



## AT A GLANCE

- \* [Better Together](#)
- \* [Resources](#)
- \* [Websites](#)
- \* [Services](#)
- \* [Subscribe](#)

## Better Together

## August 2011 Newsletter

The Jack Johnson song, Better Together is the ring tone on my cell phone for my husband's calls. And this sentiment can apply to all of us working together in the new school year! What can you do—as a teacher, parent, student, administrator, or service provider—to be “better together”?

When I was a **teacher**, I always wanted to create a warm welcome to my new students and their families. A personal note on a post card mailed to each student was always a big hit—children love receiving mail. Our school hosted an Open House/Ice Cream Social a few days before school started. This was a fabulous way for staff and families to meet and greet. All students could meet their new teachers, visit their classrooms, pick out a desk, and put their school supplies away. This helped lessen the first-day jitters for everyone.

During the school year, I used a variety of methods to connect with my students' parents. I spoke individually to parents to learn more about their child—parents have rich information to share about their children that could help me do my job as a teacher. I also recognized the value in honoring parents' insights. I asked parents their opinions on the best ways to stay in touch throughout the year. At parent-teacher conference time, some families preferred a home visit instead of the traditional meeting at school, and student-led meetings were always well attended. I made sure in-class or school-wide student performances were videotaped so parents could view the event if they were unable to attend. These small efforts led to positive partnerships and great outcomes for all—we were better together!

Before IEP meetings, I gave parents a list all the great things the students *could* do, and encouraged families to bring their ideas to the meeting. During the meeting, I focused on the student's strengths and how I could teach new skills based on the child's interests and strengths. A sample [IEP Matrix](#) that can be used to track work on goals and accommodations is on my [website](#).

As a **parent** myself, preparing for the new school year for my son, Dylan, I asked teachers what units of study would be covered, and then visited bookstores and teacher supply stores for relevant materials that would interest Dylan and be appropriate for his reading level. These became classroom materials the teacher could use with Dylan and his classmates. I also reviewed Dylan's IEP regarding goals and the accommodations that would be needed. The [3 Rs of Advocacy](#) is a helpful [article](#) for parents, available [here](#).

**Students** are key players, no matter their age, and they can and should take a responsible role in their education. Younger students can assist parents in updating an engaging profile to share with staff. This profile can include a child's interests, strengths, and talents, as well as information about the family. Secondary students can help determine what organizational tools might be helpful. For example, a color-coded system for each subject might be helpful: a red spiral notebook for math class, red pocket folder for math homework, red book cover for math text, etc.

Throughout the year, students can be expected to share with their parents what they did at school and what assignments are due. Some of this information may be included in a parent-teacher

communication book, via copies of assignment sheets from the teacher, and/or by inputting info in a student's augmentative communication device. Dylan has used a Livescribe pen in college to record lectures. Whatever the method, let's ensure students have the materials and the supports so they can be more responsible.

A school's **principal** sets the tone for the school culture. How does your school show true appreciation for diversity? What support is given to all staff members so each and every student is given the opportunity and tools to succeed? Are there a variety of ways staff members and families are encouraged to work as a team? Is collaborative planning time—general education, special education, and specialists—a priority? Is anything shared in the Back-to-School newsletter or school registration packets about all students belonging? If so, how are those words translated into everyday actions?

The beginning of a new school year brings hopes for new successes, positive partnerships, and a realization that we all need to be on the same page. What will you do differently this year to be better together?

**Identify your vision:**      What does working together look like and feel like?

**Use your voice:**              Describe what needs to happen for positive partnerships.

**Work together:**              Develop a communication tool that both families and staff agree will be effective.

\*\*\*\*\*



## Resources

### ***We Are All in This Together***

A musical inspirational video. This could be used at a staff meeting, parent support group, with students...what other ideas do you have for its use?

Check out, **[What's On My Bookshelf](#)** on my website, **[click here](#)**.

On my **[Facebook](#)** page I have started a Techie Tuesday post. Every Tuesday I am answering questions about assistive technology, apps for smart phones and tablets.

Join my **[Facebook](#)** page, ask a question about technology, share info you have, join in the conversations about inclusive education!

## Websites



**Harvard Family  
Research Project**

This is one of my favorite sites for family-school partnerships. They offer webinars, publications, and other resources. **[Harvard Family Research Project](#)**.



As a parent and an educator, I bring 30+ years of experience and enthusiasm to create positive change for students, families, and educators! How may I support you? Click the links below to learn more.

[Parent Liaison  
Presentations  
Educational Consultant for Schools](#)



[Click here](#) to SIGN UP FOR MY FREE MONTHLY [E-NEWSLETTER!](#)

Let us share our **Visions** of possibilities and opportunities.

Honor the **Voices** of students, families, and educators,

Choose to work **Together,**

To achieve **Educational Success for All!**

Please let me know if you're interested in one of my presentations and/or customized consulting and coaching.

What we anticipate, determines what we find!

Charmaine Thaner

\*\*\*\*\*

#### STAY IN TOUCH



Join us on [facebook!](#) Keep up on the latest news and share your thoughts.

[charmaine@visionsandvoicestogether.com](mailto:charmaine@visionsandvoicestogether.com)

719.351.4971

[www.visionsandvoicestogether.com](http://www.visionsandvoicestogether.com)