

PROFILES

INTENSIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



IEP Facilitation Multistate Workgroup (2011-2014)

During the past 10 years, the number of states offering IEP facilitation statewide increased more than 300%, from 9 states in 2005 to 30 states in 2014.

The CADRE Approach

Since 1998, CADRE has championed the use of early and innovative dispute resolution processes that maintain communication and strengthen relationships between schools and families. CADRE's approach to providing intensive technical assistance is founded on collaborative problem-solving principles. Using a multistate workgroup format, CADRE staff and representatives from selected state educational agencies work on issues of common interest. The workgroup model creates a forum for shared knowledge, practice, and experiences, where members benefit from multiple perspectives on improvements to their systems.

CADRE Champions the Use of Early and Innovative Dispute Resolution Processes

Families of children with disabilities and the professionals who serve them may find themselves in conflict over a child's special education services. When poorly managed, these disputes can result in damaged relationships and resources spent on conflict, rather than on education.

A growing body of evidence indicates that individualized education program (IEP) facilitation services can address conflicts, while building trust and better relationships between families and schools. So it is not surprising that when the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) surveyed state educational agencies (SEAs) in 2011, to determine where limited resources might best be invested toward expansion of dispute resolution options, IEP facilitation development and improvement emerged as a top priority. In response to this need, CADRE employed its unique, multistate workgroup approach to providing intensive technical assistance (TA), to help states maximize their investments in IEP facilitation.

This *CADRE Profile* describes CADRE's first IEP facilitation workgroup, and accomplishments of the five SEAs—Connecticut, Idaho, Illinois, Ohio, and Texas—that participated for the duration of the initiative (2011-2014).

Background: Creating the IEP Facilitation Workgroup

In 2011, CADRE consulted with its national advisory board and conducted an SEA needs assessment (with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education), to determine where limited resources might best be invested toward expansion of collaborative dispute resolution options. SEA responses were reviewed, along with Listserv queries, conference agendas, TA requests, and the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs and Congressional interests. From this information, CADRE:

- Developed an application that included detailed workgroup activities, participant expectations, and a description of the intensive TA that CADRE would provide. CADRE sent the application to SEAs.
- Reviewed the state applications and spoke with each applicant state director to confirm understanding and commitment.
- Executed intensive TA agreements with seven SEAs—four looking to improve an existing program, and three seeking to develop IEP facilitation systems. [Note: Two states discontinued participation part way through the process due to changes in staffing and priorities.]



CADRE launched the workgroup via teleconference in December 2011. In total, 15 virtual and four in-person meetings were held. Each meeting included status updates, discussion, and resource sharing. In-person meetings featured presentations by national experts and provided opportunities for the states to consult directly with them. Between meetings, CADRE worked with the states individually. CADRE presented webinars that addressed topics of interest to the member states during the course of the workgroup (see the text box, CADRE Webinars, for a sample of topics and presenters).

Identifying SEAs that will commit the staff, time, and resources necessary to participate fully in the workgroup, and maintaining flexibility throughout the process are critical aspects of the intensive TA workgroup model. This approach enabled CADRE to make minor course corrections along the way, accommodate specific state needs, and support the group as a whole.

Activities and Accomplishments

Following are selected highlights from the IEP Facilitation Workgroup, including state achievements. The highlights are organized around the major areas that must be addressed when developing and improving IEP facilitation. As part of the workgroup experience, CADRE also arranged for participants to consult with nationally regarded experts in each of the areas.

System-wide Oversight, Infrastructure, and Organization

This area includes activities related to leadership, operations structure, and system performance. Highlights include:

- Illinois formed an internal IEP facilitation workgroup that met regularly to work on the system and associated processes.

- Ohio engaged a broad stakeholder group in a thorough evaluation of the operations and efficacy of its facilitation program and panel of facilitators.
- Texas engaged stakeholders in a public rule-making process to develop regulations for its state-sponsored IEP facilitation program in response to the program having been established in state law.
- Idaho improved its existing statewide facilitation evaluation and tracking systems.
- Connecticut developed IEP facilitation operational procedures and protocols in cooperation with stakeholders.

