

Welcome to the Lead IDEA Solution-Based Learning Series

Learning Block 1: Proactive strategies for IEP Conflict Resolution and Family Partnership

NOVEMBER 13, 2025



This material was produced under the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Award No. H325Z230007. David Emenheiser serves as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned on this website is intended or should be inferred.

Agenda

- 1 Welcome to the Lead IDEA Solution-Based Learning Series
- 2 IDEA Foundations
- 3 Prevention and Disagreement Management
- 4 Proactive Strategies for Conflict Prevention
- 5 De-escalation and Conflict Resolution Tools
- 6 Independent Work Activity, Closing, and Next Steps

Meet the Lead IDEA Presenters



Paul Steinle, PhD

*Technical Assistance
Provider
American Institutes
for Research*



Jenna Basile

*Technical Assistance
Provider
American Institutes
for Research*



Karen Shaffer

*Boston University
Research Scientist
Technical Assistance
Specialist*



Keane Alavi

*Technical Assistance
Consultant
American Institutes
for Research*

Today's Norms

- **Honor Strengths and Differences:** Recognize and value experiences, perspectives, and expertise participants bring to the table.
- **Engage Actively and Respectfully:** Listen with intention, speak with purpose, and contribute constructively to foster a collaborative environment.
- **Assume Positive Intent:** Approach discussions with curiosity and compassion to promote a safe space for learning and sharing.
- **Stay Solution-Focused:** Prioritize actionable feedback and ideas that support continuous improvement of tools and understanding of IDEA.
- **Share the Mic:** Balance participation to ensure all voices are heard and valued.

Solution-Based Learning Series Timeline

November 13, 2025	Independent Work	December 4, 2025
Virtual Session		Virtual Session
Knowledge Development Session 75 minutes 6:00–7:15 p.m. ET		Reflection Session 45 minutes 6:00–6:45 p.m. ET

By the end of this learning series, participants will be able to:

- Connect conflict resolution to IDEA by reinforcing the importance of procedural safeguards and meaningful family engagement.
- Strengthen partnerships by empowering families with knowledge of their rights and the critical role advocates play in guiding informed decision making and active participation throughout the individualized education program (IEP) process.
- Identify common sources of conflict and barriers to effective communication and collaboration in the development and implementation of the IEP.
- Develop proactive strategies to prevent and de-escalate disputes, including when and how to engage advocates to support constructive dialogue.

Who Are We? The Lead IDEA Center

We work with leaders to improve systems serving children with disabilities and their families through effective implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).



**Knowledge
Advancement**



**Capacity
Building**



**Infrastructure
Development**

Partnership, Local Collaboration, Innovation, Continuous Improvement

The IDEA Leadership Essentials

Each “essential” includes:

- Action-oriented statement
- Core mindset
- Indicators of success



<https://bit.ly/LeadEss>



The goal of the Lead IDEA Solution-Based Learning Series, Learning Block 1 is to help *strengthen partnerships* with families and advocates to reduce conflict and improve collaboration.



Conflict Word Cloud

What is one word you associate with IEP conflicts?

- Scan the QR code or enter the URL to share your word and help build our word cloud!

(Your response will appear live on the screen.)

URL: <https://app.sli.do/event/4HLErrubeXzecbsvPHWY2E>



Understanding Our Current Reality

Understanding the Current Reality of IDEA Part B

In 2013, **6.59 million students** aged 3–21 (**8.3%** of all U.S. public school students) received services under **IDEA Part B**.

As of 2022, **7.63 million students** aged 3–21 (**9.6%** of all U.S. public school students) received services under **IDEA Part B**.

Formal Disputes Are Growing



Special education due process complaints filed nationally rose by 16.4% from the 2021–22 to the 2022–23 school year.

