

>> Just like every other state this is an IDEA mandated, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandated service for dispute resolution, and so this is Michigan's program to provide those services. So, as we dive into our topic today if you would play along and let us know where your comfort level is or your knowledge level is with regard to communication, collaboration, and family school relationships. Is it high? Is it medium? Is it low? If you would pop that into the chat we would really appreciate that. So, why this slide? My intent was to show you a film clip, but lawyers said no, and so we have some pictures and a pretty purple rocket ship with a little COVID germ in the window. But, one of my favorite movies of all time is "Apollo 13" with Tom Hanks and Ed Harris and Kevin Bacon and a bunch of other A-list actors. And this movie really resonated with me particularly at the top of or the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. And if you're not familiar with this movie, the link to this clip is included in the resource guide, but I would really encourage you to watch it. There's this scene in the movie where you see Ed Harris there in front of the chalkboard, and they're talking about how to get the Apollo 13 back home alive. And he draws on the chalkboard, and you'll see in that first picture that's as far as they can make it. They can't go any further than that with what they know in that moment and ... with the amount of life support. And he said, "Gentlemen, that's unacceptable. That's not good enough for us." And then in the middle of the picture you see this guy who's like, "We've got to shut it down. Power is everything. We have to shut everything down in order to get them home alive." And, finally, Ed Harris' character says, "Well, if that's what we got to do, that's what we got to do. Failure is not an option." And it just really resonated with me because I thought it was really telling in relationship to what our schools and our families went through at the start of the pandemic so I would encourage you to watch the clip. So, today we're going to talk about what happened in the control rooms of our schools and students' homes throughout the pandemic, the importance of family engagement prior to, during, and now ... well, we're not after it yet, unfortunately ... and as well as the communication about enduring it throughout the delivery of special education support and services. That communication aspect for special education is always a unique challenge but it's important all the time and what we learned from the pandemic ... how can what we learned from the pandemic inform our learning environments moving forward? Bern.

>> So, based on what I saw in the chat it looks like there's a lot of very high level of knowledge in this group, so we're going to have to give you our A presentation I guess. We'll do the best we can, and hopefully we'll meet your expectations. So, we're going to set the table first with three very important things we already knew before COVID that were illuminated by the pandemic. First, thanks to a number of studies published over the last 50 years which you may be familiar with, we already knew that parental engagement is one of the most important factors in student success. We also already knew that building trust through effective communication and collaboration is essential to nurturing that critical parent engagement. In addition, we already knew that effective communication and collaboration are even more important in special education due to its very unique dynamics. So, we'll next cover all three of these fundamental realities in detail beginning with family engagement. So the importance of family engagement in student success isn't really all that complicated. Although schools often provide students with a myriad of things well beyond their classroom lessons, most students spend a much greater number of hours at home. So it makes sense that a student's success increases when a school effectively works with those surrounding students at home, their family. So, despite the existence of these studies over the last 50 years really demonstrating the critical connection between family engagement and student success, overriding narrative until recently in many places was that schools provide sufficient opportunity for parents to engage through their PTAs and other traditional events but that many parents who didn't show up were just too busy or didn't care enough. In the past 10 years, however, research has focused more upon the concept that authentic family engagement requires overcoming barriers that haven't really been considered, so we've compiled some analysis of these developments in our resource handout we've provided you so you can link to some of these recent commentary in studies. These studies have demonstrated the benefit of family engagement and authentic collaboration which we will talk about more later. Significantly the Every Student Succeeds Act passed by Congress in 2015 has a number of parent engagement requirements for all schools that receive Title I funds. We also know that one of the IDEA's core principles is the engagement of families in the IEP and other special education processes. So the theory behind the IDEA team concept is that multiple people with varying expertise working together will produce an outcome better than any single person could create. In other words, a major difference between the old model and an evolving model of engagement is more genuine collaboration which includes things like two-way communication, home school coordination, and joint problem solving. As we will see, a critical difference between the old model of engagement and the evolving model is the creation and building of trust. Next slide. Although it perhaps was temporarily delayed by the pandemic, a national movement really began to blossom beginning in the early 2010s on parental engagement. A major contribution developed in 2017 and 2018 when 13 states were awarded federal grants to establish state wide family engagement centers. As of last year, approximately 150 school districts had established an administrative capacity specifically dedicated to family engagement. For example, here in Michigan, the largest school district, the Detroit Public Schools Community District, began a major comprehensive effort to engage families. The district created a family community engagement department and it's initiatives include home visits, a parent academy, and school advisory counsels. According to initial reports, the effort has already shown some positive results for the district. In addition, there are now numerous organizations and entities across the country dedicated to increasing family engagement and collaboration. Perhaps the most prominent of these is the National Association for Family School

