

CADRE's 10th NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON IDEA DISPUTE RESOLUTION

October 21-23, 2025 | conference.cadeworks.org | Portland, OR

MAPPING
THE
FUTURE



REDISCOVERING
OUR
PURPOSE

OCT 21-23, 2025

PRESENTED BY



Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education



CADRE

the center for appropriate dispute
resolution in special education

20
25

Acknowledgements



Symposium Objectives

- **Examine collaborative dispute prevention and conflict management strategies** within the expanding continuum of dispute resolution practices in special education and early intervention.
- **Learn about innovations, initiatives, and current research** in the field of dispute resolution.
- **Receive information, resources, and guidance** related to the design, implementation, and improvement of dispute resolution processes and systems.
- **Enhance communities of practice and connect** dispute resolution coordinators, practitioners, educators, and parent leaders with each other and nationally renowned experts in the field.
- **Acquire advanced conflict management skills and knowledge** critical to the effective resolution of disputes.

CADRE Staff

Dr. Melanie Reese, Project Director

Noëlla Bernal, Associate Director and Internal Evaluator

Kelly Rauscher, Learning and Development Specialist

Aimee Walsh, CEO, Direction Service

Amanda Rinehart, Project Associate

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Myriam Alizo, NJ Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)

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Sharon Walsh, Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA)

Tawara Goode, Georgetown University

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Young Seh Bae, Community Inclusion & Development Alliance (CIDA)

Project Officer

Carmen M. Sánchez, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education

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FACT Parent Center

Family Network on Disabilities

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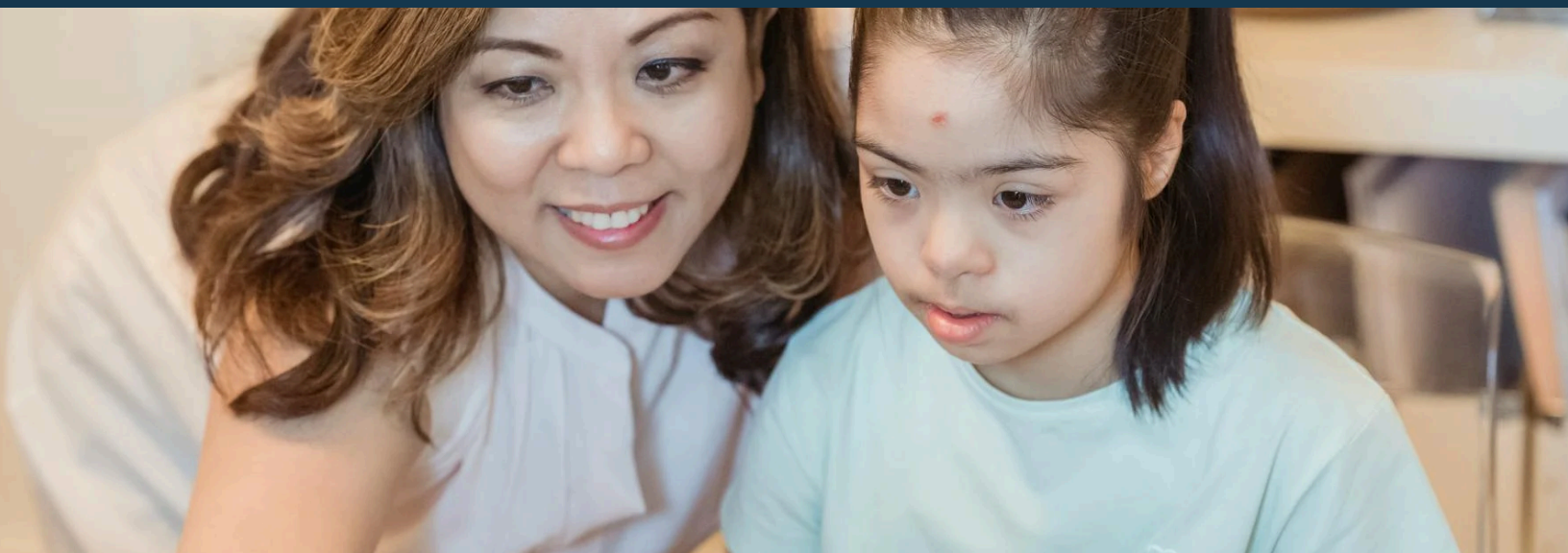
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Sponsors



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21 - THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2025



MONDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2025



PRE-SYMPOSIUM

4:30 - 7:00 PM Registration

Multnomah Foyer



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025

DAY 1 MORNING AGENDA

7:30 AM - 5:00 PM Registration

Multnomah Foyer

7:30 AM - 5:00 PM Exhibit Space/Coffee Connections

Lloyd Center Pre-function

8:00 AM - 9:15 AM Breakfast & Opening Plenary

Multnomah/Holladay

Welcome from CADRE: Melanie Reese, Director

Welcome from OSEP: Carmen Sánchez

9:30 AM - 12:10 PM Morning Breakout Sessions

Advanced Mediation Techniques: Bridging the Gap Between Parents and School Districts Myrto Flessas, Rebecca Stone

Coaching Tips for Complaint Investigators: Early Investigation Heidi Kleinman, Monica Drvota

Mapping Opportunities to Improve LEA Early Dispute Resolution Capacity Dr. Angie Balsley

Navigating IDEA Mediation for Parent Centers Jason Harper

Seeing a Better Future: Conflict Coaching in your Special Education Dispute Resolution Work (Part 1) Dr. Tricia Jones, Dr. Timothy Hedeon

Teaching the IEP Process: Bridging Legal Knowledge and Practice for Conflict Prevention Tracy Gerswhin, Ph.D., Tena Green

The Best Conflict Resolution: Avoidance Andrew Feinstein, Shirley Klein, Scott McCarthy





TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025

12:25 - 1:45 PM Lunch & Plenary



Multnomah/Holladay

Keynote Address

Joseph La Belle & Richard La Belle

2:00 PM - 5:00 PM Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Coaching Tips for Complaint Investigators: Structuring and Writing Findings of Facts and Conclusions Heidi Kleinman, Monica Drvota

Conflict Coaching as Mediation or IEP Meeting Support: Preparing Parties to Optimize Dr. Tricia Jones, Dr. Timothy Hedeon

Creating the Conditions for Collaborative IEP and IFSP Meetings Theresa Nicholls

Facilitating Group Conflict: Tools for IDEA Professionals Randall Reese, M.S. CPM

The IEP for Success Companion Guide for Educators: Practical Tools for Connection and Belonging Heather Difide, Noreen Lippincott, Hinda Nadif, Jennifer Yales, Stacy Alvey

Understanding Decision Making Across Cultures to Improve Relationships and Build Collaboration Dr. Sukhsimranjit Singh

What Does the Child Really Need? Presenting an Integrated Model of Service Edward Feinberg, Ph.D., Rene Averitt-Sanzone, Jonathan Beyer, Deborah Badawi, M.D.