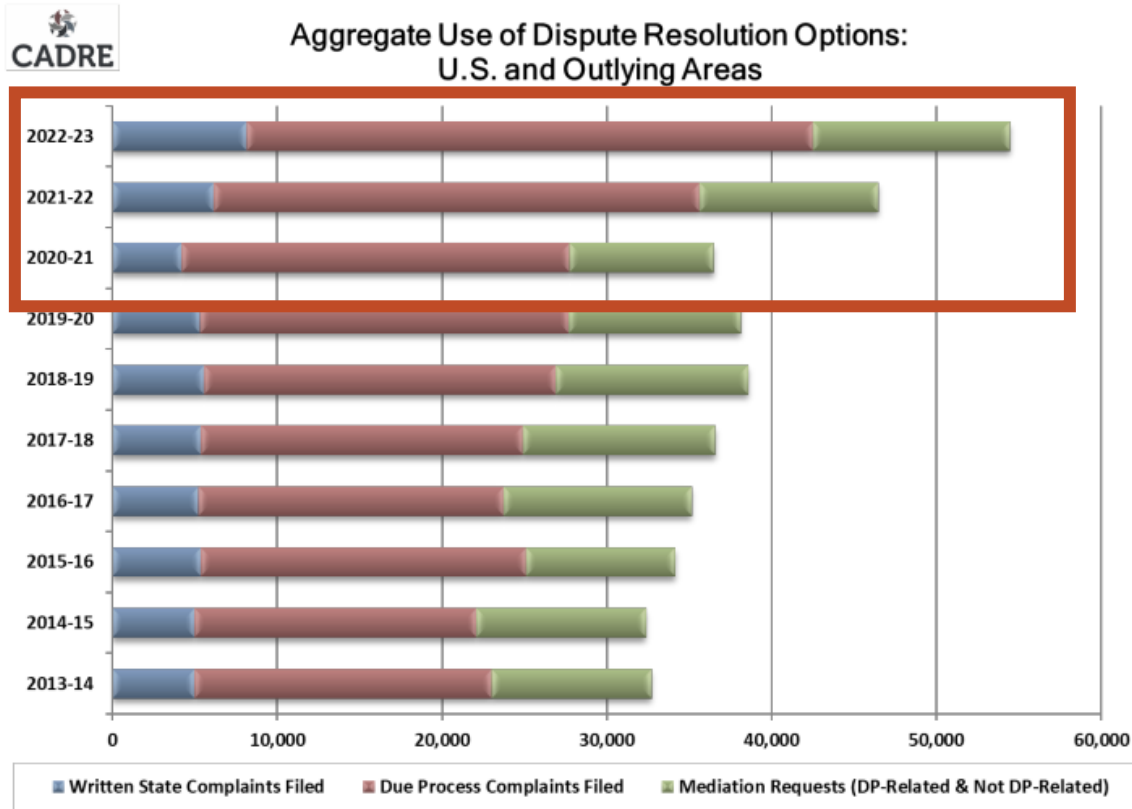


Written state complaints increased by a third (32.4%).



The volume of written state complaints, due process complaints filed, and mediations increased by 71.6% between the 2012–13 and the 2022–23 school years.

Use of Dispute Resolution Options



The number of dispute resolution events reported by process (written state complaints filed, due process complaints filed, and mediation requests) in the U.S. and Outlying Areas for the years 2012-13 to 2022-23 were used to create the chart shown above and are displayed in the following table.

- What are your experiences with the dispute resolution options?
- What concerns do you have about the increases?
- What might be the cause of such an increase?

Year	Written State Complaints Filed	Due Process Complaints Filed	Mediation Requests (DP-Related & Not DP-Related)	Total Activity
2012-13	5,076	16,980	9,680	31,736
2013-14	4,997	18,011	9,688	32,696
2014-15	4,991	17,107	10,260	32,358
2015-16	5,369	19,737	9,034	34,140
2016-17	5,239	18,490	11,413	35,142
2017-18	5,362	19,544	11,666	36,572
2018-19	5,575	21,338	11,671	38,584
2019-20	5,341	22,359	10,406	38,106
2020-21	4,186	23,567	8,725	36,478
2021-22	6,160	29,490	10,806	46,456
2022-23	8,154	34,339	11,973	54,466

IDEA Foundations

Understanding Procedural Safeguards,
Parents Rights, and the Role of Advocates



Safeguard Showdown: The Right of Parents



Which procedural safeguards have you heard of before?



Answer in the poll!

IDEA Rights and Protections for Families

- What are **procedural safeguards**?
 - **Procedural safeguards** are the rights and protections guaranteed to children with disabilities and their parents under IDEA law.
 - In addition to rights and protections, procedural safeguards include **mechanisms to resolve disputes** between parents and local education agencies.
 - IDEA includes **multiple** procedural safeguards (subpart E).

