child is “a ward of the State”. A child who has been placed with a permanent legal custodian, is not in the legal custody of the county agency, and is not a “ward of the State”. Court orders appointing permanent legal custodians may, but do not have to, address this issue by stating that the custodian is also the child’s guardian for educational matters.

Note that the parents can also invite others of their choosing. The multidisciplinary team acts as an advisory team for the child to determine what they need in order to achieve academic success. A parent of the child is a required member of this team. The multidisciplinary team without the parent’s signature can make no decisions about a child’s disability or placement.

Explain to participants that this multidisciplinary evaluation process (MDE) may vary slightly among school districts, but any child suspected of having a physical or mental disability must go through a similar evaluation process. The information on the handout comes from the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Special Education Website. The Local Education Agency (LEA) has 60 school days to complete the initial evaluation according to State Board Regulation, 22 Pa. Code Section 14.123(b). The LEA has relief from the timeframe if the child transfers to another school district or if the child is not present for the evaluation. Personnel must adhere to these policies and procedures however school districts have flexibility in the implementation of the process. For example, the forms or assessments they use for the evaluation.

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Section III: Assessment of Students (continued)

Step 7:

Distribute **Handout #9 (Case Study – Eddie)** and have participants answer the questions on the handout in small groups. Allow about 10 minutes for this activity and ask the small groups to report their conclusions to the large group.

Trainer Note: If participants question why personnel did not address Eddie’s issues until third grade, explain that it is not out of the ordinary for educational difficulties to go unaddressed until third grade, fourth grade, or beyond. This situation could arise due to a number of reasons that might include the child being “bright” enough to compensate for any learning deficiencies until the work gets too hard to do this; schools do not detect a learning disability until a later age; a parent working heavily with the child to help the child through the lower grades. Keep in mind that developmental delays might also cause learning deficiencies

Step 8:

Distribute **Handout #10 (ER for Eddie)** and explain that this is a copy of an actual report that parents would receive. Parents might not understand what the report means for their child and might ask their Child Welfare Professional to explain it. Ask the participants to break into small groups and highlight any terms or sections they might have trouble explaining to parents. Then, in a large group discussion, ask each group for those areas/terms that they have highlighted. Discuss the meaning of each area/term.

Step 9:

Summarize this section by reminding participants that the process of assessing whether a child has a “disability” and cannot learn in the same way as most other students is very intimidating and stressful for parents. Many parents become defensive at the prospect of their child being diagnosed with a learning disability and want to blame the school for the lack of successful learning. Child Welfare Professionals can assist parents through this process if the worker knows what to expect. The Child Welfare Professional can support parents throughout this process by being aware of the state and federal guidelines for evaluation and placement, thus assisting parents in the guarantee that their child receives a fair and appropriate education.

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Section IV: Special Education

Estimated Length of Time:

130 Minutes

Learning Objectives:

The participants will be able to:

- ✓ Inform parents of their rights to a “free and appropriate” education for their disabled children
- ✓ Identify the rights of the school in terms of educating special needs students
- ✓ Recognize the various disabilities that may warrant special education services
- ✓ Inform parents of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process

Method of Presentation:

Lecture, large group discussion, individual activities

Materials Needed:

- ✓ **Handout #9 (Case Study – Eddie)**
- ✓ **Handout #11 (Procedural Safeguards Notice)**
- ✓ **Handout #12 (Guaranteed Rights of Parents)**
- ✓ **Handout #13 (Definitions of Disability Terms)**
- ✓ **Handout #14 (Tips for Parents)**
- ✓ **Handout #15 (Individualized Education Plan [IEP])**
- ✓ **Handout #16 (IEP for Eddie)**
- ✓ **Handout #17 (Pennsylvania Special Education Process Chart)**
- ✓ **Handout #18 (Special Education Process Chart for Initial Evaluation)**
- ✓ **Overhead #8 (Parental Rights)**
- ✓ **Overhead #9 (Disability Categories)**
- ✓ **Overhead #10 (Individualized Education Plan [IEP])**
- ✓ Sentence strips for each table

Resources Used:

Huefner, D. S. (2000). *Getting comfortable with special education law*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

PA Standards:

Assessment Standards:

IG: Recognize Assessment as Basis for Planning

II: Document Assessment Process

IK: Review Assessment Tasks of Service Providers

Service Planning Standards:

IIB: Select an Appropriate Goal

IIB: Build on Continuing Assessments

III: Meet Concrete Needs

Service Delivery Standards:

IIIB: Establish Service Linkages

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Section IV: Special Education (continued)

PA Standards (continued):

- IIID: Assure Service Needs
- IIIP: Monitor Services to Children
- IIIQ: Support Children

CFSR Issues:

- Outcome WB 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Item 21: Educational needs of the child

Interactional Skills:

- Tuning in to others
- Providing relevant data

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Section IV: Special Education

Outline of Presentation:

Trainer will:

- ✓ Facilitate a discussion and individual activity about the rights of parents and students according to Special Education regulations
- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about the categories of disabilities
- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about how parents can assure their children are receiving an appropriate education
- ✓ Facilitate a small group activity using a case study to help understand an IEP

Step 1:

Explain to participants that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA), guarantees students with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate education. Distribute **Handout #11 (Procedural Safeguards Notice)**. Ask participants to look over their copy and circle any 10 words or phrases that they believe might be confusing to their parents. Then ask participants to share these words with the large group and be sure to explain the meaning of each one. Ensure that participants understand the Procedural Safeguards Notice so that they will be able to explain it to their parents.

Explain that this handout outlines the legal process for parents to pursue if they believe the school district offered their child neither the proper support nor an appropriate education. Schools are required to give parents this form as part of the multidisciplinary process. The purpose for this handout is first to show participants how intimidating the form may be for parents who may lack reading skills or have a disability themselves; and secondly to show what the form looks like so they can assist parents in understanding their rights.

Trainer Note: The font on this form is intentionally small to show the format parents often receive, thus making the form even more “intimidating.” This font is actually larger than the form received as a sample from a Pennsylvania school district. This form is an exact replica of the form that school districts send to parents.

The next step after the evaluation process is determination of a specific disability that impacts the student. Distribute **Handout #12 (Guaranteed Rights of Parents)**. Discuss the built-in safeguards that guarantee the rights of parents on behalf of their children. Do this while displaying **Overhead #8 (Parental Rights)**. Explain to participants that the information on **Handout #12 (Guaranteed Rights of Parents)** is a summary of the information found on the **Handout #11 (Procedural Safeguards Notice)** that informs parents of their rights under the law. Explain to participants that, as a Child Welfare Professional, they can assist parents in understanding their parental rights.

These two handouts should assist participants in their understanding of parental rights under the IDEIA laws, so that they, in turn, can help parents in understanding their legal rights.

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section IV: Special Education (continued)

Step 1: (continued)

Ask participants if they have any questions about parental rights under the IDEIA law.

Step 2:

Explain to participants that the next step is to continue with the MDE process of placement.

After the MDE evaluation, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team will form to determine whether the assessment data shows sufficient evidence to diagnose a disability that impacts the child's learning. The IEP Team should include (Public Law 108-446, §614):

- ✓ the parents of the child with the disability;
- ✓ not less than 1 regular education teacher of the child (if the child is, or will be, participating in the regular education environment);
- ✓ not less than 1 special education teacher, or where appropriate, not less than 1 special education provider of the child;
- ✓ a representative of the local educational agency who:
 - is qualified to provide, or supervise the provision of, specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities;
 - is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum; and
 - is knowledgeable about the availability of resources of the local educational agency.
- ✓ An individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results;
- ✓ At the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special experience regarding the child, including related services personnel; and
- ✓ Whenever appropriate, the child with a disability.

Distribute **Handout #13 (Definitions of Disability Terms)**. While displaying **Overhead #9 (Disability Categories)**, discuss the disabilities that guarantee a child an appropriate education under the IDEIA. Stress to participants that a team rather than one person must make this decision.

Another category of Special Education remains for children identified as mentally gifted. This category of Special Education includes students who have an IQ of 130 or higher and involves multiple criteria (such as achievement test scores, expertise in one or more academic areas, and higher-level thinking skills) indicating gifted ability. Gifted education offers an accelerated and enriched curriculum as an individualized program.