DAY 1 AFTERNOON AGENDA

DAY 1 AGENDA (CONTINUED)



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025

MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 9:30 AM - 12:10 PM

Advanced Mediation Techniques: Bridging the Gap Between Parents and School Districts

Myrto Flessas, Rebecca Stone, Leslie Bock, Beth Ross

Like a duck paddling on a blustery lake, Special Education Mediators juggle complex dynamics: they navigate seen and unseen currents; tend to obstacles immediately in front of them and in the distance; and paddle and pivot to keep moving forward...all while maintaining a graceful and calm presence. Mediators and ducks alike are responsive to the situations and conditions they find themselves in.

This interactive, skill-building workshop, led by experienced mediators, provides advanced techniques for mediators seeking to enhance their practice and foster collaboration between parents and schools. Participants will explore challenges in special education mediation, such as bridging knowledge gaps, balancing power dynamics, managing anger, and overcoming impasses. Through a mix of lecture, role-play, group discussions, and illustrative metaphors, this workshop equips mediators with actionable skills. Attendees will leave with a deeper understanding of these challenges and the tools to navigate the complexities of special education mediation effectively.

Coaching Tips for Complaint Investigators: Early Investigation

Heidi Kleinman, Monica Drvota

In this two-part workshop (you may choose to attend one or both sections) we will be working through all parts of the formal written SEA complaint process. However, this is not the typical "sit and get" workshop. Please come prepared with items you want to work through amongst other SEA complaint investigators.

Session 1: Coaching Tips for Complaint Investigators- Early Investigation

Our first session is designed to review what the process is for your SEA when you receive a complaint. Who and how does your SEA determine if a complaint is sufficient? What does initial contact with parties look like in your state? Do you contact parties via email, telephone or mail? How do you get documentation?

The intent of this session is for you to bring something that you would like to run smoother so that there is less stress around meeting the 60-day timeline, and to make sure you get the right documentation so that you can effectively investigate a complaint. While we will offer tips, we will also look for participants to add their successful procedures to the discussion.

Mapping Opportunities to Improve LEA Early Dispute Resolution Capacity

Dr. Angie Balsley

Discover opportunities to build district capacity to prevent disputes and resolve conflicts early. This session will share findings from a national study commissioned by CADRE that explored the early dispute resolution practices and needs of hundreds of school districts. Participants will gain knowledge of innovative strategies and lessons learned from their colleagues across the country. The session will also introduce a practical district self-assessment tool designed by CADRE to help local teams reflect on and strengthen their collaborative and early dispute resolution practices. Attendees will explore how to apply the assessment to guide system improvements, inform professional development, and align efforts across teams. Walk away with actionable ideas and renewed energy to build capacity for early resolution within your local context, as well as opportunities for collaboration between LEAs, SEAs, Parent Centers and other partners.





TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025

MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 9:30 AM - 12:10 PM

Navigating IDEA Mediation for Parent Centers

Jason Harper

This interactive training is designed to equip Parent Center staff with the knowledge and tools necessary to effectively support and coach families through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mediation process. This workshop will provide a comprehensive overview of the mediation process, helping Parent Center professionals guide families in making informed decisions and advocating constructively.

Participants will explore the fundamental elements that define successful mediation, including the roles of the mediator, the rights of the parties involved, and the structure of a typical mediation session. The training will also address common misunderstandings and clarify which types of issues are appropriate—or not appropriate—for mediation under IDEA.

In addition to procedural guidance, the session will focus on the human side of mediation, offering strategies for managing the emotional dynamics that often accompany disputes in special education. Participants will learn how to help parents remain focused, communicate effectively, and use relevant data and documentation to support their case.

Teaching the IEP Process: Bridging Legal Knowledge and Practice for Conflict Prevention

Tracy Gerswhin, Ph.D., Tena Green

This workshop introduces a comprehensive, newly developed IEP training curriculum designed to equip educators and families with the tools to navigate the IEP process effectively. Rooted in conflict prevention strategies, this curriculum bridges the gap between the legal foundations of IEPs and their practical application, fostering collaborative and equitable outcomes. Participants will explore strategies for improving communication, building trust, and resolving potential disputes before they escalate.

Participants will leave with actionable insights and resources to implement proactive, student-centered IEP practices that prioritize meaningful family engagement and prevent misunderstandings. The session includes interactive components to deepen understanding and build skills for effective IEP facilitation.

Seeing a Better Future: Conflict Coaching in your Special Education Dispute Resolution Work (Part 1)

Dr. Tricia Jones, Dr. Timothy Hedeem

In these challenging times we all benefit from processes that help us answer the key questions of WHY, WHAT and HOW we handle conflicts to better support children and adults with special needs. This highly interactive session introduces conflict coaching — a one-on-one ADR process used in government, community, and private sector organizations throughout the globe for the last 20 years and recently added as an ADR tool in special education dispute resolution. Conflict coaching helps a parent, educator, or other consider the nature of the conflict and why issues in the conflict matter so much — why they drive the conflict. Conflict coaching also empowers someone to see a different future — to create and express a vision of what they want to be living through if the conflict is managed as they hope. And conflict coaching provides the very valuable opportunity to build skills to enact the outcomes desired. Recently, conflict coaching has been introduced in special education dispute resolution and CADRE is helping support those efforts. Participants will be introduced to the conflict coaching process and how conflict coaching can support other processes. Focusing on the power of narrative, special attention will be given to how conflict coaching helps one see a better way forward, build an action plan and engage in skills enhancement to get there.