Overview of Key Rights and Protections for Families

- What are **the key rights and protections**?

Explanation of Procedural Safeguards	Meeting Participation	Confidentiality and Access to Student Records	Requesting Independent Educational Evaluations (IEE)	Prior Written Notice	Consent	Disagreements and Dispute Resolution
Provided at least once a year, at evaluations, at due process complaints, and upon request. Written in understandable language.	Parents are required members of any group or meeting that makes decisions related to identification, evaluation, placement, or provision of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).	Student information is protected and confidential. Parents have the right to inspect and review records, as well as the right to request amendment of or corrections to information.	Parents have the right to request an IEE to be conducted by an evaluator not employed by the school district. IEEs may or may not occur at public expense.	Prior written notice must be provided to parents of any proposal or refusal to initiate or change any IEP decision.	Parents have the right to give or deny consent to school system actions with respect to their child with a disability.	Parents have the right to disagree with any educational decisions related to identification, evaluation, placement, and special education services. Disagreements can be resolved through the dispute resolution process: IEP review, mediation, state complaint, or due process.

Source: [Center for Parent Information & Resources](#)



Activity: Clarifying Common Misconceptions

Let's explore some common misconceptions about procedural safeguards. As the statement appears on screen, answer "True" or "False" in the chat.

- *School systems must always pay for IEE.*
- *Parents are entitled to as many IEEs as requested.*
- *Only the biological parent is considered a "parent."*
- *IEP meetings cannot proceed without a parent.*
- *Parents cannot request prior written notice after the fact.*
- *Parents can request prior written notice of verbal conversations, if conversation involved educational decisions.*
- *Schools must provide interpreters at IEP meetings.*

Supporting Families: The Advocate

What protections does IDEA give parents to engage advocates?

The IEP team may include
“... individuals who have knowledge
or special expertise regarding the
child.”

20 U.S.C. §1414(d)(1)(B)(vi)

Additionally, “... right to have a
representative of the parent inspect
and review the records.”

34 C.F.R § 300.613(b)(3)



Supporting Families: The Advocate

**Why might parents bring an advocate to an IEP meeting?
Add your answers to the chat.**

Some examples include:

- Legal expertise
- Interpret evaluation results/data
- Additional knowledge about the child
- Communication
- Collaboration—reducing barriers between parent and school
- Negotiation
- Personal/emotional support

Bridging the Gap: How Advocates Support Districts and Families

Improved IDEA Compliance and Fewer Disputes

- Advocates help districts interpret and apply IDEA regulations more effectively.
- Their involvement can reduce due process hearings and legal conflicts by resolving issues early through collaboration.

Stronger Family-School Relationships

- Advocates often serve as bridges between families and schools, improving communication and trust.
- When families feel heard and supported, they're more likely to engage positively with educators.

More Welcoming and Responsive School Culture

- Improved IDEA compliance and fewer disputes.
- Advocates bring attention to systemic barriers and help districts design more equitable practices.

Enhanced Student Outcomes

- With advocates supporting IEPs, students receive more tailored services.
- This leads to better academic performance, social-emotional growth, and long-term success.

Professional Growth for Educators

- Working with advocates encourages educators to deepen their understanding of disability rights and inclusive pedagogy.
- It fosters a mindset of continuous improvement and empathy in teaching practices.

Community and Legislative Impact

- Advocates often engage in public awareness and policy efforts that benefit entire districts.
- Their work can lead to increased funding, improved legislation, and broader support for special education.

Sources: [Navigate Life Texas](#), [ARISE Advocacy Services](#), [CNLD Neuropsychology](#), [The Arc](#)

National Special Education Advocacy Institute Data

In 2024, the Professional Special Education Advocacy National Survey identified four areas of concern related to the IEP process:

1. Honest and truthful data
2. Assurance of meaningful parent participation
3. Inadequate IEP meeting documentation
4. Use of confidential settlement agreements

Source: National Special Education Advocacy Institute. (2024, December 6). *Top 10 SPED advocacy issues of 2024*. <https://www.nseai.org/blog/top-10-advocacy-issues-of-2024>

Supporting Families Who Choose Support From an Advocate

The **parent** is the central decision maker for the child.