Step 3:

Explain to participants that on December 21, 2004, counsel for parties in the *Gaskin* case signed a provisional settlement agreement that, if approved by the court, will end ten years of litigation over Commonwealth programs for the education of school children with disabilities.

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Section IV: Special Education (continued)

Step 3 (continued):

Gaskin is a class-action lawsuit brought on behalf of Pennsylvania public school students with physical, behavioral, and developmental disabilities. The action asserts violations of federal statutes protecting the rights of children under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The lawsuit, originally filed in 1994, alleges that students with disabilities have been denied their federal statutory right to a free appropriate public education in regular classrooms with necessary supplemental aids and services. In particular, the plaintiffs allege that the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) systematically failed to enforce the provisions in federal law requiring local schools and school districts to offer a full continuum of support services allowing disabled children education in regular classrooms.

The proposed settlement agreement makes significant changes in PDE's special education monitoring practices. The most significant of these changes is the creation of a new, multi-layered monitoring program called "LRE – least restrictive environment – monitoring." Under the new Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) monitoring program, all school districts in the Commonwealth would receive a "LRE index" score based on data factors relating to the success they achieve in including special education students in regular education classrooms for all or part of the day. Districts with the lowest scores would then be subject to monitoring that include on-site visiting followed by a corrective action plan.

Stress to participants that none of these changes will go into effect until the court approves the proposed settlement agreement. Few expect court approval until the Spring of 2005.

Step 4:

Introduce the concept of Special Education by explaining to participants that Special Education is the avenue through which school districts guarantee a free and appropriate education to children diagnosed with a severe disability as determined by a school or medical evaluation. Distribute **Handout #14 (Tips for Parents)** and discuss any of the ideas on the handout that have not already been discussed. Explain to participants that the tips on this handout are suggestions they can share with parents to keep in mind as they work with schools during the MDE process.

Step 5:

Continue to explain that the next step after determining the child has a disability that hinders learning is to decide whether the child needs specially designed instruction in order to succeed academically. Also, discuss the concept of "Least Restrictive Environment" and explain to participants that parents have a wide range of placement options available for their child with a disability that might include a complete isolated pullout program, community-based settings, vocational settings, or complete inclusion in a regular education classroom with age-related peers.

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Section IV: Special Education (continued)

Step 5 (continued):

When those representing the child determine the least restrictive setting in which to place the child, the child's parent signs a Notice of Recommended Educational Placement (NOREP) and offers their approval or disapproval of the placement. The Team should not base this placement decision on what is most convenient for the school, but what best meets the needs of the child. The Child Welfare Professional should be aware of these options so they may inform parents and support them through any disagreements with their child's school.

Distribute **Handout #15 (Individualized Education Plan [IEP])** and display **Overhead #10 (Individualized Education Plan [IEP])**. Discuss the parts of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) designed especially to address the needs of the child. Tell participants that they should understand an IEP so they can help families who may not understand it. Then ask if there are any areas of the IEP they would like to have clarified.

Step 6:

Explain to participants that another court case that has significance for children with disabilities is the Cordero case, which affects timely and appropriate placements. The Cordero case was a class action lawsuit filed on behalf of all Pennsylvania children with disabilities whose school districts determined that the district could not currently and appropriately educate the child in a public educational setting. These children were made to wait for more than thirty-days for an appropriate placement.

Districts placed many children in homebound instruction, pending a search for an appropriate, often residential, placement, which the court found to be inappropriate.

On June 23, 1992, the federal district court reviewed the record of children not receiving prompt appropriate placements because of a lack of a full continuum of placement options and ruled the school districts as well as the state responsible for their actions.

The school districts are to achieve the continuum of placement options through, among other things, replicating existing services, creating new options, technical assistance and training, interagency collaboration, and the organized identification of class members and gaps in the continuum of placements.

Step 7:

Explain to participants that there are early intervention services available to children who are less than the age of a child beginning school (6 by the 1st grade cut-off date) and at least 3-years-old who have a disability or developmental delay, and who need special education and related services. Early intervention services include specialized instruction and activities modified for preschool children and related services as needed, including but not limited to: transportation, speech/language services, social work and case management services, psychological services, orientation and mobility training, and parent counseling and training.