The Best Conflict Resolution: Avoidance

Andrew Feinstein, Shirley Klein, Scott McCarthy

The presenters posit that a substantial portion of special education disputes are the result of weak interpersonal relationships between district staff and parents. Approaches designed to build relationships and develop effective communication skills and perspective taking, specifically those based in the theoretical foundations of Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), can substantially reduce conflicts in the special education process.





TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: 12:30 PM - 1:50 PM

Transforming Conversations: AI as a Partner in Resolution



Multnomah/Holladay



Joseph La Belle

Family Network on Disabilities

Joe La Belle is a pioneering figure at the intersection of AI and education, serving as the Director of Programs Impact at Family Network on Disabilities. In Florida, he oversees four key programs and lends his expertise to OSEP-funded Technical Assistance centers, enhancing support for students with disabilities through technology. Notably, Joe has played a crucial role in advocating for AI's role in education, engaging with the Secretary of Education, presenting to the US Department of Education staff, and sharing insights nationwide. His efforts focus on how AI can personalize learning and increase accessibility, making him a respected voice in the field.



Richard La Belle, Esq.

Family Network on Disabilities

Richard La Belle is the CEO of Family Network on Disabilities, which has served persons with disabilities and their families throughout Florida and the U.S. for over 35 years. Prior to becoming CEO in 2005, Mr. La Belle practiced law for nearly 20 years, concentrating in the areas of disability law, including special needs trusts. Mr. La Belle and his wife are the parents of four grown children, including those who have disabilities.

He has long been active in promoting the rights and welfare of persons with disabilities. Some recent examples include:

- In 2008, he was appointed by Governor Charlie Crist to the Governor's Task Force on Autism Spectrum Disorders (until 2011)
- In 2009, Mr. La Belle was honored by being named an "Everyday Hero" by Bay News 9
- In 2013, he was appointed by the Commissioner of Education to the State Advisory Committee for the Education of Exceptional Children (SAC), on which he continues to serve
- In 2017, he was named to the Pinellas County, Florida Disability Advisory Council

Mr. La Belle received his law degree from Florida State University. He was awarded a Master of Science degree from the London School of Economics in London, England. Mr. La Belle received a B.A., with a major in political science, from Florida State University.



TUESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2025

AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Coaching Tips for Complaint Investigators: Structuring and Writing Findings of Facts and Conclusions

Heidi Kleinman, Monica Drvota

In this two-part workshop (you may choose to attend one or both sections) we will be working through all parts of the formal written SEA complaint process. However, this is not the typical “sit and get” workshop. Please come prepared with items you want to work through amongst other SEA complaint investigators.

This session gets into the structure and content of complaint reports. Do you want to restructure your reports, but you aren’t sure where to start? Do you need to work on condensing facts or are you unsure of what should or should not be included in a report? Do you struggle with the “findings/ determination” part of your report? This is your opportunity to get an insight into what other states are doing and lessons they may have learned over the years. Again, we will share tips and things we have found helpful during our time as investigators, but we will rely on members in this workshop to share their successes. This is not passive workshop! We will be working through these items and more as a group.

Conflict Coaching as Mediation or IEP Meeting Support: Preparing Parties to Optimize ADR Processes (Part 2)

Dr. Tricia Jones, Dr. Timothy Hedeon

How do you get to Carnegie Hall? You already know the answer! Success in any activity is as much about preparation as it is about performance. Parties to special education processes like mediation or IEP meetings want to succeed but often aren't well-prepared to insure that will happen. Conflict coaching has proven an excellent tool for increasing a party's understanding of the mediation/IEP process and a way to optimize their participation in that process. This session invites participants to appreciate how conflict coaching increases a party's understanding of an upcoming ADR process. Using case study scenarios and pair practice, participants will experience how conflict coaching provides hands-on support for the party to plan and practice their presentation of their situation, to better understand the other's experience, and to negotiate a desired future. This session will also focus on how mediators and IEP facilitators can expand their already impressive skills by including conflict coaching techniques in their caucusing, joint sessions, or group facilitation. Small group discussions will provide sharing of how ADR specialists are already using conflict coaching in these ways and what their experiences have been.

Creating the Conditions for Collaborative IEP and IFSP Meetings

Theresa Nicholls

For many families, IEP/IFSP meetings are a critical yet stressful part of their child’s educational journey. Parents often enter these meetings feeling anxious, overwhelmed, and uncertain about how their voices will be heard, or whether their child's needs will be met. For educators and service providers, there may also be a sense of pressure to meet compliance requirements, which can sometimes lead to a one-sided, transactional process rather than a collaborative, child-centered discussion.

However, when IEP/IFSP meetings are designed to be truly collaborative, they can become an empowering experience for everyone involved. This session focuses on how to create the right conditions for effective, productive, and genuinely collaborative IEP/IFSP meetings that foster trust, transparency, and partnership. Participants will learn how to transform IEP/IFSP meetings from stressful encounters into opportunities for teamwork, where all voices—especially the voices of families—are valued.





AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Facilitating Group Conflict: Tools for IDEA Professionals

Randall Reese, M.S., C.P.M.

This interactive workshop equips IDEA professionals—including educators, administrators, and parents—with practical strategies for navigating and facilitating group conflict. Participants will explore the dynamics of multi-party conflict, learn to manage differing perspectives, and practice tools for rebuilding trust and encouraging a collaborative, goal-centered process. With a focus on real-world applications, the session includes role-play, scenario analysis, and structured reflection, helping participants develop the confidence and skills to facilitate challenging group conversations effectively and constructively.

Understanding Decision Making Across Cultures to Improve Relationships and Build Collaboration

Dr. Sukhsimranjit Singh

Goals for this session include:

- Understand the art and science of decision making
- Understand how decision making evolves across cultures
- Empathize with others decision making while understanding your own decision making
- Working towards a plan to reach a collaborative decision making

The IEP for Success Companion Guide for Educators: Practical Tools for Connection and Belonging

Heather DiFede, Noreen Lippincott, Hinda Nadif, Jennifer Yales, Stacy Alvey

Join the High-Quality IEPs Projects for an engaging introduction to the IEP for Success Companion Guide for educators. This guide helps to lay the foundation for prevention strategies in the dispute resolution continuum. This session offers a comprehensive walkthrough of the guide, providing practical tools and strategies for creating student-centered IEPs that prioritize connection, belonging, and meaningful participation. Leave with actionable insights and techniques to ensure every student's voice is at the heart of their IEP journey, fostering engagement, autonomy, and success. Whether you're an educator, administrator, or advocate, this session will equip you with essential skills to transform the IEP process.

