



Beyond the Dotted Line

Empowering Parents From Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families to Participate

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Nicole is a second-year bilingual/biliterate early childhood special education (ECSE) teacher in a public school. She is responsible for a caseload of 10 young children with various disabilities in her classroom in addition to being a part of the school district's ECSE assessment team. As a member of the assessment team, Nicole meets new prospective families and their children. Often, she is the first person from the district that explains the process of special education, placement, and services to new families. Nicole's priorities with her ECSE families are to build collaborative relationships with them and to encourage and foster active parent participation in the individualized education program (IEP) process.

Nicole recently received files from early intervention (EI) for a new student, Lucas and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez, were referred for a transition to the school district by their EI coordinator. Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez immigrated from Honduras 5 years ago. Mr. Sanchez works full-time, and Mrs. Sanchez is currently a stay-at-home mom. The family's primary language is Spanish; however, Lucas has received EI in both English and Spanish since he began services at 22 months. The family enjoys spending time together playing outdoors, and the Sanchez family expresses they are open to any support they can receive for Lucas. It is noted that Lucas enjoys numbers, letters, and animals. He makes some approximations of sounds and babbles when he gets excited. Lucas is almost 3 years old and was diagnosed with autism. The parents are unsure what the disability means for Lucas and would like a better understanding of what the benefits of each service are regarding Lucas's development. Lucas has received EI services including speech therapy, occupational therapy, and applied behavior analysis (ABA). The EI report indicated Lucas still needs academic, speech, occupational, and behavior services. Mrs. Sanchez also expressed that her main concern for Lucas is his behavior; he tends to cry and bite when frustrated.

Nicole's experience is not uncommon for teachers in ECSE settings. Many families of children with disabilities encounter the special education system for the first time when their children enter preschool. The transition from EI to ECSE at age 3 is more complex than a change in the location where children receive their services. It involves changing service systems and families' roles in their children's services (Podvey et al., 2013).

ECSE teachers often find themselves in this unique position of advocating for the services the children need within the new service system (i.e., school system) while supporting and helping families understand the changing roles they have in their children's services. This new experience can be daunting and overwhelming for families with young children with disabilities, even more so for families from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds who are stepping into a system that may be significantly different from their cultural beliefs (Rossetti & Burke, 2019). In this article, we follow teacher Nicole in her journey in supporting a family from a CLD background in the IEP process during their children's initial and annual IEP meetings. First, we examine the importance of developing and recognizing cultural self-awareness to create a positive climate for collaborative relationships with CLD families. Second, we discuss how Nicole supports and engages her family to develop a trusting relationship. Lastly, we examine how Nicole uses best practices, including the Explain, Provide, Inquire, and Coordinate (EPIC) checklist (**Figure 2**), to support the family's understanding, knowledge, and active participation in the IEP process over time.

Parent Participation

Parents are members of the IEP team. Their participation in the special education process is strongly emphasized in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). It is a critical factor in improving the effectiveness of children's special education programs and services. Active participation in this process includes making decisions regarding their children's educational assessment,

planning, and intervention services (Division of Early Childhood [DEC], 2014). Families provide valuable input and advocate for their children's best interests, and their involvement in the educational process increases the accountability of the IEP team. However, many families, particularly those from CLD backgrounds, are unfamiliar with the IEP process and their rights under IDEA, leading to negative experiences with schools (Burke et al., 2020; Lo, 2012).

Families from CLD backgrounds may be passive in their participation in the IEP process for various reasons, including language barrier, poor interpretation, lack of respect from school personnel, and mistrust of the education system (Burke et al., 2020; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). A recent study with Chinese, Vietnamese, and Haitian immigrant families identified that limited access to special education information and the lack of educator accountability contributed to families' lack of meaningful engagement and active participation (Rossetti et al., 2020). These barriers prevented CLD families from becoming active participants in their children's IEPs and highlighted the need for more support for families to become equal partners in the IEP process. Better collaboration and partnerships between schools and families are needed to have a positive change in families' participation in their children's academic success (Rossetti et al., 2020). To foster supportive partnerships with CLD families, teachers should first examine their own cultural awareness when approaching IEPs.