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section IV: Special Education (continued)

Step 7 (continued):

Preschool settings, such as the Intermediate Unit (IU), preschools or child care centers, Head Start programs, specialized early intervention classes, clinics, hospitals, approved private schools, and/or the child's own home, provide all services.

Step 8:

Refer participants back to the case study of Eddie found on **Handout #9 (Case Study – Eddie)**. Distribute **Handout #16 (IEP for Eddie)**. Tell participants that this is what an actual Individualized Education Program (IEP) looks like.

The Child Welfare Professional should help the parent understand the various parts of the IEP, therefore making parents more comfortable meeting with school personnel. Individually, have participants go through the first few pages of the handout and circle any words or phrases they do not understand.

After allowing a few minutes for this activity, ask participants what they circled. They probably circled several things. Explain all the words that participants circled. Explain that if they found this many words/phrases on the first two pages, parents will probably find them confusing also. Ask participants if they have any questions about the IEP.

Step 9:

Explain to participants that if a student transfers to a different school district within the state, the “new” district must implement the child's current IEP until the district adopts the current IEP or develops a new one.

If a child transfers to a school outside the state, the “new” school district must implement comparable services until the district conducts an evaluation, if necessary, and develops a new IEP.

The “old” school is required to send (either faxed or sent by mail) the child's records as quickly as possible to facilitate a smooth transition of services for the child. This is especially significant if the child is already receiving Special Education services and has an IEP from the former school.

Step 10:

Distribute **Handout #17 (Pennsylvania Special Education Process Chart)** and explain to participants that this chart provides the Special Education process in a visual format. Allow participants a few minutes to look over the chart and answer any questions they may have.

Step 11:

Distribute **Handout #18 (Special Education Process Chart for Initial Evaluation)** and explain that this chart provides the evaluation process in a visual format. Allow participants a few minutes to look over the chart and answer any questions they may have.

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section IV: Special Education (continued)

Step 12:

Summarize this section by reminding participants that even though they may understand these documents, parents might find the documents to be very difficult and intimidating. As Child Welfare Professionals, they should assist the parents in understanding the forms and support them through the process of identifying a disability in their child.

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section V: Communication is the Key

Estimated Length of Time:

60 Minutes

Learning Objectives:

Participants will:

- ✓ Identify many of the acronyms used by school district personnel
- ✓ Describe the process for identifying school personnel to contact about a child
- ✓ Describe the process for identifying the best time to call school personnel
- ✓ Describe what things to discuss with school personnel about a child
- ✓ Describe when to intervene on behalf of a family
- ✓ Define the job responsibilities of key school personnel
- ✓ Identify the specific role that Child Welfare Professionals should play in communicating with parents about school issues

Method of Presentation:

Lecture, large and small group discussions, small group activity

Materials Needed:

- ✓ **Handout #10 (ER for Eddie)**
- ✓ **Handout #19 (Educational Jargon)**
- ✓ **Handout #20 (Job Responsibilities of School Personnel)**
- ✓ **Handout #21 (Vignette for Stephanie)**
- ✓ **Overhead #11 (Job Responsibilities of School Personnel)**
- ✓ **Appendix A (Educational Jargon – Answers)**
- ✓ **Appendix B (Responsibilities of Key Players)**

Resources Used:

Huefner, D. S. (2000). *Getting Comfortable with Special Education Law*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon.

PA Standards:

Monitoring and Evaluation Standards:

IVA: Monitor Service Delivery

IVF: Collaborate with Family

CFSR Issues:

Outcome WB 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Item 21: Educational needs of the child

Interactional Skills:

Tuning in to others

Providing relevant data

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section V: Communication is the Key

Pre-work:

Prepare and hang each page of **Appendix B (Responsibilities of Key Players)** around the room if you plan to do this optional activity.