and Community Engagement who just completed the annual symposium filled with a number of interesting sessions, and I'm guessing that some of you folks out there attended that or at least parts of it, pieces of it. Finally, I also want to mention that there are some interesting parallels between the family engagement movement and the much better known restore to practices movement. Although restorative practices is an especially recognized approach to handling student discipline ... for instance, here in Michigan, schools are required to consider restorative practices in most situations before any discipline can be delivered. Restorative practice's champions, however, actually prefer for it to be proactive to intentionally build community, through circles mainly, and connections to improve relationships. Some respective authorities have even applied some of the principles of restorative practices to a family engaging strategy. Next slide. So, the final piece to mastering your understanding of family school engagement is this comprehensive framework originally created by Harvard professor, Karen Mapp and Paul Kuttner, in 2013 and this the updated version that was created in 2019 by Karen Mapp and Eyal Bergman. Although there are far too many concepts to cover in our session for today, we have provided you with a link to it in our handout. For our conversation today, we will only quickly mention the first column of this entitled the challenge because it starts with the current realities of educators and families which was before the pandemic not having training or [Indistinct] with genuine engagement not being seen as essential and with what they call a deficit mindset. For instance, I think parents may have a negative experience and not feel valued. Educators may only hear from parents when they are frustrated. Next slide.

>> And although we already knew that collaborating with parents is very important to student success and that effectively communicating is a major undertaking in some situations, especially in communities where families are coming from different cultures than the teachers and school staff, we also know that there are additional dynamics that make communication and special education unique. So we have an overlay in our general communication challenges working in special education. The federal law requires that schools attempt to collaborate with parents of children with disabilities, and parents of children with disabilities deal with stresses, and feelings that touch upon many powerful emotions, and those emotions some times spill over into meetings. This means that effective communication is more important in special ed because our decisions require it. It makes patience and empathy and strategic communication even more important. And then with those added realities on top of all the other realities we always faced, it's inevitable that sometimes school staff falls short of perfection.

>> Right, and one of the things that I like to think about specifically with regard to the second bullet and my knowledge and expertise of being a parent of a child with a disability, I think about early on when my son, Cameron, was first receiving special education support and services, I actually worked at a community college. My first career was in higher education, and I worked at a community college, and the intermediate school district was maybe a quarter of a mile away from the community college, but my son's childcare provider was across town. And so the delivery model at the time ... and I think it's pretty similar still today ... is in those early intervention services you might have a 20-minute session with an occupational therapist or physical therapist or a speech therapist or some kind of an -ist. And, so, I would have to leave work. I would have to drive across town to pick my son up from the daycare provider. I would have to come all the way back because the ISD was right next to my workplace, have Cameron participate in whatever therapy or early intervention service he was receiving, and then drive him all the way back all the way across town to go back to the childcare providers and then drive all the way back across town again to come back and to do my work. And that was a really big stressor. It was ... I provided the insurance for my entire family. He was very fragile, and so I didn't want to lose that insurance, but I also couldn't be a good employee. I couldn't be a good mom. I could only do half a job for each of them, and that was a really big stressor. Coupled with the emotion of nobody ever said, "I'm just so excited to have this baby, and I can't wait for them to start special ed." I've never met a person who said that. It's not something that I experienced personally. It was really an emotional time, and so there's just some different variations of that across the span of early intervention through K-12 and transition that I think we need to keep in mind with regard to parent relationships, and I know Cheryl being a parent and a grandparent has experienced this over some decades too so.