Developing and Recognizing Cultural Self-Awareness

The concept of parent participation may be unfamiliar or even intimidating to some families entering the special education

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system, particularly those from CLD backgrounds. Studies have identified a myriad of cultural and economic reasons that have contributed to families' low participation, including communication and language barriers, cultural differences in help-seeking behaviors, history of poor relationships with schools, and beliefs about disability (e.g., Burke et al., 2020; Rossetti & Burke, 2019). Parents are given the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process regarding their child's special education program, but to what degree is dependent on the parent. This process is developed and highly valued by the White-dominant culture of the United States but can be disadvantageous to CLD families who may not hold the same views or beliefs. To develop more collaborative relationships with CLD families, teachers should first examine their own cultural beliefs and experiences (Brown et al., 2019). Teachers need to acknowledge and recognize the significance of diverse points of view and how their personal cultural and ethical views can influence and bias the decisions they make with families (Fish, 2019). More resources are available for teachers on this topic on the website of the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform Center (<https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/>).

Recognition of one's assumptions and biases can help teachers move beyond traditional assumptions of good teaching; instead, emphasize a family-centered approach that prioritizes the child and family's needs and desires (Rivera et al., 2022). Family-centered practices allow for a deeper understanding of families' views on disability and individualized programming and help avoid cultural stereotypes (Dunst et al., 2007; Rivera et al., 2022). For example, teachers can conduct family-centered interviews to address family priorities and goals. Through this model, ECSE teachers can support and strengthen the family to become active participants in their children's academic programming and become major decision makers. Families are empowered when they are treated with respect for their values and choices and when provided with the opportunity to share their expertise (Dunst et al., 2007). ECSE teachers can facilitate ways for families to reach specific goals for their children through collaboration, as highlighted by the DEC Recommended

Practices on Family and Teaming and Collaboration (DEC, 2014).

Nicole is a first-generation college graduate whose family immigrated from Mexico. She is fluent in English and Spanish and communicates with families and students in her program in both languages as needed. Although Nicole does not have children of her own, she has a younger sibling with cerebral palsy. She has observed her mother go through the IEP process and the experience of special education in the public school system.

Nicole has firsthand experience of how challenging the IEP process can be for families, particularly those from CLD backgrounds. She wants the families she works with to feel welcomed and comfortable in sharing with her. During the meetings with the Sanchez family, Nicole speaks Spanish to the family to eliminate the language barriers in understanding. She also encourages the Sanchez family to share about Lucas. At first, the Sanchez family only shared what Lucas liked doing at home. As the family became more comfortable, they mentioned Lucas has started to display more physical aggression. They were concerned he would be kicked out of school if he were to hurt someone. Nicole listens and encourages the family to share Lucas's information during the IEP with the interpreter that is arranged in advance. Nicole also reassures the family that the team members are all there to support Lucas and explains that as a team, the family can share what strategies work at home and the team can discuss how best to support Lucas at school and try the strategies that have worked at home.

Developing Collaborative Relationships With Families

Building strong partnerships and collaboration with families is critical in ECSE for positive child outcomes (DEC, 2014). The IEP process is no exception. For individual families, the learning curve of the IEP process and the comfort level in advocating for services on behalf of their children can vary widely. However, to

start this process, it is essential the family feels the professional team understands and cares about their concerns and is willing to support them with mutual respect (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2015). Communication, competence, commitment, advocacy, respect, equality, and trust have been identified as seven key principles for positive collaborative family-professional partnerships (Blue-Banning et al., 2004; Turnbull & Turnbull, 2015). How these principles are implemented is equally important. The attention to the emotional aspects (e.g., empathy, compassion, and dignity) of how families and professionals interact can significantly impact the quality of these relationships (Turnbull & Turnbull, 2015).

Open and effective communication will help the IEP team meet its goal in providing the best possible programming for the student with a disability (Lo, 2012). Families new to the special education system are often unsure whom they should contact and what questions they should ask. ECSE teachers can initiate this line of communication by getting to know the families. Teachers can invite families to school for a conversation, or if families are unable to meet in person for various reasons (e.g., working parents, transportation), teachers can ask families their preferred method of communication. Technology has allowed for more options of communication (e.g., text, video calls, e-mail) and can enhance family-school collaboration.