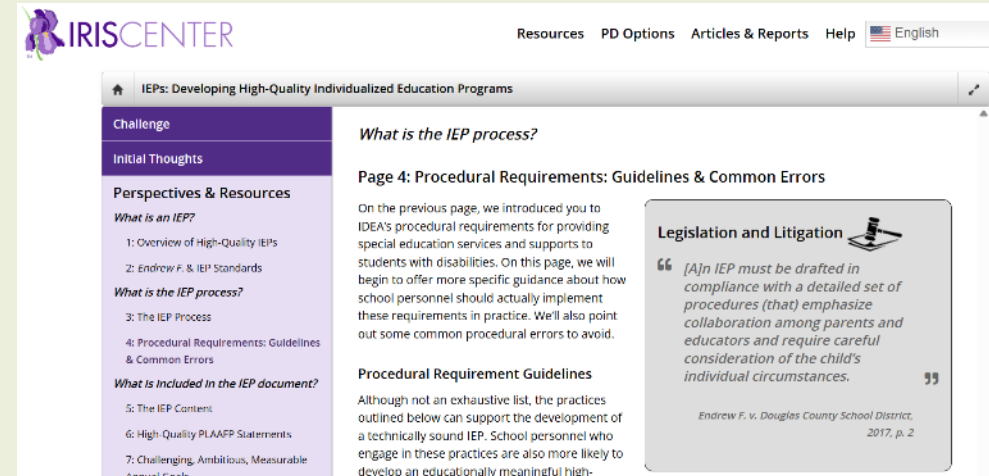
- Advocates do not have the authority to provide consent or the authority to disagree on behalf of the parent, but they can advise the parent.
- Only parents receive procedural safeguards (e.g., prior written notice is not required to be provided to an advocate, an advocate cannot request an IEE).
- Advocates cannot make identification, evaluation, or placement decisions, but they can provide information to support decision making.

Procedural Safeguards: Resources

Center for Parent Information and Resources: Parental Rights under IDEA



Iris Center: Procedural Requirements: Guidelines and Common Errors



Prevention and Disagreement Management

Sources of Conflict and Barriers to Collaboration:
Proactive Strategies for Conflict Prevention

Sources of Conflict and Barriers to Collaboration With Parents

Use of jargon or overly technical language	Information presented in ways that are difficult to understand
Inadequate information sharing	Key information not shared in advance; decisions made “on the spot”
Unmet expectations or unclear roles	Lack of clarity about responsibilities for families and educators
Lack of trust	Limited relationship building, past negative experiences, or families not feeling valued
Differing perspectives or values	Differing views on student needs, priorities, or values
Limited knowledge of the IEP process	Families, educators, or administrators lack understanding of the IEP process and family rights
Time or resource pressures	Rushed meetings, limited preparation time, heavy case loads
Emotional responses and daily stressors	Stress or strong emotions affecting participation and decision making

Source: [Pathways to Partnership](#)

Interpersonal Barriers to Collaboration With Parents

Power imbalances or
perceived authority

Emotional or
defensiveness

Past negative
experiences

Cultural or language
mismatches

Lack of relational
history or trust

Unmet or unclear
expectations

Source: [Pathways to Partnership](#)

Systemic Barriers to Collaboration With Parents

Limited infrastructure
or supports

Time and resource
constraints

Lack of professional
development for
collaboration

Inaccessible
information or lack of
transparency

Infrequent or
insufficient
opportunities for
family input

Elevation of
professional voices

Source: [Pathways to Partnership](#)



Parent Perspective

Aubri Girardeau

*Mother of a child with autism
and specific learning disabilities*

(time: 1:24)



[Transcript](#)



Let's listen to Aubri Girardeau, a mother of a child with autism and specific learning disability, describe how she navigates the IEP process, while facing interpersonal and systemic barriers to collaboration.

Reflection: As you listen, identify which barriers this parent faced during the IEP development process.



Source: Iris Center. (2025). *Family Engagement: Collaborating with Families of Students with Disabilities*.

