

# What Did We Learn About Parent-Professional Training?

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University of Connecticut Center for Excellence in  
Developmental Disabilities

Families As Partners Training

# Why do we need *Families as Partners* Training?

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- A lack of information about the special education process can lead to conflicts between parents and schools
- Breakdowns can occur when parents and school staff have inadequate or inaccurate information about the laws and regulations
- Educating parents and professionals can facilitate family school partnerships

# Benefits of Joint Training for Parents and Professionals

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- Everyone hears the same information at the same time
- Encourages dialogue
- Levels the playing field by making sure everyone comes to the IEP table fully informed
- Builds a sense of partnership
- Gives each group a view into the world of the other

# The UCEDD's History of Joint Parent-Professional Training

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## ■ **Understanding Special Education Training**

- 10-hour course on special education laws and processes
- Funded by the Council on Developmental Disabilities
- 4-year project (2001-2005)
- Trained more than 1400 parents and educators in more than 100 Connecticut school districts

## ■ **Families as Partners Training**

- Funded by the Connecticut State Department of Education (2004-05 school year)
- Trained 48 trainers, who trained 300+ parents and educators

# Curriculum Development

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- The curriculum is based on the following values:
  - All parties must have equal access to information and knowledge
  - Parent involvement in the IEP process improves outcomes for children
  - Strong parent-professional partnerships benefit everyone

# Curriculum Development

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- Began with the USE curriculum developed by the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) in Virginia
- Using a train-the-trainer model, prepared 15 parent-educator teams to deliver the USE training in their communities
- Over a period of 3 years, with feedback from 30 trainers and 1000 trainees, revised the curriculum to its current form

# Families As Partners Project

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- Developed 2 additional modules
  - Building effective family-school partnerships
  - Person centered planning
- Trained 42 parents and educators to deliver the new Families as Partners Curriculum
- Statewide training for 100 parents and educators to unveil the curriculum
- Disseminated completed, socially validated modules nationally

# Challenges of Joint Training

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- Educators are less likely to view joint training as beneficial
- Scheduling can be tricky
- Audience members can be widely diverse
- Participants may bring past conflicts into the training process
- Train-the-trainers models are time intensive
- Need to carefully match trainer to audience
  - Diversity of language, community, experience



# Effective Parent-Professional Training

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- Strive for a 50-50 mix
- Train parent-educator teams to deliver training in their own communities
- Offer incentives (stipends for babysitting and transportation; CEUs, prizes, food)
- Have interpreters readily available and have materials in alternate formats

# Effective Parent-Professional Training

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- Know your audience
  - PowerPoint doesn't work for everyone
  - Know the level of knowledge of participants
  - Differentiate the curriculum for diverse groups
  - Lecture is the least effective (and least preferred) mode of instruction for many people. Vary instructional strategies and groupings

# Training the Trainers

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- Be prepared for a wide range of needs
  - Our train-the-trainers sessions ranged from a total of 3 hours to more than 20 hours
- Not everyone is a dynamic public speaker—pair up teams to balance skills
- Observe trainers in action and provide constructive feedback
- Have more experienced trainers mentor new trainers

# Increasing Participation

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- Use a variety of advertising
  - Word of mouth
  - Personal invitation
  - Flyers, community bulletins
  - Public service announcements
  - Newspapers
  - School newsletters
  - Websites
  - List serves

# What Worked?

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- Collaborating with parent groups to get the word out
- Finding allies in school districts to “talk up” the training
- Reaching out to under-served groups
- Training trainers who live and work in the community

## What Worked...

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- Getting general educators involved
- Getting the investment of administrators
- Providing creative incentives
  - Onsite babysitting, potluck dinners, door prizes, raffles, games
- Being flexible about scheduling

# What Didn't Work?

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- Spending too little time up front to build relationships
- Using a complex, lengthy evaluation form
- Relying too much on PowerPoint
- Underestimating the time needed to train trainers
- Trying to use a "one size fits all" curriculum

# Where Do We Go From Here?

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- Revise curriculum based on your feedback
- Disseminate curriculum nationally
- Continue to provide training across the state, particularly in under-represented populations
- After the IDEA 2004 regulations are finalized, translate documents into Spanish
- Conduct follow-up surveys to determine outcomes of training