What Does the Child Really Need? Presenting an Integrated Model of Service

Edward Feinberg, Ph.D., Rene Averitt-Sanzone, Jonathan Beyer, Deborah Badawi, M.D.

Families of children with developmental disabilities may seek the opinions of medically-based and school-based programs. Parents frequently receive inconsistent and even contradictory recommendations. While professionals in these settings may use similar evaluation instruments, medically-based providers typically recommend more intensive services than school-based staff. These differences can be a source of confusion for parents and can create conflict in the development of the IFSP or IEP. This presentation proposes a model of service that integrates the perspectives of medically and educationally based staff in formulating recommendations from these two sectors. The vital role of family members will be a focus of discussion. Real-life scenarios will be the basis for mock IFSP and IEP deliberations.





WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025



DAY 2 MORNING AGENDA

7:00 AM - 5:00 PM Exhibit Space/Coffee Connections

Lloyd Center Pre-function

7:30 AM - 5:00 PM Registration

Multnomah Foyer

8:30 AM - 9:45 AM Breakfast & Plenary

Multnomah/Holladay

Keynote Address

Dr. Sukhsimranjit Singh

10:00 AM - 11:30 AM Morning Breakout Sessions

Building Capacity for Families Through PEATC's Dispute Resolution Toolkits: Equitable, Early, and Effective Solutions Love Kingsbury

Implementing a State Corrective Action Specialist Sandra Ramsey, Latisha Wooford

Mastering High-Stakes Facilitation in Difficult Dynamics: Achieving Team Goals Myrto Flessas, Rebecca Comiskey

Parents and Schools: Being Present for the Journey Marc Purchin, Michele Williers

Parents, Advocates, & Schools: A Collaborative Approach Crystal Sanford

Pathways to Partnership: Cultivating Communities of Practice in Alternative Dispute Resolution Aubrie Fulk, Stacy Alvey, Peter Aguirre, Michelle Kinner

What Michigan Learned While Building a Successful Informal and Early Special Education Dispute Resolution System Cheryl Levine, Bernard Dempsey, Beth Kohler, Laura Zangara





WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025

DAY 2 AFTERNOON AGENDA

11:45 AM - 1:00 PM Lunch & Afternoon Plenary

Multnomah/Holladay

Keys to Access Award & Keynote Address: Nina Meierding, Esq.
Presented By: Dr. Melanie Reese

1:15 PM - 2:45 PM Early Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Addressing Special Education Disputes: A Systems-Based Approach to Collaborative Conflict Resolution Theresa Nicholls, Jana Rosborough

The Past, Present, and Future of Disability Advocacy Diana Cruz

Building the Bridge: Creating a Facilitated IEP Culture Carrie McCulloch

Cultural and Linguistic Considerations for Family Engagement within Nonprofit Organizations Brigitte Tavarez

Empowering Student Voice in the IEP Meeting Cassie Velasquez, Robin O'Shea

Generating Interest to Utilize the ADR Process Erik Lopez, Ricardo Toland

Proposed Resolutions: Navigating Alternative Dispute Resolution Methods
Crista Grimwood

SPARcing Conversations: Strategies for Equitable Dispute Resolution
Joy Jordan, Sarah Marshall





DAY 2 AFTERNOON AGENDA

3:15 PM - 4:45 PM Late Afternoon Breakout Sessions

Breaking Barriers: Strengthening Family Engagement and Advocacy in Special Education Britania Vazquez-Elorza, Heather Olivier, Diana Cruz

Building Family-Professional Partnerships Using the Sunshine Model: The PEPTI Project Natalie Holdren, Sarah Hughes Thompson

Despite the Best Intentions...Unraveling the Mess: Using Strategic Questions to Address Challenges Jana Rosborough, Kevin Davis

Even the Playing Field for All Families: Implementation of IEP Facilitation with Fidelity Cassie Velasquez, Robin O'Shea, Carla Cumblad, Patti Buchmiller

Name It to Tame It: Overcoming Implicit Bias in Special Education Jason A. Harper

The Future of IDEA Complaint Investigation Claudette Rushing, J.D., Natalie Campbell

The Wisdom of the Room: Peer Learning and Support for Mediators & Facilitators Nina Meierding, MS, JD

5:15 PM - 7:00 PM Reception Sponsored by Key2Ed



Pacific Northwest Ballroom





WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: 8:30 AM - 9:45 AM

Investing in Trust through Reflection and Communication

Dr. Sukhsimranjit Singh



Multnomah/Holladay

Sukhsimranjit Singh is mediator and arbitrator with JAMS and on the board of Weinstein International Foundation. A professor of dispute resolution for two decades, Dr. Singh is an author, speaker and a leader in the field of dispute resolution, and has been recognized for his global outreach efforts, world-class teachings, and for his work in dispute resolution.

His focus is on utilizing modern theories, science, and technology to devise creative solutions for global disputes, with a focus on cross-cultural conflicts.

Dr. Singh is a successful international mediator and has resolved disputes in countries throughout the world—including in states across the United States, Brazil, Canada, India, Japan and New Zealand, to name a few. He currently serves as the mediator for Willamette University's Atkinson Graduate School of Management, where he identifies and resolves organizational conflicts, and for the City of Beverly Hills, where he was recently nominated for the city's annual Peace Award.

He has taught dispute resolution courses at various law schools across the United States and has lectured in more than 30 states across the United States, as well in Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Denmark, Egypt, France, India, Japan, Kenya, Korea, New Zealand, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Spain, U.A.E, and United Kingdom. He has delivered TEDx Talks on dispute resolution in relationships, titled "Negotiating for Love," in 2015 and on professional identity titled "Made in India," in 2018.

Recipient of the Cloke-Milen Peacemaker award and the 100th Brazilian Gold Medal Award, Professor Singh serves as an Honorary Fellow at the International Academy of Mediators (IAM), and as an honorary professor of law at National Law University Delhi, and at Amity Law School, Gwalior. He can be reached at his website, www.singhadr.com.





WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025

MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

Implementing a State Corrective Action Specialist

Sandra Ramsey, Latisha Wooford

In 2023, the Virginia Department of Education established a Corrective Action Plan Specialist position to provide highly complex special education technical assistance to LEAs, provide consultation to LEA personnel and parents, VDOE staff, and other agencies and groups on state and federal laws and regulations governing special education. The Corrective Action Specialist is responsible for reviewing, assisting to create, and maintaining documentation of all corrective action and implementation plans for the state's LEAs. This presentation will describe the implementation of the Corrective Action Specialist position and provide insight into how a SEA may utilize comparable positions.

Building Capacity for Families Through PEATC's Dispute Resolution Toolkits: Equitable, Early, and Effective Solutions

Love Kingsbury

This interactive session will focus on empowering families, educators, and dispute resolution practitioners with the skills and tools to navigate the special education dispute resolution process. Utilizing the Mediation, State Complaint, Due Process, and Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) Toolkits developed by the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC), this presentation will explore practical, equitable, and early resolution strategies that strengthen relationships and enhance the capacity of all stakeholders. Participants will engage in hands-on activities that illustrate how these toolkits can be implemented to promote effective dispute prevention and resolution, with a focus on understanding and respecting diverse family needs. By showcasing real-life scenarios and providing detailed guidance, this session will highlight innovative practices that support collaborative, solutions-oriented approaches. Special emphasis will be placed on the importance of early intervention in resolving disputes, while fostering trust and communication between families and school systems.

Mastering High-Stakes Facilitation in Difficult Dynamics: Achieving Team Goals

Myrto Flessas, Rebecca Comiskey

This program is designed to equip professionals with advanced facilitation skills to navigate high-stakes situations and emotionally charged dynamics. Participants will learn to foster effective communication, encouraging clear and constructive dialogue even when relationships are strained. The course emphasizes techniques to efficiently guide teams in achieving their meeting agendas and business within the allotted time, overcoming conflicts and challenges. Participants will also develop strategies to set a collaborative tone and create a roadmap for future communication, fostering stronger, more effective interactions. Additionally, the program will cover how to adapt facilitation methods for both in-person and virtual settings, ensuring engagement and productivity in any meeting environment. Through a combination of practical exercises and expert guidance, attendees will gain the tools to manage difficult dynamics and lead teams toward success in any scenario.





WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025



MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 10:00 AM - 11:30 AM

Parents and Schools: Being Present for the Journey

Marc Purchin, Michele Williers

Building collaborative and productive relationships among parents, schools, and agencies is essential for supporting meaningful student participation and fostering positive post-secondary outcomes. Authentic interagency collaboration plays a pivotal role in ensuring that partnerships are comprehensive, coordinated, and focused on the unique needs of each student. Building collaborative and productive relationships that provide genuine support to students is easier said than done. But it doesn't have to be so hard. This interactive and fast paced session focuses on the importance of building and maintaining strong parent-school partnerships. All stakeholders need to fully commit to work together in collaboration to help build those positive, trusting and productive relationships which lead to positive and productive outcomes. Using applied improvisation, participants will participate in hands-on exercises that teach team building, conflict resolution, and negotiation strategies. Additionally, they will learn valuable new skills, activities and techniques that can be used in future meetings and trainings.

Parents, Advocates, & Schools: A Collaborative Approach

Crystal Sanford

The dynamic between parents, advocates, and schools is one that at times leaves "room for improvement." How did we get here? What can we do to improve this relationship? Through this session, participants will discover key patterns and collaborative strategies that can improve the parent-advocate-school connection...and thereby facilitate student progress and success.

Pathways to Partnership: Cultivating Communities of Practice in Alternative Dispute Resolution

Aubrie Fulk, Stacy Alvey, Peter Aguirre, Michelle Kinner

This presentation explores the concept of Communities of Practice (CoP) in the field of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), highlighting how these collaborative networks can serve as pathways to partnership among practitioners, families/parent groups, educators, and state partners. It will delve into the benefits of shared knowledge, best practices, and mutual support within ADR communities, fostering innovation and improving outcomes in conflict resolution. Attendees will gain insights into how cultivating these communities can enhance professional development, strengthen partnerships, and drive more effective and sustainable dispute resolution practices.

What Michigan Learned While Building a Successful Informal and Early Special Education Dispute Resolution System

Cheryl Levine, Bernard Dempsey, Beth Kohler, Laura Zangara

This program is designed to equip professionals with advanced facilitation skills to navigate high-stakes situations and emotionally charged dynamics. Participants will learn to foster effective communication, encouraging clear and constructive dialogue even when relationships are strained. The course emphasizes techniques to efficiently guide teams in achieving their meeting agendas and business within the allotted time, overcoming conflicts and challenges. Participants will also develop strategies to set a collaborative tone and create a roadmap for future communication, fostering stronger, more effective interactions. Additionally, the program will cover how to adapt facilitation methods for both in-person and virtual settings, ensuring engagement and productivity in any meeting environment. Through a combination of practical exercises and expert guidance, attendees will gain the tools to manage difficult dynamics and lead teams toward success in any scenario.



WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025

KEYNOTE ADDRESS & KEYS TO ACCESS AWARD PRESENTATION: 11:45 AM - 1:00 PM

Moving Forward: How to Learn From Our Experiences

Nina Meierding, MS., J.D.



Multnomah/Holladay

Nina Meierding, a full-time professional in the conflict resolution field for almost 40 years, has mediated over 4,000 disputes. She has conducted trainings all over the world and has consulted and trained many groups in almost all 50 states in a variety of professional settings in the areas of conflict resolution, cross cultural issues, and management, leadership and negotiation skills.



Nina has been committed to children with special needs for almost 50 years. She received her M.S in Education in 1977 and taught special education students in inner city Los Angeles, Ventura and Oxnard, California. She went to law school at night and in 1984 began representing children and parents. Quickly realizing the promise of mediation, she started her own private practice in 1986. In addition, she became a special education mediator in the 1990s for the California State Department of Education.