Workgroup participants consulted with the following experts in this area:

- Patricia McGinnis, Special Education ADR Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Education.
- Jo Anne Pool Blades, Program Manager, Special Education Resolution Center, Oklahoma State University.

Program Access and Delivery

This area includes how services are accessed and provided. Highlights include:

- Illinois conducted a statewide survey measuring interest in a pilot program and received responses from 25 interested districts.
- CADRE developed a model intake form for facilitated IEP meeting requests and a set of sample data collection tools.
- Texas expanded its dispute resolution data system to include state-sponsored IEP facilitation case management and tracking.
- Idaho's facilitation trainings have increased partnerships between school districts and Idaho Parents Unlimited.

Origin: The Workgroup Model

CADRE's use of a workgroup model to facilitate intensive technical assistance originated in the CADRE Exemplar Initiative (2008-2011). In this project, staff worked with four states with high-performing dispute resolution systems to identify their exemplary attributes. During the course of the initiative, CADRE cultivated a high degree of camaraderie and rapport among participants. Results were impressive: strong relationships were forged, high-quality resources were created, and positive feedback on the entire process was received. This experience informed CADRE's decision to shift from single-state initiatives to providing intensive technical assistance primarily through multistate workgroups.

- CADRE authored *IEP Facilitation Background & Context*—a document featuring a brief history, overview, and definition of IEP facilitation.

Workgroup participants consulted with Jane Burns, Intake Coordinator/Administrator, Wisconsin Special Education Mediation System, on different aspects of program access and delivery.

Practitioner Standards and Professional Development

This area includes facilitator requirements, training, and retention. Highlights include:

- CADRE and Connecticut provided an intensive, highly rated, two-day IEP facilitation training, in collaboration with Quinnipiac University School of Law. The training, conducted by Key2Ed, included Connecticut IEP facilitators and workgroup members.
- Using recordings from the training, CADRE created a set of facilitated IEP meeting training video vignettes, which were posted on the CADRE website.
- CADRE's Request for Proposals and resulting agreement developed for the Connecticut training provided states with model criteria and formatting.
- Ohio involved stakeholders throughout the process of evaluating and selecting a new panel of facilitators.
- CADRE created a model job description, set of expectations, and process checklist for IEP facilitators.
- Illinois developed a hiring rubric and intergovernmental employment agreements for the IEP facilitator hiring process.
- Ohio significantly improved its facilitator professional development requirements.

- Idaho practitioners were provided regular training opportunities, including monthly lunch-and-learn sessions.
- CADRE resources and webinars encouraged SEAs to provide inclusive and relevant services to culturally and linguistically diverse students and families.

Workgroup participants consulted with the following experts in this area:

- Julie Gentili-Armburst, President, Mediation Northwest.
- Joyce and Doug Little, Founders, Key2Ed Facilitation Training.
- Tim Hedeem, CADRE Senior Consultant and Professor of Conflict Management, Kennesaw State University.

Public Awareness and Outreach Activities

This area includes a variety of activities—print, face-to-face, and virtual—designed to inform and engage stakeholders in IEP facilitation programs. Highlights include:

- Ohio staff began presenting regularly at school support team meetings, to increase awareness and support for its statewide facilitation program.
- Texas staff engaged in statewide communication activities to increase awareness and support for local and state-sponsored IEP facilitation.
- Illinois developed a collection of brochures for parents and educators, (e.g., *Q&A about IEP Facilitation*, *Preparing for IEP Facilitation*, and a facilitation/mediation process comparison chart).

Workgroup participants consulted with the following experts in this area:

- Kerry Voss Smith, Director, Pennsylvania Office for Dispute Resolution.