Outline of Presentation:

The trainer will:

- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about what it means to communicate with school personnel
- ✓ Highlight some of the acronyms and terms used by school personnel
- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about communicating with school personnel
- ✓ Facilitate a small group activity followed by a large group discussion about the responsibilities of key school personnel
- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about communicating with parents about school issues
- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about the responsibilities of key team players
- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about the specific role of Child Welfare Professionals in acting as communication liaison between parents and school personnel

Step 1:

Introduce this section by explaining to participants that many systems have their own language and set of acronyms – schools are no exception. It can be uncomfortable for parents to communicate directly with schools, not only because they do not understand the jargon, but also because parents can perceive themselves on a different ability level from the school personnel or because they might have less-than-fond memories of their own school experiences. In addition, parents can be uncomfortable with the information discussed during the meeting because they do not understand it and are too embarrassed to ask for clarification. Remind participants that it is important for them to consider the comfort level of the parents and to ease their anxiety level as much as they can by helping parents to understand some of the language (acronyms, MDE process, and etcetera) in advance, and to encourage parents to ask questions when they do not understand something.

Step 2:

Explain to participants that, when parents do not understand the language, they cannot make good decisions about their child's education. Child Welfare Professionals who work with a family can help them understand the jargon used by school personnel or even attend meetings with the family to facilitate understanding. It is critical for parents to understand fully what happens at the meetings so that they have the ability to make the best decisions about a child's education.

Reinforce that participants must have a familiarity with the acronyms used by educators in order to help the parents understand the terms as well as being able to communicate and talk to school personnel in their language.

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section V: Communication is the Key (continued)

Step 2 (continued):

Distribute **Handout #19 (Educational Jargon)**. Individually or in small groups, allow participants a few minutes to fill in the blanks with the meanings for any terms with which they are familiar. In a large group, ask participants for their answers. Also, ask if any terms are unfamiliar and explain them to the group. Distribute **Appendix A (Educational Jargon – Answers)** to give participants a copy of the correct meaning for each acronym and term.

The trainer should point out a few of the acronyms on **Handout #10 (ER for Eddie)** that have the most relevance for Child Welfare Professionals. Then, ask participants if they have any questions about the meaning of any other terms.

Step 3:

Discuss the importance of a Child Welfare Professional understanding the various job responsibilities of school personnel in order that they, if needed, might help their families to know the best person to contact. Stress that this understanding also holds significance when a Child Welfare Professional has to share information about a child in order to ensure a child's safety or well-being.

Distribute **Handout #20 (Job Responsibilities of School Personnel)**. While displaying **Overhead #11 (Job Responsibilities of School Personnel)**, discuss the various job responsibilities of school personnel. Remind participants that they might not find every position in every district. On the other hand, some large districts may have these job responsibilities distributed between several people. If they are unsure with whom to get in touch about a specific issue, a good plan is to discuss the issue with the child's homeroom teacher, since this individual typically serves as the overall "case manager" for a child.

Remind participants that frequently, parents discuss their communications with school personnel with their Child Welfare Professional. This is especially true if the parent's experience with the school was negative or they have confusion about something a teacher said about their child. Facilitate a discussion about communicating with a family about school issues. Ask participants about some of their positive experiences in communicating with parents and record the responses on a piece of flipchart paper. Be sure to include tips and techniques that helped to make the experience positive.

Step 4:

Encourage participants to think of a team consisting of the Child Welfare Professionals, parents, school personnel, and the student – in other words, many players in a child's life. The members of this team must create a positive school-related learning environment that promotes the student's success. In order to do this, all team members must communicate with all other team members. These communication responsibilities directly tie to the person's role in the student's life. All team members should share equal responsibility in terms of communication.

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section V: Communication is the Key (continued)

Step 4 (continued):

If a team member does not share an important piece of a child's life with the other team members, the communication breaks down. This situation might create tension and anxiety between team members. It is therefore important to be able to see the child from the perspective of the other team members and know what information needs to be shared. Discuss with the large group some of the barriers they see in terms of team members communicating with each other and list these barriers on a piece of flipchart paper. Then, discuss ways they can overcome these barriers to open the lines of communication.

Step 5: (Optional if Time Permitting)

Refer participants to the pages from **Appendix B (Responsibilities of Key Players)** that hang around the room. Divide participants into four groups and have them go to one of the "responsibilities" areas. Give each group a piece of flipchart paper. Have members list the kinds of information each player should be responsible for reporting to the rest of the educational team. For example, the Child Welfare Professional should tell a teacher that the reason for a child's withdrawal might be that dad heavily drinks and hits mom during his times of inebriation. On the other hand, it might be important for the teacher to let the team know that the child seems excessively worried and may not have the ability to concentrate on schoolwork. The "team" might be able to brainstorm ways to help the child. When participants complete this activity, have each group report their findings to the large group.