Sources of Conflict and Barriers to Collaboration With Parents

Use of jargon or overly technical language	Information presented in ways that are difficult to understand
Inadequate information sharing	Key information not shared in advance; decisions made “on the spot”
Unmet expectations or unclear roles	Lack of clarity about responsibilities for families and educators
Lack of trust	Limited relationship building, past negative experiences, or families not feeling valued
Differing perspectives or values	Differing views on student needs, priorities, or values
Limited knowledge of the IEP process	Families, educators, or administrators lack understanding of the IEP process and family rights
Time or resource pressures	Rushed meetings, limited preparation time, heavy case loads
Emotional responses and daily stressors	Stress or strong emotions affecting participation and decision making

Source: [Pathways to Partnership](#)

Preventing Conflict Before it Starts: Strategies for Collaborating With Parents of Students With Disabilities



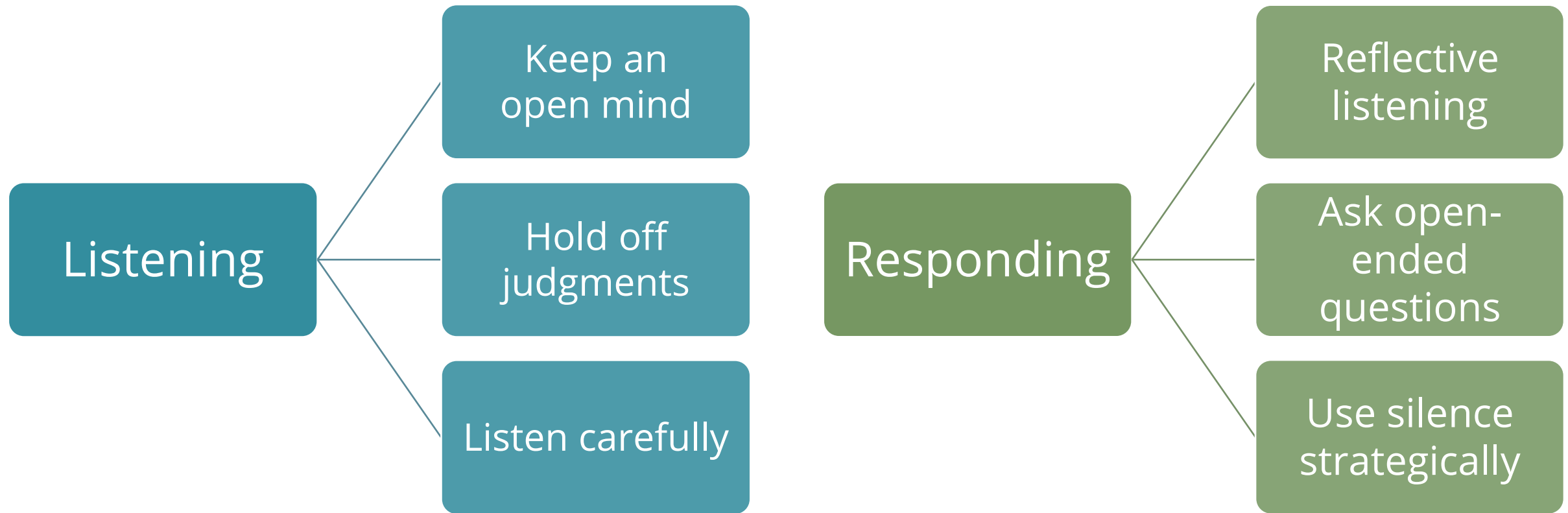
Photo by [Gabrielle Henderson](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Proactive Strategies for Conflict Prevention

CADRE Continuum of Dispute Resolution Processes & Practices												
Levels of Intervention	Prevention				Disagreement		Conflict			Procedural Safeguards		
Assistance/ Intervention Options	Family Engagement	Participant & Stakeholder Training	Stakeholder Council	Collaborative Rule Making	Parent to Parent Assistance	Case Manager	Telephone Intermediary	Facilitation	Mediation Models	Ombudsperson	Third Party Opinion/Consultation	Resolution Meeting
Dimensions that help clarify placement of the options along the Continuum	Third-Party Assistance						Third-Party Intervention					
	Decision Making by Parties						Decision Making by Third-Party					
	Interest-Based Focus						Rights-Based Focus					
	Informal & Flexible						Formal & Fixed					

Source: The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE). [CADRE Continuum](#).

Strategy 1: Communication Techniques



Source: The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE). [*Working Together Series. Course 3: Listening and Responding Skills.*](#)

Building Communication Through Trust

Improved communication starts with trust and belonging. See each component of trust building and actionable steps toward each.