>> Yeah, it hasn't changed. My oldest is now in her 40s, and I'm raising grandchildren, so my littlest one is just 10 months old, and we're experiencing it again. I just wanted to define how we're using the word engagement too, and there are some differences since the pandemic because our communication modalities have been changed a little bit, but engagement is more than just that mandatory messaging that the IDEA requires one way, maybe leave a message, maybe send an email. But, we're using engagement to define a real intentional reciprocal exchange between important adults in the students life so more than just your bake sale, or distribution of procedural safeguards, more than just fulfilling the state mandate to collect data from parent involvement, more than just the transparency reporting the school districts are required to do so, again, engagement the way we're using it today is a real specific intentional act on both school and families' parts. So, this means that that could ... Flip, Beth. The extra early effort to make parents feel welcome and respected, and they provide an important role pay off later when the difficult decisions have to be made. Start early. How are you going to do that? I mentioned earlier there's the general communication dynamics especially when the populations are different, where your school staff culture is different than your family culture, and the school staff in many instances have multiple cultures integrated into their schools so that puts additional responsibilities, additional stressors on school staff to be that flexible. But that flexible along with having a consistent strategy, and the strategy needs to reflect respectful listening and positive framing of issues. Parents and school staff might have very different perceptions about their students' needs, and how are you going to encourage the conversation that allows for value for all of those viewpoints, all of those observations and interactions about some times very different environments? The three most important words in special education law, appropriate, reasonable, and unique, leave lots of rooms for differing interpretations and disagreements. And those alternative interpretation leave lots of potential triggers if the participants don't have that initial connection and trust so exerting that extra effort early to set a respectful and caring focus on the student can be the best strategy you can employ to prevent sometimes very painful escalations. So, we keep mentioning trust, and we'd like to take a second right now and ask you ... Well, we're going to define trust this way, that we're going to use the multiple level trust definition that was set out in a CADRE webinar entitled "To Trust or Not to Trust," and we've seen that other places too, but most recently it was just last month maybe that CADRE hosted this webinar. And with or without the pandemic, there are three major points we need to consider: That the reservoir of trust is critical in order to weather the inevitable challenges that are going to arise and keeping the door open to trust might be very hard work and require patience, but it's worth it. And as we're going to see, the pandemic has created a higher level of engagement for participants, and this engagement needs to be aligned with an effort to increase the collaboration. So, in order to talk about trust, we have to be able to define trust. If you could type into the chat, what is trust? And to you, how would trust be demonstrated? I'll just look at the clock here and take about a minute and let folks type into the chat, and then maybe, Bern, you could summarize what you see.

>> Safety demonstrated through integrity. No judgment. Mutual respect. Follow-through. Honest and reliable. Confidence. The other person understands you and has your back. Knowing everyone's view. It begins with active listening. Discretion. Honesty. Believe in the other person. Respect. Authenticity. I think I missed one that went very quickly. I apologize. Demonstrated through implementation as agreed.

>> Okay, yes, and if you look at the box ...

>> [Indistinct] Liability. Truthful. True strength in another person. They're coming fast and furious now.

>> Oh, are they? Okay.

>> Well, they start and stop a little bit. But, that ... I'm sorry. Go ahead.

>> Oh. So, we'd like to use this working definition of trust that it's a willingness to be vulnerable to another party because you have confidence that that other party is open, so they're willing to be vulnerable to you, that they're benevolent ... benevolence is the willingness to give, to help, to support ... that they're reliable. Now, they might be reliably late which is frustrating, but they're reliable. They're honest and that they're competent in what they're bringing to the table, so that doesn't mean they have the same competencies that you do, but they are competent in the views that they're putting forth. So, again, the willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on your confidence that that person is open, benevolent, reliable, honest, and competent. Using that definition and starting from the very beginning to set up those partnerships. Okay, yeah.

