



Supporting Special Education Family Advocacy

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Special Education law in the United States requires professionals to collaborate with parents in the decision-making process related to the education of their child with a disability. Although the legal requirement recognizes parents as equal partners with other professionals, the reality of this vision remains elusive for an overwhelming number of families and particularly for those coming from low-income, culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Parents who have children with disabilities face multiple barriers when attempting to actively participate in the planning and implementation of their child's special education services. Providing immigrant parents with bilingual, special education parent training programs can offer families essential information and expertise, in their primary language, and opportunities to connect with other families more experienced with obtaining necessary services.

In the current project, a non-profit, special education parent advocacy group, in collaboration with a large urban school district and university developed, implemented, and evaluated a bilingual, special education parent training program for low-income, immigrant families. This paper reports on the evaluation of the parent training program. Six training sessions were implemented at three elementary school sites. A total of 92 families participated in the training series. All participating parents completed surveys after concluding the training program assessing parents' self-efficacy regarding their ability to 1) communicate with their child's school; 2) support their child's Individualized Education Program; and 3) support their child's development at home. A subsample of parents was randomly selected for more extensive interviews regarding their experience through the program, what they learned, and their overall recommendations. School administrators were also interviewed. Overall, a majority of parents reported that the trainings helped them better understand their child's IEP and communicate with their child's school. Almost all parents reported increasing their knowledge of how to support their child at home.