Personal Regard:

You demonstrate that you care about families and their experiences.

- ✓ Be accessible to families and model compassionate problem solving.
- ✓ Regularly reflect on your own biases and assumptions (and help staff do the same).

Respect: *Families feel heard and valued.*

- ✓ Help staff understand families' communication preferences (e.g., email, text, frequency).
- ✓ Build positive relationships by modeling empathy and understanding their perspectives.

Integrity: *Families trust that collaboration will support their children's needs.*

- ✓ Follow through on commitments and ensure consistency.
- ✓ Conduct surveys or focus groups to gather family input and use it to improve practices.

Transparency: *Everyone, including families, receives timely and complete information.*

- ✓ Employ technology to translate messages into families' home languages and help teachers do the same.
- ✓ Share regular, clear updates on student progress with families in their preferred format and language.

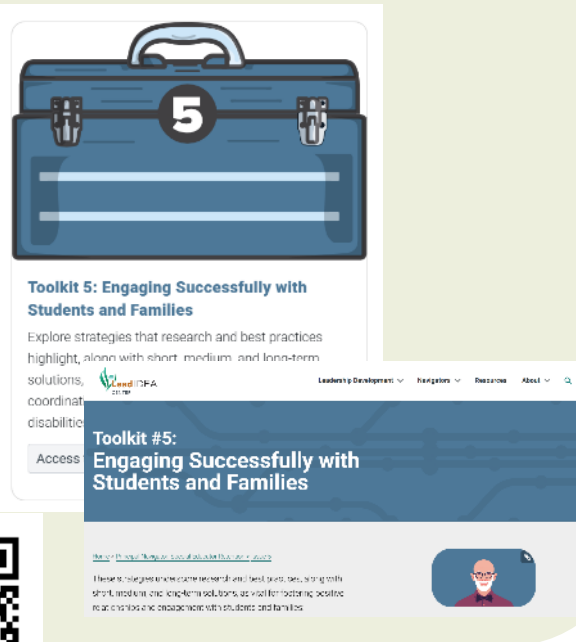
Sources:

Lead IDEA Center. [Toolkit 5: Engaging Successfully with Students and Their Families.](#)

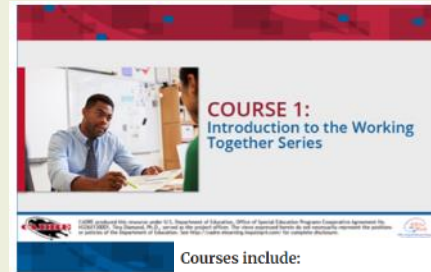
The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE). [Working Together Learning Series.](#)

Communication Techniques: Resources

LEAD IDEA Principal Navigator Toolkit 5



CADRE: Working Together Series



Courses include:

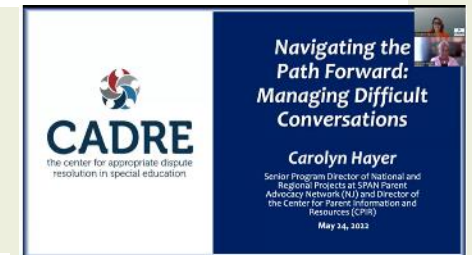
- Course 1: Introduction to the Working Together Series
- Course 2: IEP Meetings and Beyond
- Course 3: Listening and Responding Skills
- Course 4: Managing and Responding to Emotions
- Course 5: Focusing on Interests to Reach Agreement



Navigating the Path Forward: Managing Difficult Conversations (Webinar)

Navigating the Path Forward:
Managing Difficult Conversations

May 24, 2022 - 11am - 12:30pm PDT



Strategy 2: Collaborative IEP Meeting Practices

Strategies for addressing common barriers to collaborative IEP meetings

Collaboration

- ✓ Provide training opportunities to leaders, educators, and families on ways to cultivate participation throughout the IEP process (e.g., IEP tip sheets).
 - *Consider inviting advocates to these sessions so they understand collaborative norms and can reinforce positive participation.*
- ✓ Use prepared resources or IEP tip sheets to assist all IEP team members (including families) throughout the IEP process.

