

CADRE and JAMS Foundation Present:
Voices from the Field
Interview Clip #3 Transcript – Jody Manning

Marshall: Jody, positively engaging with parents early on in their school career can really set a tone for the future and help to kind of predict how disagreements will be subsequently managed. Are there strategies that you've seen schools employ that have really helped to set a positive tone?

Jody: Yes, we have. At Pacer Center, we recognize that there are some things that school districts, local school districts and state agencies that have done that have been extremely potential as far as raising the bar and letting the team work well together. One is, a school district can really encourage collaboration in the IEP teams. There are a couple of ways that school districts can do that. One is, they can provide training to parents early on about what their rights and responsibilities are in the special education system. Many parents enter this system early on with no previous experience. We've also seen some particular success when local agencies and parent training and information centers partner together in co-presenting to an audience that would consist of parents and professionals both, so that both audiences are hearing from two agencies that are working well together and reflecting that good collaboration. That they're hearing the same information together so that they can use what they've heard in IEP meetings and perhaps even sometimes remind one another of what they've heard. In addition to that, we have seen schools that will do a great job of supporting a transition from one setting whether it be early childhood into the K-12 setting or from the K-12 setting to transition programs by being very intentional about the transition process and perhaps inviting parties from both organizations and both systems to come together to better help prepare the family and the child for that transition; and we also see schools being very successful at and purposeful in engaging families and being part of the school climate. The more involved parents are the more the more likely they are to be active members in that school community; and lastly, parents and schools are best served to allow all parties to feel as though they're an equal member in the process. So anything they can support, they can do to support that would be beneficial to the entire process. I think that when school staff are able to hear the parent and allow them an opportunity to share their experiences about raising their child and what they know about their child, I think that that will serve the

family and the IEP team very well. I think as parents of children with special needs, we want to be honored for our experience and our expertise related to raising a child with special needs and while we know that professionals are trained and have an education related to educating students with special needs, we as parents serve a very important role and when school staff can hear us and about our experiences, I think that it helps parents feel as though they're an important part of the process.