

**Mistakes People Make - School Districts**  
**by Robert K. Crabtree, Esq.**

Anything a school system does that undermines parents' trust creates a climate that is costly in dollars, time, peace of mind, and the quality and success of services given to the child.

Here are the most significant school system mistakes, according to persons at every level of the system:

1. Refusing to let parents or parents' experts see programs, either within or outside of the school system. When school systems tightly restrict the parents' access to their own programs, the parents wonder what they are hiding and assume the worst; when they refuse to clear the way for parents to see an outside program, the parents will assume that the grass is greener over there;
2. Failing or refusing to communicate and actively coordinate with outside experts working with the child, such as the child's therapist or a tutor;
3. Ignoring reports from independent evaluators; failing to speak to those evaluators to clarify ambiguous information or recommendations; failing to add the evaluator's recommendations to the IEP when reasonable;
4. Failing to respond to parents in writing or at a meeting when a problem arises;
5. Taking a patronizing and/or antagonistic and/or insulting attitude toward parents; personalizing issues between school and parents; attempting to blame parents for their children's educational failures rather than looking for solutions (school system professionals need to treat parents with respect even if those parents are insulting and belligerent themselves);
6. Sweating the small stuff (e.g., spending twenty minutes at a team meeting arguing about whether the meeting can be tape-recorded);
7. Failing to observe procedural timelines and notice requirements (e.g., scheduling timely meetings, getting evaluations to the parents before the team meeting, notifying the parents who will attend the meeting, providing clear written explanations of parent rights);
8. Writing careless and sloppy IEPs. Parents, evaluators, and hearing officers all look first at the extent to which the written IEP reflects a thorough and logically coherent view of the child, the goals and objectives for that child's program, and a clear and understandable description of what will be provided, how, by whom, and when; and how the child's program will be evaluated;
9. Failing to implement an IEP and, worse, trying to cover up that failure;
10. Failing to modify an IEP that is not working and waiting, instead, for the program - and the child - to collapse;

11. Failing to provide additional or different services as a way to avoid having to make more restrictive (and expensive) outside placements;
12. Failing to call in expert consultants from outside the school system with good reputations among both school and parent communities who can help develop or monitor a program for a child with unusual needs;
13. Losing contact with families who have placed their child unilaterally. Some school systems forget or ignore their continuing responsibility to evaluate, review, and propose IEPs for children when they are attending outside placements at their parents' expense;
14. Botching the required procedures around suspension or expulsion of students with identified or suspected special education needs (e.g., failing to convene the team, failing to make a manifestation determination, failing to re-examine the IEP to see if services are appropriate and have actually been provided, failure to provide FAPE to suspended or expelled students with special education needs;
15. Failing to ensure that non-special education administrators - particularly building principals - are fully informed about and are following the required special education policies and procedures.