>> Trigger finger apparently. So, another aspect or another component of that trust is the partnerships that we develop between schools and families, so I'm a bit of a word junkie and research junkie, so I kind of was trying to play around with this a little bit, and according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, one of the definitions of partner is a heavy timber that strengthens a ship's deck to support the mast. It's usually used in the plural. It can also define the partnership as a relationship resembling a legal partnership usually involving close cooperation between parties and having specific responsibilities and roles. And I used a picture of a sailing ship because when I read the definition that really resonated with me, that partner, that mast, and I thought it was a perfect analogy to a family school partnership. A sailing ship is a very complex vessel. School partnerships are very complex. Requires a certain harmony among the crew working the different parts and the weather, the things that are beyond your control, and if the partner is broken on the sailing ship, it's not going to sail. It's not going to work well at all. It might still float, but it's not going to get anywhere. And gosh, darn it, my lawn is getting mowed right now, so I apologize if you can hear that in the background. But, so, what do these images of smooth sailing, rough seas, and then the last image is actually called "The Broken Mast" by an artist named Juliann Grant. What do they invoke in you? And I'm curious, if you would type in the chat, what boat would you like to be on as a team member? And then, Bern, if you can keep an eye on ... or, Cheryl, keep an eye on that for me and let me know if you're seeing people answer that.

>> While they're doing that. Oh, the first one on the left.

>> So, I actually ...

>> First one.

>> Yeah, everybody wants to be on smooth sailing right? But, we're not, right? And I actually really like the middle picture because I feel like it's showing a crew that's really working in partnership with one another. They're working as a team to navigate the rough seas. Everybody's role is important and reliant on each other for success. So, while, yeah, we might want to have a tasty beverage and be facing the sun, a real example of a true partnership I think is the one in the middle. Definitely not like this. So, we don't want to be at the end of somebody's pointy sword being forced to do something, right? We want to ... We all like to have choice and a role and, like Cheryl was saying, that level of trust for it to work. Bern.

>> I did want to mention that someone said that they couldn't answer this question because they get too sea sick.

>> That's awesome.

>> That would be me too.

>> They weren't able to participate.

>> Don't want to be on a cruise ship.

>> Right. I also saw in the chat previously someone requested the definition of trust. They said it went by pretty quickly for them. Cheryl, if you could repeat what our definition of trust was I think is what they were looking for.

>> Sure. A willingness to be vulnerable to another party, another person, based on confidence that that person is open, benevolent, reliable, honest, and competent.

