

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR HEARING OFFICERS *Virtual Event Agenda*

February 9-10, 2026 | conference.cadeworks.org



PRESENTED BY



Acknowledgements



Partners

CADRE would like to thank the Pennsylvania Office of Dispute Resolution and the Oklahoma Special Education Resolution Center for the immeasurable contributions to this event.

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SPEAKERS



David Bateman



Lenore Knudtson



Jake McElligott



Mitchell Yell



Lisa Pagano



Jim Mortensen



Mark Weber



Melanie Reese



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2026



9:00 AM - 9:15 AM

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr. Melanie Reese

9:15 AM - 10:45 AM

Mastering the Hearing Process: Practical Strategies for Effective Case Management

Mitchell Yell, David Bateman

This session provides due process hearing officers with practical strategies to manage complex special education cases efficiently and fairly. Drawing on real-world examples and common procedural challenges, participants will learn how to streamline pre-hearing conferences, resolve evidentiary disputes, and maintain neutrality while keeping proceedings focused and productive. Special attention will be given to creating a clear, organized record that can be understood by appellate reviewers who may not have a background in special education. The session also addresses balancing due process rights with practical timelines and crafting clear, defensible decisions that demonstrate both legal and procedural integrity.

11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Say What You Mean: Writing Clear Decisions in IDEA Cases

Jim Mortensen

Do you strive to write decisions in IDEA cases which benefit the parties? Do you want your decisions to be enforceable by the State Education Agency? Do you expect your well-reasoned determinations to be upheld on appellate review? In this session, an experienced administrative law judge, with more than 30-years of experience with the IDEA, will share his thoughts on writing decisions to accomplish these things. Judge Mortenson will discuss: 1) the basics of organizing a report; 2) the benefit of writing clearly and suggestions on how to do it; and 3) pro-tips specific to decisions in IDEA cases.

12:45 PM - 2:15 PM

Hearing Officer Ethics: Implications of Ex Parte Communications in a "Hit Send" Culture

Lenore Knudtson

The session will use real life examples and cases to explore the boundaries of ex parte communications with a focus on unrepresented litigants in a world of instant communication. We will explore the difference between familiarity and favoritism when communicating with the parties. What is the hearing officer's role in discouraging ex parte communication? What is a hearing officer's response when inappropriate communication occurs? This session will challenge boundaries using ABA Model Code of Judicial Conduct as a reference point.





TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2026



Zoom

9:00 AM - 9:15 AM

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Dr. Melanie Reese

9:15 AM - 10:45 AM

IDEA Case Law Update

Mark Weber

This program will discuss recent cases of interest for due process hearing officers and ALJs. The primary focus will be on decisions of the federal courts of appeals, but important state court and lower federal court cases will also be included. The program will take up the implications of the court decisions for due process cases, and will seek to identify and analyze trends and emerging issues.

11:00 AM - 12:30 PM

Protecting the Educational Rights of Children with Disabilities and their Parents: An Overview of Select Laws

Lisa Pagano

This session will include a discussion and comparison of protections afforded to children with disabilities and their parents under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). We will also explore key differences in IDEA's requirements for due process hearings when a State adopts the Part B due process procedures rather than the Part C due process procedures to resolve early intervention due process complaints. Challenges in meeting IDEA's due process requirements and suggestions for addressing them will be highlighted.

12:45 PM - 2:15 PM

"Knew or Should Have Known" under IDEA: A Procedural Framework for Hearing Officers/ALJs

Jake McElligott

It is often said that IDEA has a '2-year statute of limitations' for claims, based on when claimants "knew or should have known" of the basis for their claims. Is that the case? When and how might this concept apply to adjudicating claims? How can a fact-finder make determinations about the "knew or should have known" issue? This session explores the statutory language, provides insight into the issue, and provides a procedural framework which has proven effective for fact-finding.





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