Communication

- ✓ Communicate through multiple, unique channels (e.g., phone calls, email, text messages).
- ✓ Provide parents with a draft IEP in advance of the meeting to encourage participation.
 - *If an advocate is involved, include them in the draft-sharing process to support clarity and reduce misunderstandings.*

Conflicting Perspectives

- ✓ Send a brief survey home or talk directly with parents to get to know the family better and understand their needs.
- ✓ Establish regular practices for positive communication by celebrating achievements or showing gratitude to members of the IEP team.
 - *Encourage advocates to join in recognizing progress to reinforce a team mindset.*

Source: [Pathways to Partnership](#)

Strategy 2: Collaborative IEP Meeting Practices *(cont'd)*

Strategies for addressing common barriers to collaborative IEP meetings

Awareness/Knowledge

- ✓ Provide parents with informational sessions or training workshops focused on understanding the IEP process.
 - *Advocates can cohost or attend these sessions to strengthen family understanding and trust.*
- ✓ Connect families to parent information centers for additional resources and support.

Relationships

- ✓ Maintain regular communication with parents, not just during IEP meetings.
- ✓ Connect with families before IEP meetings by introducing yourself, sending a welcome letter/email, or offering a home visit or conference.
 - *Include advocates in early introductions to set a positive tone and reduce adversarial framing.*

Time/Resources

- ✓ Before IEP meetings, allow time for team members to share input, discuss concerns, and prepare tasks.
 - *Provide advocates with an opportunity to share insights during preparation so their input supports collaboration.*

Source: [Pathways to Partnership](#)

Strategy 3: Actions Leaders Can Take to Support Proactive and Collaborative IEP Meeting Engagement

Be Positive	Keep it positive!
Remind	Remind parents to bring their documents and ask questions.
Protect Time	Protect the time for all team members, as much as possible.
Share an Agenda	Share an agenda in advance so that everyone understands how the meeting will function.
Introduce	Ask the team members to introduce themselves and explain their role.
Listen	Encourage all team members to listen to updates and ideas from other team members.
Share	Encourage all team members—especially parents—to share thoughts, ideas, and questions.

Collaborative IEP Meetings: Resources

Progress Center Tip Sheet: IEP Team Meeting Guide for Families

PROGRESS Center
at the American Institutes for Research®

Promoting Progress for Students with Disabilities

IEP Team Meeting Guide for Families

You are the expert on your child and a critical member of the individualized team that develops the IEP. You understand the IEP and its parts, why the IEP is important, and the role of the IEP team.

This resource includes information to consider before, during, and after the meeting.

- Prior to the meeting, review the information about the meeting and draft IEP, use this guide to help you review it.
- During the meeting, use the information and questions presented in this guide to help you participate. Your thoughts, questions, and reactions throughout the meeting. Listen carefully and ask questions all your concerns have been addressed and your questions have been answered.
- After the meeting, the team will begin to implement the IEP and monitor progress. You consider any follow-up needed after the meeting.

Before the Meeting

Prior to the meeting, you will receive an official IEP meeting notice. If you receive the notice and have enough time to prepare for and participate in the meeting, you should sign it and return it as soon as possible. If not, you can request a new meeting date. The table below includes things to consider and resources to refer to as you prepare for the meeting. Use the notes column to write anything you want to discuss during the meeting.

Things to Consider Before the Meeting	Notes
The team will gather information and data about your child to inform the IEP development. To support this process, you can: • Learn more about the key parts of the IEP. • Learn about who will be attending the IEP meeting and their roles during the meeting. • Share your and your child's concerns and needs with the team a couple of weeks prior to the meeting. • Review available information and note any questions or concerns that you might have. This may include: – your child's most recent evaluation, IEP, and progress data; – any draft content that is shared, such as a draft present levels statement; and – samples of your child's work. • Identify if there is anyone else you would like to invite to the meeting who may have knowledge about your child. Ensure that you have told the IEP team about the individual's attendance. • Let the school know if you need an interpreter to access the meeting. The school is required to provide you with an interpreter if needed. • Share whether you would prefer to attend in person or by conference or video call. Both options are available to meet your needs. • Confirm you have been given a copy of your parental rights, also known as procedural safeguards.	