Additionally, teachers can get to know the family better by having them complete a parent survey regarding their child's strengths, areas of improvement, and areas of need. These teacher-developed surveys should include sections for families to provide family-prioritized goals in each developmental domain, medical or family updates that may impact the child's education, and their overall goals for their child's special education services and classroom placements. The



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Figure 1 Levels of Understanding of the individualized education program

No or limited Understanding of the IEP	Basic Understanding of the IEP	Extensive Understanding of the IEP
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ States they do not understand what an IEP is and/or the evaluation process ○ States they do not know or understand special education acronyms or special education specific language ○ States that the professionals know best ○ Does not actively participate (e.g., provide input) in conversation or ask questions during the IEP meeting ○ Provides limited or no student strengths or educational concerns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Asks what areas and/or which professionals will be part of the IEP evaluation process ○ Demonstrates knowledge of a few acronyms and special education specific language (e.g., OT, ESY) ○ Reviews the IEP but not in its entirety ○ Participates in conversation with team members during the IEP meeting regarding present levels of performance and IEP development ○ Invites outside agencies to the IEP meeting ○ Provides input regarding student's progress, strengths, educational concerns, and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Asks questions regarding services and how it relates to their child's goals ○ Demonstrates clear understanding of acronyms and special education specific language (e.g., FAPE, LRE) and uses these terms themselves during the meeting ○ Reviews the IEP in detail before they sign in agreement and may ask questions for clarification or corrections ○ Asks for evaluations in areas suspected of deficit or aide support as needed ○ Asks about various placements if applicable ○ Provides the district with outside reports (e.g., related services and medical reports) ○ May opt to disagree with components of the IEP

survey should be provided in the family's preferred language or can be conducted as an interview in the family's preferred language (e.g., Wolfe & Durán, 2013).

As Nicole interacts with the Sanchez family throughout the assessment process, she builds a relationship with Lucas and Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez. She takes note of the family's preferred methods of communication and the best times to reach them. She makes purposeful connections with Lucas by remembering his favorite toys and food as well as his dislikes. Conscientious of the family's work and therapy schedules, Nicole also schedules assessment dates with several related service providers on the same day to reduce the number of times Lucas needs to be brought to the school. For one of the assessments, Mrs. Sanchez calls Nicole to cancel due to transportation challenges that day. Nicole asks Mrs. Sanchez if she would like to reschedule or

if it would be helpful if the team comes to her home. Mrs. Sanchez indicates that it would be helpful if the assessment team could come to their home instead. Nicole coordinates with the speech pathologist and was able to go to the Sanchez home to perform the testing.

Supporting and Empowering Families

Having families feel welcomed and comfortable in sharing is a first step in establishing the relationship with the family. The next step is to support and empower the families to advocate for their children. Family empowerment is a dynamic and developmental process. The ECSE teacher should meet family members at the level of their comfort, knowledge, and skills and move them forward in reaching specific goals for their child (Hsiao et al., 2018). The goal of family

empowerment is for family members to be active advocates focused on self-control, self-efficacy, and self-determination (Hsiao et al., 2018). ECSE teachers can empower the family and alleviate some of the burdens the special education system places on families. Family empowerment can start by providing CLD families with basic information about their parental rights and the special education system (Lo, 2012).

Families' understanding of the IEP process can vary greatly. Support for families should vary depending on their comfort level and knowledge of the IEP process. The Levels of Understanding of the IEP Checklist is a teacher-developed rubric to help teachers develop a sense of awareness of how much support and guidance a family may need in becoming an active participant in the IEP process (see **Figure 1**). Families with various

experiences with special education will impact their level of empowerment and willingness to advocate for their child during the IEP. With this checklist, ECSE teachers can evaluate a family's current level of understanding of the IEP process and determine the level of support the family may need to develop and grow as an active member of the IEP team.

The Levels of Understanding of the IEP Checklist includes three levels. The first level (No or Limited Understanding) characterizes families who have no or very limited experience with IEPs. These families may not understand terminologies used in special education, the process of IEP meetings, or the role they have in IEP meetings. They may defer most decisions to the IEP team with the assumption that professionals would know best for their children, and they may not ask questions during this process. The second level (Basic Understanding) characterizes families who have some experience with the IEP process. They may understand some special education terminologies, and they may start to participate more actively in the IEP meeting by providing input about their children and asking questions during the meeting. Additionally, they also know they need to review the IEP document. The third level (Extensive Understanding) characterizes families who are fluent in the IEP process. They have a clear understanding of special education terminologies and even use them themselves in conversations. They are also active participants during the IEP meeting. They understand their legal rights and will ask for evaluations and placement options for their children, if applicable. They also read the IEP document in detail before they sign the document.