From 2006 – 2017 she was the mediation partner and trainer for the Wisconsin Special Education System (WSEMS). For over 30 years she has trained school district administrators, teachers, and parents in multiple states in conflict resolution and communication skills and has taught and consulted with numerous special education mediator panels. She is passionately committed to working with underserved communities and broadening the understanding and impact of cross-cultural issues.

Nina taught at the Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution at Pepperdine University School of Law for over 30 years and Southern Methodist University for over 18 years. She has been an instructor at the National Judicial College and the California Judicial College and is a guest lecturer at many universities and law schools. She was a founding member and President of the Board of Directors of the Ventura Center for Dispute Settlement, the first non-profit community mediation center in Ventura County, California.

She has served on many state and national conflict resolution boards as well as on the Council for Distinguished Advisors at Pepperdine University and the Advisory Board at Southern Methodist University. She received the Peacemaker Award in 1992 from the Southern California Mediation Association, the Distinguished Mediator Award from the Association of Conflict Resolution in 2005, the Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017 from the American College of Civil Trial Mediators, the Distinguish Neutral Award from the National Academy of Distinguished Neutrals in 2021, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Academy of Professional Family Mediators in 2022. An honorary fellow of the International Academy of Mediators, she has been profiled in the American Bar Association Dispute Resolution Magazine.



EARLY AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 1:15 PM - 2:45 PM

Addressing Special Education Disputes: A Systems-Based Approach to Collaborative Conflict Resolution

Theresa Nicholls, Jana Rosborough

In 2017, the Richland School District faced significant challenges characterized by three distinct divisions among parents, administration, and staff. These divisions led to numerous community complaints, including 21 filed by the local labor union, multiple due process hearings, and contentious team meetings and community forums. The resulting turmoil contributed to high turnover across all levels, unmet student service needs, and widespread distrust within the district.

To address these issues, the district engaged an external agency in 2018 to conduct a comprehensive audit of its special education department. The audit identified 18 actionable recommendations for improvement. Since then, the district, in collaboration with a dedicated Special Education Task Force, has made measurable progress in implementing these recommendations and fostering positive change.

Cultural and Linguistic Considerations for Family Engagement within Nonprofit Organizations

Brigette Tavaréz

In our diverse society, cultural and linguistic considerations play a pivotal role in the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations serving families of children and young adults with disabilities. This 90-minute workshop aims to deepen parent centers to understand how cultural backgrounds and language preferences impact service delivery and family engagement. Also to analyze internal values within organizations with the goal to identify barriers and develop strategies that foster inclusion and support to underserved families. We will explore the impact of cultural taboos that may influence families' perceptions of disability and available services. The participants will be encouraged to share examples from their own work, fostering a rich dialogue about the cultural nuances that shape family experiences.

The Past, Present, and Future of Disability Advocacy

Diana Cruz

Over nearly five decades, special education advocacy has evolved alongside major social and political shifts. This interactive session invites participants to explore how advocacy has shaped the past, defines our present, and will determine the future of special education systems. Through facilitated discussion and reflection, participants will examine pivotal federal events—from landmark legislation and court rulings to recent structural shifts—and consider their implications for family engagement, dispute resolution, and advocacy.

Building the Bridge: Creating a Facilitated IEP Culture

Carrie McCulloch

Building a strong IEP requires collaboration from all sides, just like a bridge needs two sides to be constructed. What can teams do to strengthen the partnership between schools and families to ensure more effective meetings? How can teams build trust and cultivate a relationship that benefits everyone? This presentation will explore a range of tools and strategies designed to enhance future IEP meetings and foster a collaborative culture that supports student success.





EARLY AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 1:15 PM - 2:45 PM

Empowering Student Voice in the IEP Meeting

Cassie Velasquez, Robin O'Shea

Are we giving our student's the life skill of advocating for themselves once they leave our educational organizations? Students who feel empowered are more motivated and likely to achieve in post-secondary outcomes. We will provide case studies, student, parent, and teacher interviews and anecdotal evidence of the power of the student voice in their own meeting. Examples of case-manager and student meeting preparation and post meeting follow up will be presented. Implications of how this practice can mitigate disputes and lead to resolution will be discussed.

Proposed Resolutions: Navigating Alternative Dispute Resolution Methods

Crista Grimwood

This presentation will focus on the advantages and components of what the state of Kansas calls a Proposed Resolution. Proposed resolutions can be a win/win for both the school district and the complainant. During the presentation, the audience will learn the components of an accepted proposed resolution, how to monitor, and the advantages for both the family and the school on electing this remedy to settle a special education dispute.

Generating Interest to Utilize the ADR Process

Erik Lopez, Ricardo Toland

Participants will gain insight into how a large urban school district, Los Angeles Unified School District, has generated interest for utilization of the ADR process from school teams, regional staff, parents, community members, and other stakeholder groups. Tips, tools, and systems created to support the ADR process will be shared to help participants develop, enhance and/ or augment their ADR practices, including communication, collaboration, and consultation, to proactively address and effectively resolve Individualized Education Program (IEP) disagreements. Participants will be provided examples of how creating open communication and dialogue can innovate and elevate the IEP team meeting process, to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. This presentation will share how the LAUSD developed and offered trainings for parents, community members, and other stakeholders. It will provide an in-depth look into the development of professional development and topics related to the ADR process to support the use of the ADR process.

SPARcing Conversations: Strategies for Equitable Dispute Resolution

Joy Jordan, Sarah Marshall

Two practitioners from Delaware's special education mediation and facilitation program, SPARC, will offer practical tools to "SPARcing" meaningful conversations between educators and families. The presenters will highlight valuable skills to prevent and reduce conflicts. Participants will learn how to foster equity and empathy in special education dispute resolution by acknowledging and developing cultural competency, effective communication skills, and mental health awareness.





WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025

LATE AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 3:15 PM - 4:45 PM

Breaking Barriers: Strengthening Family Engagement and Advocacy in Special Education

Britania Vazquez-Elorza, Heather Olivier, Diana Cruz

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families of students with disabilities often face barriers that limit their meaningful participation in special education processes. This session will explore key findings from recent research on the challenges many CLD families encounter as they navigate educational systems and strategies to address their unique needs. Using the experiences from FACT Oregon and their parent leadership program, Activating Your Advocacy (AYA), this session will highlight lessons learned and program strategies that effectively support CLD families. Presenters will share impactful quotes and first-hand experiences that underscore the program's effectiveness. The session will conclude with an interactive Q&A, fostering discussion on actionable strategies for improving CLD family engagement in special education processes.