>> Excellent. So, hopefully that will work. So, now that we've set the table for parent engagement and building trust, let's address the impact of the pandemic and all that we have learned from it. From the many surveys and analysis undertaken, some of which we're linking to in our resource handout, the primary impact of the pandemic upon schools and families can sort of fall into four areas. The first area is that parents observed firsthand the inner workings of their children's education, became far more involved and communicated more often with their teachers. The realities of the pandemic keeping everyone stuck at home made additional communication with families, especially of young students, essential to any learning at all. Second, many parents concluded that their children needed more individualized instruction and learning options and are now asking for these changes. Third, and closely related to that, technology and innovation by necessity became clear drivers of successful learning and communication. And, finally, the schools that failed to meet families needs and expectations especially in minority communities lost students in large numbers. Next slide. So, from these four developments, there are sort of three primary conclusions that observers have voiced. First and foremost, the evidence of success for some schools during the pandemic demonstrated that parents of all income levels and backgrounds will engage in their children's education if they are made to feel invited, welcomed, and valued, so that's the critical point. In contrast, in schools that don't prioritize a nurturing and welcoming collaborative engagement, many parents give up and even walk away from their local schools. A number of families apparently joined learning pods or home school their children. Although some have suggested that this will result in a permanent exit from local schools, it's still a bit of a mystery as to whether this was more a function of many parents not working during the pandemic, and so, it may change. Third, technology has become a critical tool for improving communication and increasing family engagement moving forward. Those who succeeded during the pandemic were able to master technology capabilities and utilize them in creative ways. The simplest version of this is that many realized that Zoom meetings were far more convenient and even comfortable for some participants. For example, shorter meetings broken up over several sessions may be the most efficient way to tackle the creation of a complex or challenging IEP. Taken together, these conclusions have led some observers to pronounce that the essential ingredients to a school's success no longer should be viewed as pillars on a three-legged stool which is evolving the teacher, student, and curriculum but instead now should be viewed as pillars on a four legged stool which includes the teacher, student, curriculum/materials, and the family. Next slide. So, with all of this in mind, we'll now delve into four general strategies that schools can implement to increase family engagement and thus improve their student success. We'll then review some more specific strategies to consider. So, first, in line with the generally collaborative approach, schools should start by asking families questions to determine how to most efficiently engage with them. Surveying parents is a good way to demonstrate to them that their knowledge and input are valued. Second, schools should be creative and find flexible ways to meet families where they are. Home visits are the most common and proven means of doing this, but Zoom sessions, for those with Internet access of course, might be an efficient compromise. In addition, some schools have shown some great results in improving reading skills through one-on-one tutoring and teaching utilizing specific programs over Zoom. Third, educators should collaborate with their coworkers and we should add local community organizations as well to this to employ multiple approaches. One size never fits all and as an example, here in Michigan, the Department of Education has published to range of recommended



strategies including adopting evidence-based home visiting program, building bridges with cultural proficiency activities, use surveys throughout the year to capture family input and report out results, link families to community resources, lead academic parent/teacher teams, design family events with family input and use the events to teach family skills they can reinforce, involve families when creating security and visiting policies, and ensure school personnel are always visible in the hallways, at buses, and at pickup. So, last but not least, schools should make it a priority from top to bottom both to regularly engage with and to teach parents. So, in light of the already overwhelming responsibilities placed upon most schools, pursuing these four strategies may have seemed like an impossible heavy lift before the COVID pandemic began; however, thanks to the attention placed upon the realities illuminated by COVID that we talked about combined with the massive and unprecedented amount of recovery funds now being distributed and dispersed by Congress in the coming months, implementing these strategies is far more realistically achievable in the near future. And notably, the US Department of Ed recently released the document entitled strategies for using American Rescue Plan Funding to address the impact of lost instructional time, and it begins by advising districts to "actively and consistently reach out to families to hear their concerns and work to build trusting relationships." Sounds familiar. Next slide.

>> Bern, we have a question in the chat. Can you repeat the four pillars or the legs of the stool?

>> Oh, absolutely.

>> And, yes, I believe the slides are posted, aren't they, Beth?

>> Yeah. She's saying yes. So, the four pillars would be, again ... Traditionally, the three pillars were the teacher, the student, and then the curriculum and/or materials. Those were the three pillars then until recently were the predominant idea. But, now you've added to those three, the family. So, those would be the four pillows. Pillows. I want to take a nap. But, no, four pillars. Teacher, student, curriculum/materials, and then the family. So, from a review of the literature as well as a review of many initiatives currently undertaken across the country, we now know there are a number of common strategies and principles that run through the majority of these efforts. We can start with two incredibly basic, but important steps, and the first is to approach the relationship as a genuine collaboration. This means working with the families as an equal partner. In order to begin to communicate this new dynamic, you can start with a recognition of a family's critical role in the student's success. Let them know. Go ahead, Beth. Next slide.

>> I'm sorry I muted myself so you wouldn't hear the weed wacking happening, and then I couldn't unmute myself. So, just remember a few minutes ago, we discussed the true collaboration and you're going to hear us repeat this throughout this presentation. It's not prescriptive based on what the school wants, right? It's about what the joint collaborative needs, okay. It's not just calling a family and saying, "I could really use 15 cupcakes tomorrow, or, "Could you please staff the PTO booth at the trunk or treat this week?" It's really far more enriched than those more traditional, in my words, old-fashioned ways that we engage with families.