Nicole provides Mrs. Sanchez with a Spanish version of a parent survey to fill out before the IEP meeting to better understand the family perspectives and their primary concerns regarding Lucas. Based on this survey and previous conversations with the family, Nicole determines that the family has a limited understanding of the IEP. The Sanchez family indicated that they do not understand the purpose of the IEP and what that means for their child.

Steps in Supporting Families Through the IEP Process

Start supporting families in navigating the special education system with the initial

contact with families, typically when the child's records are received from the EI coordinator. From there, initiate an informal introductory phone call to the families, followed by a more formal preparation for the initial IEP meeting.

Use a teacher-developed checklist (e.g., EPIC) to effectively involve families in the IEP process and build collaborative relationships (see *Figure 2*). The EPIC checklist is a teacher-developed guide for ECSE teachers to use to support families, including those from CLD backgrounds, in becoming active participants in the IEP process. It can help teachers evaluate where their families are in this process and how much support they may need to provide families. Although it is important to provide the necessary support for families in the IEP process, you should also acknowledge this process is fluid and developmental. By empowering families, families can become more confident and active in their participation in the IEP process.

The EPIC checklist is designed for teachers to use during the initial, annual, and transition IEP meetings. The EPIC checklist can guide teachers on what to do before, during, and after the meeting. In each phase of the meeting, *explain* the process and paperwork involved, such as parents' roles and responsibilities, procedures, and timelines. Second, it includes documents to *provide* families, such as assessment reports and agendas. Third, it has critical *inquiries* to ask families throughout the IEP process to ensure the families' needs, wants, and areas of concern are addressed. Lastly, it provides a layout to *coordinate* with other related service providers or school personnel in all steps of the IEP timeline.

In the next section, we describe how teacher Nicole used the EPIC checklist to support the Sanchez family in the IEP process. For each phase of the IEP meeting, Nicole also considered the family's linguistic and cultural background and how these factors may impact the family's participation and decisions (see cultural considerations on EPIC Checklist). This included providing documents in the family's preferred language, providing a translator and/or interpreter if needed, and awareness of the family's dynamic and cultural beliefs that may influence their decisions.

Step 1: Before the IEP Meeting

For the initial IEP meeting, many families may have no understanding or limited understanding of the IEP process. It is important to explain the unfamiliar special education terminology and acronyms often used in these meetings because it can be overwhelming for families, particularly those from CLD backgrounds where English may not be their preferred language. Additionally, provide families with translated copies of the IEP agenda and other documents that will be reviewed at the meeting prior to the IEP meeting. Families should have enough time to review the documents and note any questions or concerns they might have and bring them to the meeting (i.e., inquire). Coordinate with an interpreter to ensure availability to the family during the meeting (Lo, 2012; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). See the Before the IEP section in *Figure 2* for more guidance on what to explain, provide, inquire, and coordinate prior to the IEP meeting.

Nicole remains in regular contact with the family before the IEP meeting. Nicole explains to the family about the IEP process (e.g., what is an IEP, IEP team members and their roles), IEP procedures and timelines, the family's legal rights and their role in the IEP process, information about upcoming evaluations for the child, and the difference between EI and school-based services. She also provides Spanish versions of documents that families may find helpful or need, including information flyers (e.g., brochure of the continuum of programs, parent rights and procedure safeguards, special education acronym list), parent survey, and assessment reports. Because the Sanchez family is new to the process, they did not openly share their concerns about Lucas until Nicole inquired about them. Nicole further asks about the parents' preschool enrollment interests. To make the family feel more comfortable and ease them into the IEP process, Nicole also coordinates with the Sanchez family to tour the classrooms, shows them the classroom schedule and student work samples, and shares her teaching philosophies. Lastly, Nicole coordinates with the family and the IEP team to schedule the IEP meeting.

One week before the IEP meeting, Nicole provides the Sanchez family with copies of the psychoeducational, speech, and occupational therapy evaluations. Nicole suggests the Sanchez family review the reports and note

Figure 2 Explain, Provide, Inquire, and Coordinate (EPIC) checklist for the individualized education program meeting