Building Family-Professional Partnerships Using the Sunshine Model: The PEPTI Project

Natalie Holdren, Sarah Hughes Thompson

This session will share about PEPTI, an OSEP-funded project led by the Napa County Office of Education under the direction of the California Department of Education and in partnership with the Department of Developmental Services. One of the goals of the project is to promote culturally responsive, successful family transition experiences using the Sunshine Model (Haines, et al., 2017), a framework for actualizing trusting family-professional partnerships. We will share how we developed professional development webinars, community of practice sessions, and an interactive module for Family Resource Center personnel based on the Sunshine Model. We will also share the core features of the model and examples of ways this work can be duplicated. Participants will engage in discussion to identify: 1) specific ways they already nurture trusting family partnerships aligned to the model, 2) opportunities for increasing family partnership in their work, and 3) actionable next steps for improving their practices.





LATE AFTERNOON BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 3:15 PM - 4:45 PM

Despite the Best Intentions...Unraveling the Mess: Using Strategic Questions to Address Challenges

Jana Rosborough, Kevin Davis

Despite the best efforts of educators, achieving success in special education can often feel elusive. Systemic challenges—rooted in gaps in communication and compliance—can undermine even the most well-intentioned improvement. This interactive session will explore how state, district, and local personnel can use strategic questioning to identify and address the root causes of these barriers, with a particular focus on enhancing communication and fostering adaptive skills across all levels of the system. By approaching dispute resolution through a strategic lens, participants will uncover the complex, the complicated, and the simple barriers that hinder progress and discover actionable solutions to create more effective, sustainable systems. Shifting from a "hero" model to a collaborative, team-based approach, attendees will gain tools to not only ask the "right" question and develop concrete actions to improve collaboration, compliance, and communication.

The Future of IDEA Complaint Investigation

Claudette Rushing, J.D., Katharine Ford, Natalie Campbell

The presenters have worked together to serve remote and diverse clients for IDEA complaint investigations. They will discuss their tips, tricks, tools and practices that help ensure regulatory compliance and stakeholder satisfaction when investigations must be conducted online or may not be done in person.

The Wisdom of the Room: Peer Learning and Support for Mediators & Facilitators

Nina Meirerding, MS, JD

This session creates space for mediators and facilitators to come together—sharing experiences, exploring strategies for handling difficult conversations, and building skills through the collective wisdom of the group. Participants will both give and receive feedback, drawing on one another's perspectives as well as guided input from the facilitator. Together, we'll map approaches for navigating challenging dynamics and strengthen our toolkit for practice. This is an interactive, reflective space designed to build community, sharpen skills, and remind us we're not doing this work alone.

Name It to Tame It: Overcoming Implicit Bias in Special Education

Jason A. Harper

Stereotypes and unconscious biases are the result, in part, of the human brain's need to categorize and store vast amounts of information. While everyone has unconscious biases, it can create problems when they surface in our recommendations, referrals, and relationships. In this workshop, participants will learn about the different neurological processes that fuel unconscious biases, how implicit bias can distort decision-making, and learn how to engage in more systematic thinking that can achieve better outcomes for students.

Even the Playing Field for All Families: Implementation of IEP Facilitation with Fidelity

Cassie Velasquez, Robin O'Shea, Carla Cumblad, Patti Buchmiller

Been trained on Facilitated IEPs? If so, now what? As with any systems improvement effort, a plan should be in place to guide implementation. We will integrate the tenets and methodologies of implementation science in a manner that allows District and Building Leadership, as well as IEP teams, to use and sustain tools and techniques strategically over time. We will provide specific guidelines so that you can leave with your vision of implementing facilitated IEPs across your organization. This in turn will create a culture change in how IEP meetings are managed so that all families have access to using the early resolution practice of IEP Facilitation.





THURSDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2025



DAY 3 MORNING AGENDA

7:00 AM - 12:00 PM Exhibit Space/Coffee Connections

Lloyd Center Pre-function

7:30 AM - 12:00 PM Registration

Multnomah Foyer

8:30 AM - 10:00 AM Breakfast & Closing Plenary

Multnomah/Holladay

Keynote Address
Glenna Wright-Gallo

10:15 AM - 11:45 AM Morning Breakout Sessions

Being the Third Side: Supporting Through Conflict Amber Gallagher, Tricia Lomino, Lindsay Flatos

Finding Understanding in Conflict: Steps, Tips, and Considerations for Productive Conversations and Resolving Differences Randall Reese

Enhancing Access to IDEA Dispute Resolution Processes: Indiana Complaint, Hearing, and Mediation Process (I-CHAMP) Zoretta Ward-Holloway

Enhancing Hawaii's Dispute Resolution System: A Collaborative Journey with Educational and Community Partners Brikena White, Steven Vanata, Allison Eby, Amanda Kaahanui, Jasmine Williams

Is That a Complaint? A Glimpse into Connecticut's Part C Dispute Resolution Process? Elisabeth Teller

Practical Strategies for School Leaders to Prevent and Navigate Future Conflicts Dr. Angela Balsley, Dr. Janet R Decker

Re-thinking Family Engagement in Special Education Marisa Howard-Karp, Theresa Nicholls





THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2025

KEYNOTE ADDRESS : 8:30 AM - 10:00 AM

**Anchored in Mission, Ready for Change:
Strengthening Systems with Strategy and Innovation**

Glenna Wright-Gallo



Multnomah/Holladay

Glenna Wright-Gallo is Vice President of Policy Center of Excellence at Everway, previously served as Assistant Secretary of Education for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) from 2023 to 2025 under the Biden administration. Prior to her appointment, Glenna was the Assistant Superintendent of Special Education in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) in Washington and the Past-President of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), and previously the State Director of Special Education for the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) for seven years after her career as a classroom teacher and administrator. She has over 25 years of public education experience teaching students with disabilities and adults, and 15 years of experience in state-level educational leadership with expertise in the improvement planning, management, and monitoring of public special education programs. Glenna has a B.S and an M.S in Special Education, a special education teacher and administrative license, endorsements as a Program Administrator, Principal, and Superintendent, and an M.B.A.

