



## Facilitated Special Education Meetings

Facilitated special education meetings can be valuable early in solving disagreements. Facilitators provide direction during special education team meetings such as individualized education programs (IEPs), individualized family service plans (IFSPs), manifestation determination reviews, and behavior intervention plan (BIP) meetings. Facilitators encourage open communication, address conflicts, and keep the focus on the student throughout the meeting. When conflict is expected during a meeting, or the meeting is expected to be long and complex, the team should consider inviting a neutral, independent, and trained facilitator to guide the meeting process.

### Facilitation or Mediation?

[Mediation](#) and facilitation are activities which involve collaborative problem solving when parties are in disagreement. However, mediation and facilitation are not the same. The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) requires states to provide mediation at no cost and for mediation to be voluntary, confidential, and agreed upon by both parties. When issues are successfully resolved through mediation, there is a written signed agreement between the two parties. Mediation is especially helpful in situations when parties want to resolve their issues but want a neutral third party to assist them in their attempts to resolve their issues. A mediator will work with the parties until there is a signed, written agreement or the process ends without resolution.

Facilitation is not required by the IDEA and is less formal than mediation. Facilitation can be used proactively to prevent possible conflicts and promote effective communication and positive working relationships. Both mediation and facilitation are free to parents and school districts and are provided by a neutral, third party facilitator or mediator.

### Benefits of a Facilitated Team Meeting

- Offers a no-cost option to the parent and school.
- Provides quick resolution (results).
- Uses an informal approach to the dispute resolution process.
- Encourages prevention of more serious conflicts.
- Guides participation of team members by an independent facilitator.
- Promotes stronger relationships and communication.

### Preparing for a Facilitated Team Meeting

Facilitated meetings are voluntary, meaning both parties must agree to participate in the meeting, and may be requested by either the parent or the school district. 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

- 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.
- Facilitated meetings are usually scheduled by the school district at a time and place agreeable to the parents.
- Facilitators may be chosen randomly, or the school and parents may choose the facilitator together.

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 on the [Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education \(CADRE\) website](#).

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](#)
- [Michigan Department of Education \(MDE\): Facilitated IEP Meeting and Mediation](#)
- [Special Education Mediation Services \(SEMS\): Facilitation](#)



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