EPIC (Explain, Provide, Inquire and Coordinate) Checklist	
<p>Directions: Read through the EPIC checklist for each corresponding/ applicable IEP process. The items include 1) reminders of explanations to parents, 2) documents to provide to parents, 3) information to inquire from parents, and 4) coordination of meetings and people for the IEP meeting.</p> <p>Completion of these actions will encourage and empower parent(s) to be more of an active participant at each stage of the IEP process (before, during, and after). This checklist can be used for initial, annual, and transition IEP meetings.</p> <p>Cultural considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide documents in the family’s preferred language • Provide professional translator and/or interpreter as needed for communication with families and testing • Awareness of parental/family roles and which family member(s) is the decision-maker • Awareness of cultural factors that may influence parents’ willingness and decision with specific assessments • Awareness of what some may consider as a deficit (e.g., feeding with utensils for a family whose culture eats primarily with their hands) 	
Before the IEP Meeting	
<p>1: Explain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Assessment and IEP procedures and timelines o Assessments prior to IEP requests o Role as a parent in the IEP o Dynamics and differences of early intervention (Part C) in comparison to school-based services (Part B) *as applicable 	
<p>2: Provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Special education acronym list o Initial/Incoming IEP parent survey o Brochure of continuum of programs available o IEP agenda o Parent rights/procedural safeguards o Contacts for assessment team members o Assessment report 	
<p>3: Inquire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Parent educational concerns and student’s developmental levels o Preschool enrollment interests (special education, general education and/or no enrollment). o Clarify if student is receiving or has received prior early intervention services 	
<p>4: Coordinate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Visitation and/or trial period to continuum of programs available o Schedules of assessments & IEP date o Contact early intervention coordinator o Invitation to IEP 	

(continued)

Figure 2 (continued)

During IEP Meeting	
1: Explain:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Review any special education acronyms used o Various eligibilities and what those mean for that particular student o Offer of FAPE and LRE particular to recommendation o Rationale of placement and needs
2: Provide:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Draft goals for parents/caregivers to review o Any updated or edited reports o Clarification of any information throughout meeting that may need more in-depth explanation
3: Inquire:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Frequently pause the meeting and ask parents if they have questions or concerns about what is presented o Are there any areas of deficit/concern that the team did not target in their presented goals?
4: Coordinate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Discuss with parent and early intervention coordinator about over age 3 services and eligibility.
After the IEP Meeting	
1: Explain:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Parental consent o Explanation of each signature (participation, consent, etc) o Their rights/options of agreement/consent o Transition only: Share IEP with receiving teacher
2: Provide:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o IEP binder & copy of IEP o Welcome packet o Transition only: Share IEP with receiving teacher
3: Inquire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Check on parent/caregiver with a one-on-one phone call o Did any concerns or questions come up after the meeting?
4: Coordinate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Classroom enrollment needs if applicable o Related services schedule & provide to parent

any questions or concerns they may have on any of the evaluations. The reports are in English, so Nicole offers to review the reports with Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez and assists in noting any questions or concerns. Nicole additionally guides the family during the meeting to write down questions regarding the terminology, recommendations, and activities they can do at home.

Step 2: During the IEP Meeting

Families should feel welcomed and supported during the IEP meeting, so they feel they are valued and equal members of the IEP team (Lo, 2012). The initial IEP meeting is the first encounter families have with the educational team. For many families, it may be the first time they meet a group of individuals, rather than one individual (e.g., teacher), from the school, which can be intimidating. Additionally, the interpreter should be seated next to the family during the meeting. At the start of the meeting, explain and inform families of their parental rights and introduce the team members. The child's eligibility and placement rationale and recommendations should also be explained. Additionally, provide families with drafts of the child's goals and any updated or revised reports. Throughout the meeting, inquire and check parents' understanding and allow families to ask questions and discuss any concerns they may have. Lastly, coordinate the intake process with the EI coordinator for students over the age of 3. See the During the IEP section in **Figure 2** for more guidance on what to explain, provide, inquire, and coordinate during the IEP meeting.

On the day of the IEP meeting, Nicole sends a reminder to Mrs. Sanchez with information about the time and location for the meeting. At the IEP meeting, the interpreter and Nicole sit next to the Sanchez family. Nicole provides the family with a Spanish version of parent rights and a "special education acronym cheat sheet." During the education concern section of Lucas's meeting, the Sanchez family mentions Lucas's delay in speech but fails to mention their concerns with his behavior. Nicole asks the family if she could start sharing concerns they had previously shared with her. Nicole begins by mentioning some of Lucas's behavior concerns. She asks the family to elaborate on these behaviors and what strategies the family is trying at home. The team actively listens

and gathers more information on what triggers can cause physical aggression. Throughout the meeting, Nicole pauses to elaborate on specific terminology and explain eligibility. Because Lucas is turning 3, Nicole also discusses the intake process for students over the age of 3 with the EI coordinator and requests the coordinator provides the family with information for the possibility of continuing in-home services.

