

Lack of Trust Between Families & Schools Driver

Meaning: when families do not trust that schools are acting transparently, respectfully, or in their child's best interest, disputes escalate quickly into complaints, mediation, or due process hearings.

Levers: Actions that build transparency, relationship quality, responsiveness, and shared understanding.

Lever	Description
Proactive, Ongoing Communication	Create regular, proactive communication loops — not just at IEP meetings. Examples: positive calls home, newsletters, classroom updates.
Rapid and Visible Follow-Through	When you promise something to a parent — even something small — do it quickly and visibly. Follow-through builds trust more than words.
Offer Relationship-Building Opportunities Outside of Conflict	Host informal gatherings (e.g., coffee chats, disability awareness fairs, family nights) where families can interact with educators in low-stakes environments.
Transparency About Processes and Decisions	Ensure parents understand the "why" behind decisions, document everything carefully, and use clear language (no jargon, no hiding information).
Train Staff on Empathy, Active Listening, and Repair After Conflict	Not just what to say legally, but how to listen deeply, validate feelings, and stay connected even during difficult conversations.
Create Visible, Accessible Problem-Solving Pathways	Publicize clear ways for parents to raise concerns early, and visibly celebrate when early conflict resolution works.
Consistency Across Schools and Teams	Parents trust systems that are predictable. Train staff to follow consistent practices and communication norms across schools
Use Facilitated IEP Meetings Strategically	Offer neutral facilitation for high-tension IEPs to show families you are willing to collaborate and problem-solve fairly.
Engage Parent Advisory Councils or Family Leadership Groups	Involve families in system improvement, not just individual cases — so they experience being partners, not outsiders.
Build Cultural Competence and Responsiveness	Analyze complaints, mediation requests, hearing data, and staffing data to focus limited resources where risk is highest (rather than spreading them too thinly).