>> So, in addition, here are two simple means to build connections to families. One is to convey high expectations for their child and ask them about their child's strengths. We know that nothing inspires the parents good will more than touching upon their hopes for their child's success. Second, as we indicated, ask about the families technology. The highest rated need of parents in many of the surveys taken during the COVID pandemic was for requesting help and utilizing technology. It makes sense. Next slide.

>> So, we really ... We use the word encourage, but I feel like really it's a must for school staff to ask parents and caregivers about the students' routines and what works best for them. One student might be ready to learn as soon as they enter the classroom. The other student may need 5 minutes to get acclimated before they launch into learning. You think about morning people and whether you're a morning person or not. I am. I'm one of those annoying morning people, but if you're not a morning person, you can't just pop out of bed and be ready to go just because someone tells you to, right? You have a routine you have to get through before you're ready to go. We all have routines. It's part of being human, and in most cases, parents are going to know what routine works best for their student. Personally, I think one of the greatest things about the past 18 months is also how creative we've become to stay in touch with one another. I would have loved to be able to FaceTime, Zoom, or Google Meet with my children's teachers or the IEP team when I was commuting an hour each way to work and was responsible for department and had a really big job and had to take a day off of work to attend a meeting that now really can be handled at my desk, on my lunch hour, or if I shut the door to work on whatever issue we needed to work on. There's just so many amazing tools that are being used now to enhance communication, and when this pandemic ends, fingers crossed, these tools shouldn't go away. We shouldn't just revert back to that traditional, well, we can meet with you from 3 to 3:30 model. We should really continue to engage our families in ways that are accessible to them. And I'd like to add with regard to our bullet here on providing five positive comments, creativity is key for everybody right now, but creative doesn't have to mean complex. It can be really simple. I can't express enough about this compliments before criticism. Again, we're all human beings. It's so easy to say at the top of a meeting, "Mrs. Smith, I love how Johnny engages during story time. He's attentive. He asks clarifying questions. He's gracious in waiting his turn to be called on. He makes requests for certain books to be read. Today I'm seeking your help in coming up with a plan to help him be more engaged in math." All right? Boom. The parent has just heard you love her son. It's much better than saying, "I'm calling to discuss a problem with Johnny" because what the parent has heard is, "Your son, Johnny, is a problem." It didn't take much longer to talk about those positive things before we dove into the problem that we needed to solve and the solution we were engaging the parent in. And, again, we need to go beyond that traditional PTO, volunteer, room parent. True engagement gives families a really substantive role in the relationship, and it really can make all the difference in our school experience. So, what if you had families that don't engage, right? Maybe they don't know how. Maybe it wasn't their example growing up. Well, the good news is that family training is a part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and it was highly emphasized in the past year because we were so reliant on parents as teaching facilitators. Family training can be included in the IEP as supports. Example would be providing family training on how to help Johnny improve his reading comprehension. This training can encompass technology. I had a fun chat with the conference platform this morning about my lack of comfort over some of the types of technology, and I don't know how many times ... I'm not a Google girl. I'm just ... I mean, I can look stuff up on the Google, but Google Classroom is a really foreign concept to me, and I would have loved as a parent to have had a class with a technology team from the school district on how can I help my son turn in an assignment on Google Classroom. My younger kid is the one who helped me begrudgingly and complained about it the whole time, but these are really simple things that we can do, and, again, there's been a significant investment that the federal government has made in our schools that can be allocated for this type of training. Cheryl. You need to unmute, Cheryl. There you

go.