Glenna has a proven track record of implementing scalable initiatives, developing and implementing national and state education policies, managing multi-billion-dollar budgets, and improving education and employment outcomes for over 7 million individuals with disabilities. She has been recognized for exceptional leadership with awards from governors, national associations, and district and state leaders, and is dedicated to transforming education systems through collaborative partnerships, evidence-based practices, and a relentless focus on improving education and employment outcomes.





MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 10:15 AM - 11:45 AM

Being the Third Side: Supporting Through Conflict

Amber Gallagher, Tricia Lomino, Lindsay Flatos

In this presentation, participants will delve into the concept of the "third side" in conflict resolution, exploring the critical role of a neutral and supportive presence in managing disagreements. Attendees will learn how to guide teams through adaptive work by actively listening, uncovering underlying issues, and seeking out diverse perspectives. The session will emphasize the power of collaboration over confrontation, equipping participants with the skills to foster a cooperative approach when conflict arises. By the end, attendees will have the tools needed to manage conflict constructively, strengthening team unity and effectiveness. Additionally, the session will highlight how one California-based multi-district SELPA successfully transformed its ADR continuum to prioritize the "third sider" role, enhancing conflict resolution within special education.

Enhancing Access to IDEA Dispute Resolution Processes: Indiana Complaint, Hearing, and Mediation Process (I-CHAMP)

Zoretta Ward-Holloway

The Indiana Department of Education Office of Special Education-Dispute Resolution Team (OSE-DRT) utilizes a dual database portal system as an essential component of its dispute resolution procedures designed to support general supervision and monitoring requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). System 1, Indiana Complaint, Hearing, and Mediation Process (I-CHAMP) is the public view and provides an online electronic filing system designed to enhance self-service features and make it easier and faster to learn about and use due process procedures. System 2, the internal customer relationship management (CRM), provides a database management system that tracks/documents the activities of users in a case from start to finish and notices parties involved; links associated with complaints, mediations, and hearings; preserves the records; generates unique reports as needed; provides notices of due dates to officers; and other features to support general supervision and monitoring.

Finding Understanding in Conflict: Steps, Tips, and Considerations for Productive Conversations and Resolving Differences

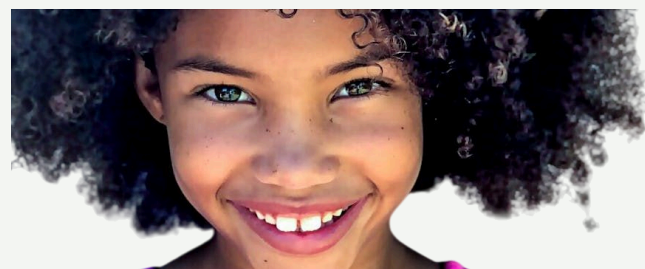
Randall Reese

Attendees will gain insight into the psychology of human conflict as well as practical steps that participants can make in conflicts to improve the likelihood of satisfactory outcomes and improved relationships.

Enhancing Hawaii's Dispute Resolution System: A Collaborative Journey with Educational and Community Partners

Brikena White, Steven Vanata, Allison Eby, Amanda Kaahanui, Jasmine Williams

This session will explore the Hawaii State Department of Education's journey and innovative efforts to enhance its Dispute Resolution System (DRS) by engaging educational partners and community organizations. The Department has transformed its approach to conflict resolution by leveraging alternative collaborative dispute resolution methods, such as IEP facilitation, mediation, and conflict resolution training for staff and parents. The presentation will be facilitated by the Department's Monitoring and Compliance Branch in collaboration with the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC). The Department's journey in improving its Dispute Resolution System highlights the power of community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and culturally sensitive practices. The Department has created a more inclusive and effective system for resolving conflicts through educational outreach, training, and integrating alternative dispute resolution options.





MORNING BREAKOUT SESSIONS: 10:15 AM - 11:45 AM

Is That a Complaint? A Glimpse Into Connecticut's Part C Dispute Resolution Process?

Elisabeth Teller

Dispute resolution in early intervention is rarely simple — especially when Lead Agencies must distinguish between informal concerns, credible allegations, and formal complaints. In this session, participants will explore Connecticut's approach to navigating this complexity within its IDEA Part C system. Through real-world scenarios and data-driven strategies, the presentation will walk attendees through decision-making considerations, communication strategies that support family understanding, and the use of informal concern tracking to strengthen system-level improvements. This session offers insights into building responsive and compliant dispute resolution practices that serve both families and systems.

Practical Strategies for School Leaders to Prevent and Navigate Future Conflicts

Dr. Angela Balsley, Dr. Janet R Decker

With disputes between families and schools on the rise, professionals tasked with implementing IDEA and Section 504/ADA must navigate the complex challenge of balancing legal requirements with practical solutions. In this session, Janet Decker, an attorney and education law professor, will discuss five common issues that lead to lawsuits including 1) adversarial IEP meetings; 2) failure to recognize that all school staff need to be legally literate; 3) discipline mistakes; 4) failure to identify students with hidden disabilities; and 5) staff shortages. These real-world scenarios will pave the way for Angie Balsley, a seasoned special education director, to share practical recommendations so that school leaders can better prevent and navigate conflict. Regardless of your professional role, in this session you'll increase your legal literacy and practical toolkit to effectively support your work in ensuring student success and maintaining productive family-school relationships while mitigating future liabilities.

Re-thinking Family Engagement in Special Education

Marisa Howard-Karp, Theresa Nicholls

We know the best way to manage conflict is to prevent it! Family engagement is a primary prevention tool meant to foster relationships and trust between families and schools, but it can be challenging. Limited time and competing priorities make it hard for families to take advantage of traditional family engagement opportunities and difficult for schools to meet families where they are. Without meaningful family engagement, families turn to other resources for information, which can lead to frustration and distrust. We will address the role of intentional, genuine family engagement as a powerful tool in the ADR process. Our presenters, representing both educator and parent perspectives, will walk through each part of the process and address the ways in which our systems can better engage families. Participants will consider the processes and protocols in their own district and identify changes that can build collaboration, strengthen communication, and avoid costly disputes.





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