

A Meeting about Harry

Context This is a meeting held at the beginning of the school year, at the request of Harry's mother, to discuss Harry's 4th grade program. In attendance are Harry's mother, the elementary school principal, the 4th grade teacher, the special education teacher, and the paraprofessional aide.

Desired Outcome

By the end of this meeting, you hope to develop an understanding of and address staff and parent concerns and to identify next steps to address Harry's needs.

Background

Harry has been identified as eligible for special education services since he was 3 years old, when he was diagnosed with a moderate sensory neural binaural hearing loss. His hearing has remained relatively stable until last year, when the loss appeared to worsen. This is consistent with the medical prognosis that the loss would be degenerative and progressive. Harry's parents have considered a cochlear implant for him, but are not certain that current technology is adequate to meet his needs.

Harry's father is not actively involved in his educational services. His mother is the one who works with the school. She is supportive of the school program, but is always very concerned about her son. She requests IEP reviews 5 or 6 times per year. Last year at the IEP annual review held in May, she requested that a meeting be held at the beginning of the school year because she wanted to ensure that Harry is successful in 4th grade and that the 4th grade teacher understands his needs

Harry has been included in regular education classrooms throughout his school experience. Classroom teachers have utilized auditory enhancement devices and Harry has had an aide for some activities. His hearing loss is currently moderate, but because it is likely to progress, he has learned to sign.

Assessment

Assessments of Harry indicate high average intelligence, with strong visual skills accompanied by good fine motor skills. Results from intelligence and achievement assessments have been consistent. Harry's achievement scores are within low average range for reading and math. His classroom performance on reading tasks is below grade level as well as below his ability level. His performance on math tasks is slightly above grade level and is commensurate with his ability level. He is a gifted artist, with a strong interest in photography. He has been assessed every 3 years since his initial placement at 3 years of age. His last triennial was a year and a half ago, in the middle of his 2nd grade year.

Mother

You are concerned and very involved in your son's education, even though you work full time. Harry is your only child and you and your husband are a bit older than the parents of most of Harry's peers. You have advocated successfully for Harry since his first IFSP at the preschool level. In all that time, Harry's father has never attended an IEP meeting. Your husband is frequently deployed and works long hours due to mission requirements. He hasn't had time to come to the school for meetings. You have the responsibility for Harry's education.

Last year at the IEP annual review held in May, you requested that a meeting be held at the beginning of the school year because you want to ensure that Harry is successful in 4th grade and that the 4th grade teacher understands his needs. You think the 4th grade teacher doesn't really want Harry included in the class. You have interpreted the teacher's concerns regarding the difficult academic requirements of the 4th grade to be a rejection of your child.

You have become good personal friends with the school psychologist, who has told you that Harry has above average ability and should be very successful being included in a general education class with hearing students. She has even told you that she thinks Harry can continue in an inclusive placement throughout his K-12 education. You want to make sure that the school is committed to that goal and is going to provide Harry with the assistance necessary to make it possible.

You are frightened by how much worse Harry's hearing has gotten over the past year and you are worried that the 10 hours/week that Harry gets assistance from an aide won't be sufficient for his needs. You want the school to do additional assessment to explore the discrepancy between Harry's academic performance and his ability in light of the fact that he will be doing fourth grade work this year.

Father

Since your son's birth, you have been deployed a large percentage of the time. Harry is your only child and you and your wife are a bit older than the parents of most of Harry's peers. Because of your work responsibilities, this is the first time you have attended a meeting with school personnel. It is important to you to be present this time because things are changing. As your son's hearing has deteriorated, you find yourself having more and more trouble communicating with him the way you would like. You hope the school personnel will recommend cochlear implants, because you believe this will improve your communication with your son and be the best for Harry in the long run.

Paraprofessional Aide

You have worked with Harry and his family for 2 years, since Harry first started in special education in your school. You currently work with him in his regular education classroom to assure his ability to fully participate in all activities. You work with Harry 10 hours each week and with two other children for the remainder of your time at school. Harry seems very comfortable working with you, not self-conscious at all.

Harry's previous special ed teacher did not communicate well with you and you are somewhat anxious about working with the new special ed teacher. A lot of teachers do not seem to appreciate the amount you know from your experience working with different students. In this case, you are not sure if the new special education teacher will welcome your input.

You and Harry's mother don't always agree about Harry's needs; you sometimes feel that she is expressing her needs more than Harry's. You are impressed with Harry's abilities, especially his artistic and creative skills. You are a photographer yourself and have encouraged Harry in his interest in photography.

Special Education Teacher

You are new to this school this year, but are not new to the district. You have expertise working with students who have hearing impairments. Harry's most recent IEP requires that you provide direct services to Harry for an hour per day, four days a week, assist him with tutoring, and work with the general education teacher in creating appropriate modifications to class assignments. You have already had a few conversations with the general ed teacher about what will be required for Harry to succeed in 4th grade because of the increased academic demands at this level. This issue concerns you particularly because of the discrepancy between his test scores and achievement in the lower grades, where the work was easier.

You wish this meeting had not been scheduled so early in the year, before you have had a chance to better understand Harry's needs for yourself. Your general educational approach is to rely on your experience working with students and observing their classroom performance, rather than relying heavily on test scores.

In addition, the principal scheduled this meeting without consulting you, which is annoying.

General Ed Teacher

You have been teaching 4th grade for 8 years and are considered to be a good teacher. You are well-liked by your students, respected by their parents, and liked and respected by your colleagues. You perceive Harry's inclusion in your class as a positive one for him as well as the whole class. You are, however, concerned that his skills will not be strong enough for him to be as successful academically in 4th grade as he has been in the previous grades, because of the increased academic demands of the 4th grade. You are also concerned that his role as the school's official photographer will distract him from important academic work this year.

Your view is shared by the speech/language specialist, who has worked with Harry for 2 years. She finds Harry to be a hard worker, really concentrating on keeping his speech understandable. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult for him because his hearing loss is progressive and has increased over this past year. The speech/language specialist is particularly concerned that the language arts and social studies assignments will be very demanding for him during the coming school year.

Principal

You know Harry and his mother very well, but have never met his father. Harry has been included with hearing students at your site since 2nd grade. You see Harry as a positive influence on his peers. Last year, he was the unofficial school photographer and was so good at it that this year you asked him to be the official photographer. You want to encourage Harry to be as independent as possible and are concerned about him becoming too reliant on communicating through an aide. Harry has told you that he likes doing things on his own.

You try to attend the IEP meetings at your school, but it is difficult, especially at the beginning of the school year, when so many other matters require your attention. At the mother's request, you have arranged this less formal meeting with her and told the 4th grade teacher, the special education teacher, and the paraprofessional to come. Of course, if issues arise requiring a formal meeting of the committee or IEP team, you would not want this informal group making those decisions.