Step 3: After the IEP Meeting

After the meeting, ensure the parents understood the development and outcome of the IEP document and answer any questions they may still have about the IEP. Explain and review the completed IEP with the parents. Provide parents with information regarding child's eligibility, the list of services, the recommended placement, the goals, and the modifications and accommodations. Inform the parents they can agree or disagree with the IEP and the next steps following the IEP. Follow up and inquire any questions or concerns they may have regarding the meeting or next steps. Lastly, coordinate with parents about enrollment information, transportation, start dates for placement, and their child's related services schedule. See the After the IEP section in **Figure 2** for more guidance on what to explain, provide, inquire, and coordinate after the IEP meeting.

After the IEP meeting, Nicole reviews the parent consent form with the family and explains each section they are signing. Mrs. Sanchez asks if she has to sign the IEP document right now, and Nicole informs Mrs. Sanchez she can sign for participation and take home the draft IEP to review and sign in the next few days. Nicole explains to the family that after they review the IEP, their signature approves services and placement. Nicole also informs the parents how to sign the IEP if they disagree with portions of the IEP and explains if there is a disagreement, they can hold a second IEP meeting to discuss concerns. At the end of the day, Nicole calls Mrs. Sanchez, inquiring how she feels about the IEP and congratulating her on making it through her first IEP. Nicole reiterates the parents should review the IEP document and notify her of any typos, corrections, or questions they may have.

Nicole also discusses the next steps of enrolling Lucas and starting school. Nicole

e-mails the parents a welcome packet, including contact information for staff and related service providers. Nicole also creates an IEP binder for the family, which holds a copy of the IEP and assessment reports. After Lucas enrolls in school, Nicole provides the family with a related services schedule that indicates when he receives his services during their school day.

Continuous Assessment

After the IEP meeting, it is important to continue to have regular communication with families. Collaboration, where families' expertise is respected, is the key to true partnership. Some CLD families may not be comfortable in contacting the school; therefore, reach out and share with families through phone calls, daily reports, and parent conferences. The daily reports provide the highlights of the child's daily success. Parent conferences allow for more discussion of families' concerns regarding their child and how the teachers and the families can work together to address these concerns. During these meetings, provide data (e.g., photos, videos, behavior data) to show families how the child has been doing in meeting their IEP goals and discuss whether additional support may be needed based on the family report (Love et al., 2019).

Throughout the school year, Nicole continues to keep an open line of communication with the Sanchez family. She sends home written daily reports to communicate how Lucas is engaged in the school day and shares weekly videos and photos of Lucas participating in class activities. At dismissal, Nicole will often touch base with Mr. or Mrs. Sanchez and share anecdotes of Lucas. Nicole makes an effort to communicate daily with the parents to be informed of changes in Lucas's routines (e.g., sleep) and to update the parents of any changes at school (e.g., schedule, staff). Nicole also incorporates the family's input during each progress review period.

When it is time for the annual IEP, Nicole reaches out to Mrs. Sanchez 1 week prior with another parent survey. The survey inquires about Lucas's progress during the past year and additional parent concerns and areas for growth. In the survey, Mrs. Sanchez notes she is concerned with Lucas's behavior at home and school. Lucas has been biting more at home. Nicole validates Mrs. Sanchez's concerns by confirming Lucas has begun in-home ABA therapy and notes the behavioral concerns within the classroom setting. Before the

meeting, Nicole discussed these concerns with Mrs. Sanchez, and they agreed to request a behavior assessment during the IEP. Nicole provides data to the IEP team regarding Lucas's biting behaviors within the classroom. Mrs. Sanchez makes a formal request to have Lucas evaluated for behavior services at the meeting.

Conclusion

In summary, ECSE teachers play a vital role in empowering CLD families to become active participants in the IEP process. Families with young children with special needs come into the school system with varying understanding of the IEP process, particularly those from CLD backgrounds. ECSE teachers are uniquely positioned to help these families navigate this complex system and acquire the necessary skills to advocate for their children's needs and services by becoming active participants in the IEP process. By initiating and keeping an open line of communication, ECSE teachers can reduce the apprehension and anxiety that CLD families may have about the IEP process while enhancing the partnerships with families to promote positive student outcomes

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