Step 6:

Tell participants they may be asked by school personnel to relate a child's potential risk academically, socially, and behaviorally as related to school success. For example, a 6-year old child who is consistently getting to bed at midnight on school nights may be at risk of academic failure. Similarly, a 10-year old child who is physically abused by a parent may hit his/her classmates and be at risk socially.

On a piece of flipchart paper, draw a diagram similar to the one below:

No Risk	High Risk
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Ask participants what they consider as "success" in the areas of education, socialization, and behavior. Then ask them to think about assessing a child's risk along a continuum from "no risk" to "high risk." In terms of school success, they could assess risk as it relates to:

- Academic issues
 - a. Attendance/interaction with teachers
 - b. School performance/Grades and test scores
- Social Issues
 - a. Interaction with peers and adults
- Behavior Issues
 - a. Unacceptable behaviors for a school setting

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section V: Communication is the Key (continued)

Step 6 (continued):

Ask participants to close their eyes for a minute and think about a child on their caseload. Where along the risk continuum would they place that child academically, socially, and behaviorally? Ask a few volunteers to share their information with the large group.

Step 7:

Distribute **Handout #21 (Vignette for Stephanie)**. Break participants into small groups and have them read the case study and answer the questions. Have the small groups report back to the large group. Explain to the participants that even though their answers may differ, the process of assessing risk and how participants arrived at their answers is just as important as the “correct” answers.

Step 8:

To summarize this section, discuss the specific role the Child Welfare Professional would play in acting as a communication liaison between parents and school personnel.

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section VI: Review and Evaluation

Estimated Length of Time:

15 Minutes

Learning Objectives:

The participants will be able to:

- ✓ Review key learning points of the training
- ✓ Apply what they have learned
- ✓ Evaluate the training

Method of Presentation:

Lecture, small group discussion, individual activity

Materials Needed:

- ✓ **Handout #22 (Action Plan)**
- ✓ **Handout #23 (Bibliography)**
- ✓ **Overhead #2 (Learning Objectives)**
- ✓ Evaluation forms

Resources Used:

None

PA Standards:

None

CFSR Issues:

None

Interactional Skills:

None

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section VI: Review and Evaluation

Outline of Presentation:

Trainers will:

- ✓ Facilitate a discussion about the key learning points of the training
- ✓ Facilitate a transfer of learning activity
- ✓ Have the participants fill out the evaluation form for the training

Step 1:

Using **Overhead #2 (Learning Objectives)**, discuss the learning objectives for the workshop and ensure that the content and the trainer met those objectives.

Step 2:

Refer to the sentence strips taped to the wall in Section I and acknowledge the individual learning objectives met throughout the day. Ask the participants if they have any additional thoughts or questions.

Step 3:

Explain to participants that if they have any questions about the Special Education process, two excellent sources include:

- Intermediate Units - Pennsylvania's 29 Intermediate Units are regional education service agencies charged with providing programs and services to public, private, and non-public (religious) schools. Intermediate Units serve schools in geographic areas ranging in size from a single school district located in one city to serving schools across six counties. Some Intermediate Units also provide special services to schools throughout the Commonwealth. All Intermediate Units provide curriculum and instructional support, professional development, technology services, and operate educational programs such as special and alternative education on a regional basis.
- The Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN). PaTTAN serves as the training and technical assistance branch of the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education. PaTTAN consultants work collaboratively with intermediate units to provide services in the areas of professional development, technical assistance, and information dissemination to support school districts within the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. PaTTAN has offices in Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and King of Prussia.

Step 4:

Distribute **Handout #22 (Action Plan)** and have participants answer the questions. Allow a few minutes for them to fill out individually the action plan. Then, have participants discuss in their small groups some of the ways they expect to transfer their learning from the training to their everyday work.

306: Helping Parents through the Special Education Process

Section VI: Review and Evaluation (continued)

Step 5:

Distribute **Handout #23 (Bibliography)**. Note to participants that these are the resources used to put together this session.

Step 6:

Have participants fill out the evaluation forms for the workshop and thank them for coming.

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