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Negotiating Resolution Sessions and Informal Dispute Resolution Activities: Strategies for Special Education Advocates

The Advocacy Institute has initiated informal and formal data gathering activities as a response to the questions and experiences shared with us by advocates and parents working through difficult disagreements and disputes with school staff and administration in their planning on behalf of students with disabilities.

Preliminary review of our data indicates that:

- The majority of disputes are addressed most frequently with additional meetings with school administrators or building principals.
- Parents and advocates report that most often the information they have received regarding Alternative Dispute Resolution activities and requirements has been through the school district. In addition, advocates report that they most often seek additional information through conferences and independent reading,
- Those who have engaged in ADR activities believe that the people involved may mean well, but aren't very well trained and that, in general, disputes are resolved because everyone "just does the best they can" to come to some agreement.
- The majority of advocates and parents surveyed report that they have never filed for a due process hearing.
- For those advocates who have participated in Resolution Sessions, the most significant difficulties were encountered when appropriate staff were not at the meeting, when school district attorneys led the meetings and when parents were advised that decisions would have to be finalized and approved by higher level administration – leaving the issues unresolved at the end of the Session.

Detailed results of the data gathered, an overview of the requirements contained in IDEA as well as good practices in conflict prevention and early resolution processes and an outline of possible responses and strategies that special education advocates might use to assist parents and school staff to overcome identified barriers is contained in a newly developed guide, "***Negotiating Informal Dispute Resolution Activities and Resolution Sessions: Strategies for Special Education Advocates***" A copy will be provided to each participant and will form the core of the presentation and discussion. The guide will also be available on The Advocacy Institute website www.advocacyinstitute.org