Workgroup Participants (The People)

Connecticut Department of Education

Gail Mangs, Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education

Connecticut State Education Resource Center

Sally Esposito, Consultant

Idaho State Department of Education

Melanie Reese, Dispute Resolution Coordinator, Office of Dispute Resolution

Illinois State Board of Education

Donna Schertz, Division Supervisor, Special Education Services Division

Sherry Colegrove, Mediation Coordinator

Kelly Rauscher, Principal Consultant

Ohio Department of Education Office for Exceptional Children

Monica Drvota, Assistant Director, Dispute Resolution

Chrissy Cline, Mediation and Facilitation Coordinator

Texas Education Agency

Cindy Swain, Manager, Special Education Support Services, Division of Federal and State Education Policy

Ron Roberts, Program Specialist, Division of Federal and State Education Policy

CADRE Staff

Marshall Peter, Director

Philip Moses, Associate Director

Amy Whitehorne, Policy Analyst

Noella Bernal, Program Associate

Dick Zeller, Senior Policy Analyst

Anita Engiles, Dispute Resolution Specialist

- Mary Eaddy, Director, PRO-Parents of South Carolina.
- Jim Melamed, CEO, Mediate.com.
- Luann Purcell, Executive Director, Council of Administrators of Special Education.

CADRE Webinars

CADRE's free webinars provide professional development featuring nationally recognized experts.

Cathy Fromme, *Trust Is Like the Air We Breathe. We Don't Notice It Until It Is Gone* (2012).

Karen Mapp, *Moving Forward: Building Effective Family-School Partnerships* (2013).

Greg Abell, *Re-connecting with the Roots of the IEP/IFSP Process* (2012).

Ed Feinberg, *Practical Strategies for Helping Parents in Conflict: Assisting Divorced or Estranged Parents Through the IEP Process* (2014).

Trisha Bergin-Lytton, *IEP/IFSP Facilitation Techniques for Success: Counter Proposals and Consensus-As-You-Go* (2012).

Tricia Jones, *Conflict Coaching: Its Value in Special Education Dispute Resolution* (2013).

Lorig Charkoudian and Erricka Bridgeford, *Inclusive Listening: Building Understanding, Supporting Collaboration* (2013).

Johnny Lake, *Visiting a House on the Other Side of Town* (2014).

Nina Meierding, *The Impact of the Apology on Communication and Negotiation* (2012).

Tracy Mueller, *Moving Research to Practice: Lessons Learned Regarding Meaningful Home-School Collaboration* (2013).

Evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement

This area includes how to use a variety of tools and evaluation instruments to report, summarize, and analyze quantitative and qualitative data. Highlights include:

- Idaho now conducts evaluation activities via an online survey tool, resulting in a threefold increase in the response rate. Idaho facilitators can access these survey results in real time, providing them with immediate feedback on their performance.
- Ohio is moving from a paper survey to an online performance survey that will make it easier for participants to complete, thereby increasing response rate.
- Idaho developed a four-month follow-up survey to collect information on the long-term value of IEP facilitation and its impact on family-school relationships.
- Improvements made to Idaho's data collection and tracking system enable staff to approximate cost per facilitation.

Workgroup participants consulted with Courtney Brown, CADRE External Evaluator and Director of Organizational Performance and Evaluation, Lumina Foundation, on the importance of evaluation and continuous quality improvement.

Project Evaluation and Conclusion

At regular intervals during the initiative, Courtney Brown contacted workgroup

members for feedback on their experiences. All of the participants expressed excitement about the group, found incredible value in the experience, and were optimistic that their efforts and the knowledge gained would lead to successful changes and improvements in their states. They all valued CADRE's work and dedication and all had positive things to say about the organization and people affiliated with it.

At the final face-to-face meeting, in November 2014, workgroup members decided that they wanted to continue meeting via conference call on a quarterly basis because they so highly valued the time spent exchanging ideas and experiences. The following quotes from workgroup participants are typical of the consistent feedback Dr. Brown received.

“CADRE provides us with things we don't always think about. They go above and beyond. They always listen. They are always helpful.”

“Small-group synergy is fabulous and invigorating!”

“I would never have made so much progress in such a short time without the help of CADRE and the workgroup.”

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