>> Okay. Yes, I muted myself because the people in the office next to me our pounding on the walls, but then I couldn't unmute. I apologize. So, significantly according to the parent survey that we talked about, the top three priorities for parents were receiving technological assistance, technology assistance, guidance on how to best support their student, and then one-on-one time with their teacher. So, one primary for collaboration building is in that area of family training, real-time video conferences, and for multiple parents, these sessions can be recorded or emailed, put on a website or hub, and in addition providing those written instructions. Provide some time on your platform for individualized coaching while your families are working with students. And even now with a lot of schools back in session, families are still providing support because the reality is every student, regardless of their disability status, their academic progress took a hit during COVID. And families are very aware of that and most families have committed to helping their kiddos get caught up, if you will, or get to a point where they're more comfortable learning new material. And perhaps it's not the teacher providing that one-on-one but someone on your team, and the options that are there can be explored with the team, involving the parents also, and making sure that their supports are in place. So, again, as Beth said earlier it's not prescriptive the way the school wants to do it, but this is another place to engage and how are we going to meet your needs, not let us meet your needs by doing A, B, and C, but do you need Q, W, and M and how are we going to do that? I just wanted to mention, too, when Beth was giving her example about Johnny and calling Johnny's parents, Mrs. Smith. And the purpose of the call was to talk about how to help Johnny in math because Johnny was falling behind in math, and you notice when she read her statement she didn't say, "Johnny engages at reading time or circle time and asked appropriate questions and requests books to read, but we're having trouble with math" because that but simple language change, that but turns of fall that positive stuff you just did. "But Johnny's having trouble in math and Johnny's having a problem in math," so the focus then becomes on the negative. If we could dial this back, you'd see she mentioned the things. "Today I'd like to talk to you about ..." So, she made a graceful transition if you will into the real purpose of the call. But, it was still genuine and honest and open, and if that framework has been consistent all along, the parent could rely on you or someone at the school to make sure that the student's strengths were paramount and were first before talking to or talking about the challenges. Beth. So, when we talk about building a team we have to talk about connecting the players, right? Connecting the people on the team. And not every relationship between the members connects the same way, and the pieces necessary to succeed don't usually rest only in one person, and we mentioned earlier that schools are expected to fill so many important roles for students. The ability to teach in a classroom was the most significant. For instance, while a teacher might possess tremendous skills in the classroom or success connecting with the kids, it's not always realistic to think that even the best teachers or school staff are going to be those who are most successful in connecting with every parent. Connecting with other humans is a real complicated puzzle and often beyond an individual ... a single individual's understanding. Therefore, building a team based on the realistic assessment of what each person's strengths brings and fitting them together as a team is essential. Each person's background, culture, experience, should all be considered from a strategic viewpoint when building your team. Now, I know there's certain roles that must be put on a team, but usually there's more than one person who serves that role. So, this strategy and strategic team building requires a lot of effort and effective communication as well.

>> So, the critical factor that links this all together is that a school has to make parent collaboration as high an urgency as any of its other priorities and ensure that all the pieces and skills needed are provided, and this will be a significant investment from top to bottom. It has to be comprehensive though to be really successful. Next slide.

>> Okay, so we're back to "Apollo 13." Now, this is a clip, and, again, please humor me. Let me trust that you're going to go watch these clips since we couldn't share them here, but this is an example that I used throughout my son's education so much so that I'm sure that the team knew it was coming. But, here's the scenario, right, so the astronauts on board, their CO2 filters aren't working. They weren't built for the situation that they're in, and our main character here, Ed Harris, this isn't a contingency that they remotely looked at, and he says, "I suggest you gentlemen invent a way to put a square peg in a round hole." So then you see a bunch of engineers in a room with a box of stuff, and it's the only stuff available to them. They didn't get to hop on to Amazon and order stuff on their Prime account and have it delivered the very next day, right? That's what they had to work with. And so this engineer who's holding the square and the cylinder, he says, "The people upstairs have handed us this one, and we've got to come through. We've got to find a way." There was no time. They were forced to use what they had, and they had an urgency of now, and gosh, darn, it if they didn't do it, right? This is a real story. It happened in real life, and so I would always say to my son's team, "We've got duck tape, string, chewing gum, and a Styrofoam cup. What can we do with what we have with the urgency of now to help our students be successful?" And it really comes down to you've got to be willing to do it, right? Failure is not an option. Bern.

