



Facilitated Special Education Meetings

Making complicated decisions about a child's education sometimes can be stressful and lead to a difference of opinion between schools and families. Fortunately, Michigan offers a free option to encourage collaborative discussions and prevent differences of opinion from escalating. Using a neutral facilitator can help ensure your child's team meetings are more efficient, productive, and all voices are heard. Specially trained facilitators help by providing support and guidance during meetings such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs), Manifest Determination Reviews (MDRs), and Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs). Facilitators encourage productive communication and keep the focus on the student's success. When communication is an issue or a meeting is expected to be long and complex, the team should consider inviting a neutral, independent, and trained facilitator to guide the meeting process.

A Facilitator Will:

- Focus on team decision-making.
- Guide the discussion by keeping the team's energy centered on the student.
- Assist the team to resolve conflicts and disagreements that arise during the meeting.
- Promote open communication among all of the team members.
- Help the team develop and ask clarifying questions.
- Keep the team on task and within the time allotted.
- Maintain impartiality and neutrality.

A Facilitator Will Not:

- Make a decision for the team.
- Offer legal or compliance advice.
- Advocate.

Benefits of a Facilitated Team Meeting

- Encourages a collaborative environment.
- Leads to a more productive meeting focused on the student's success.
- Ensures all voices are heard.
- Promotes stronger relationships moving forward.
- Resolves disagreements before they escalate.

Preparing for a Facilitated Team Meeting

Parents can assist by preparing information about their child such as:

- Child's strengths, needs, and interests.
- Child's performance on schoolwork outside of the school building such as educational strategies used successfully at home (for example, a schedule for a morning routine).
- Major parental concerns about the child's education.
- Information related to the child's physical and emotional health.

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Other Information About Facilitated Special Education Meetings

- Facilitated meetings are voluntary, meaning both parties must agree to participate in the meeting. Facilitated meetings may be requested by either the parent or the school district.
- Facilitated meetings are usually scheduled by the school district at a time and place agreeable to the parents.
- Facilitators are neutral and provided at no cost to the parent and school district through [Special Education Mediation Services \(SEMS\)](#), an IDEA grant funded initiative.
- Facilitators are trained in addressing conflicts but do not advise or make decisions.
- Facilitators are selected on a random, rotational, or other impartial basis.

As a parent:

- Let your school district know if you need an interpreter.
- Learn as much as you can about the special education meeting topic prior to the meeting.

Parents can learn more about facilitated meetings by visiting the [Special Education Mediation Services \(SEMS\) website](#) or by visiting the [Michigan Alliance for Families website](#). Additionally, more information about the [IEP Facilitation Process](#) can be found in the [IDEA Special Education IEP Facilitation Parent Guide from CADRE](#).

When issues cannot be resolved through a facilitated special education meeting, parents can request mediation and have the right to file a state complaint or request a due process hearing. Learn more about these rights within the [Family Matters: Problem Solving Process](#).

Resources

- [Alliance/CADRE Facilitated IEP Meetings: An Emerging Practice](#)
- [CADRE IDEA Special Education: IEP Facilitation Parent Guide](#)
- [Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\): Five Options, 1-2-3](#)
- [Michigan Department of Education: Dispute Resolution Options](#)
- [Pacer Center, Facilitated Team Meetings](#)
- [Special Education Mediation Services \(SEMS\): Facilitation](#)



[Michigan Alliance for Families:
Facilitation, Mediation](#)