>> So, we'll close with a big question that I think and hope is on everyone's mind which is, will there now be a new normal? According to at least one expert, the CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools, "We simply cannot afford to ignore the important things we saw and learned during the pandemic." Realistically, of course, as the impact of the pandemic begins to diminish, parents go back to work and other activities and the infusion of the mass of temporary resources starts to dwindle, it's really probably too soon to reach any final conclusions. The real question then is whether we'll have the will and determination to follow through and focus our efforts to follow the overwhelming evidence we have regarding the impact of genuine family school engagement to make the potential improved outcomes for students that are now, thanks to this greatest influx of money in a generation, within our grasp. Next slide. So, in summary the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that from the unexpected we can, one, improve how we can communicate, collaborate, and problem solve in the delivery of special education supports and services in a variety of learning environments; two, engage in rich and productive partnerships with families and guardians; and, three, innovate to meet the individualized needs of students who receive special ed supports and services to improve student learning and outcomes. Next slide.

>> So, we actually have ... and if our CADRE partner wants to disagree with me. I have we have 8 minutes left. So ... but I might not have started my stop watch at the same time that you started yours, but we did have a question that we wanted to pose if there was time, and it was ... Bern and Cheryl, you may need to help me with this. What do people want to see stay? What worked during the pandemic, and we're still ... I mean we keep talking about it like it's over because it's not, but when we were all still trying to look for the coffee pot at the height of the pandemic and we developed some tools, what do you want to see stay?

>> What was your aha from our life changing, health impacting pandemic? And we would love to see it.

>> [Indistinct] to our profession in challenging times.

>> A lot of what we've talked about in our office is that ... and we recognize how hard people have worked the past year and a half. We knew they worked hard before that, and we recognize how hard it was with this added factor that nobody had ever prepared for, but what we talked about most is a lot of what is being talked about right now isn't new stuff. It's just been brought to the attention of people who didn't realize it before. It's been illuminated as we said earlier. Not necessarily new problems, just ones that ...

>> So, the overwhelming sense that's being put in the chat is about Zoom, the realization that Zoom can actually be very efficient and some are more comfortable with it which we knew, so that's interesting.

>> Some day ... I don't know who this committee of people is, but every now and then there's an announcement that they're retiring a word from the dictionary or a phrase that's overused or whatever. And I think some day we will look forward to the phrase "You're muted, Cheryl," being retired.

>> That's Northern Michigan University. They do that every year.

>> Is that who it is?

>> Yes.

>> Okay. All right. I didn't know that.

>> Yeah, it's from the UP.

>> There's more on innovation and somebody mentioned something I think about father participation increasing.

>> Yes.

>> But, also more about Zoom and technology.

>> And Zoom is not new. We've had Zoom for a long time, but we're becoming more comfortable with it. It's become part of our lexicon. It does illustrate the need to ensure that everyone's technology capabilities and capacities though aren't as close as equal as possible. That might mean hooking up a hot spot somewhere. Michigan has such a diverse landscape. We have super, super rural, and we have super, super urban so what works in Detroit isn't going to work in Marquette or Hartwood, some of our little towns in the Upper Peninsula. And there may be ... I know there's other states that have much larger regions of poor Internet access so to allow the utilization ... portable utilization of the technology is going to require that front up work. Survey, what do you need? Survey your community. How are we going to do it? Community, come with us on this trip to outer space and join us in this mission. Failure is not an option. We've got to do it.

>> We got our 1-minute warning. So we're all going to go blank. Zoom will be over. But anyway, it was a pleasure to have this opportunity to share this with you, and I hope it inspires you a little bit the way we're inspired by it and the promise and the possibilities, so thank you for hanging in there with us.

>> Yes, thank you so much. Enjoy the rest of the conference.

>> Thanks, everybody.