PROGRESS Center at the American Institutes for Research®



Iris Center: Collaborating with Families of Students with Disabilities

Family Engagement: Collaborating with Families of Students with Disabilities

- Challenge
- Initial Thoughts
- Perspectives & Resources
- Wrap Up
- Assessment

[Provide Feedback](#)

Family Engagement: Collaborating with Families of Students with Disabilities

This module addresses the importance of engaging the families of students with disabilities in their child's education. It highlights some of the key factors that affect these families and outlines some practical ways to build relationships and create opportunities for involvement (est. completion time: 1 hour).

Earn the [Professional Development Certificate](#) for this module.

Work through the sections of this module in the order presented in the STAR graphic above.





Hearing Parents' Priorities

Dr. David Bateman shares a story from an IEP meeting that highlights an important reminder:

The IEP *is meant to address all of a student's individual needs*, and *family input and perspective are critical* for developing and implementing an IEP that meets the child's needs.

It serves as a reminder
that the team's purpose
is to address all of the
individual needs of the child.



Source: Progress Center (Promoting Progress for Students with Disabilities). [*Stories from the Classroom: Hearing Parents' Priorities.*](#)

Strategies for De-escalating Disagreements and Conflict Resolution

Proactive Strategies for Disagreements

CADRE Continuum of Dispute Resolution Processes & Practices																				
Levels of Intervention		Prevention				Disagreement			Conflict				Procedural Safeguards			Legal Review				
Assistance/ Intervention Options		Family Engagement	Participant & Stakeholder Training	Stakeholder Council	Collaborative Rule Making	Parent to Parent Assistance	Case Manager	Telephone Intermediary	Facilitation	Mediation Models	Ombudsperson	Third Party Opinion/Consultation	Resolution Meeting	Mediation Under IDEA	Written State Complaints	Due Process Hearing	Hearing Appeal (Two-Tier Systems)	Litigation	Legislation	
		Third-Party Assistance																	Third-Party Intervention	
		Decision Making by Parties																	Decision Making by Third-Party	
		Interest-Based Focus																	Rights-Based Focus	
		Informal & Flexible																	Formal & Fixed	

Source: The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE). [CADRE Continuum](#).

Strategy 1: L.C. and the 3 Rs for De-escalation

Responsive strategies for addressing disagreements in an IEP meeting

Listen

- **Action:** Validate emotion.
- Example: “You’re understandably upset. No one wants to hear their child is being hurt.”

Clarify

- **Action:** Gather details.
- Example: “Can you tell me what your child described to you? When did this happen?”

Redirect

- **Action:** Suggest next steps.
- Example: “I’d like to connect with the teacher and your child today. Then we’ll touch base tomorrow to go over what I’ve found.”

Reconnect

- **Action:** Encourage proper channels.
- Example: “Sometimes there are details the teacher may be aware of that can help us understand the full picture.”

Resolve

- **Action:** Offer a plan.
- Example: “We’ll put a safety check-in in place for the week, and I’ll follow up with your child every other day. Let’s reassess next Friday.”

Source: Cube for Teachers. (2025, August 8). [*De-Escalation Guide for Principals: Working Alongside High-Concern or Escalating Parents.*](#)

Strategy 2: Conflict Coaching

Responsive strategies for addressing disagreements in an IEP meeting

Stage 1: Discover the Story

- **Inviting the Initial Story** – What is the conflict?
- **Refining the Initial Story** – Do I fully understand the conflict?
- **Testing the Initial Story** – What perspectives or assumptions of the party may need to be changed?

Stage 2: Know the Conflict Driver's Identity, Emotion, Power

- **Identity** – Who do I/they want to be respected as?
- **Emotion** – How do I/they want to feel in this relationship/situation?
- **Power** – What can I/they make happen in this situation?

Stage 3: Craft the Best Story

- Focus on “what can be” – the future.
- Visioning the desired future.
- The best visions are detailed, clarified, refined.
- Help parties discuss realistic outcomes and coping strategies if change is difficult.

Stage 4: Enact the Story With Skills

- Is the process of skills development – How To make the best story happen. It includes:
 - Critical skills necessary to enact the “best” story.
 - Skills development agenda.
 - Skills development work.

Source: cadreworks.org. [Conflict Coaching for Special Education: Trust Is the Issue](#). CADRE Conference 2022.

Strategy 3: Using a Conflict Resolution Framework

CADRE's Collaborative Frameworks

Facilitation and Mediation

- Neutral third-party support during IEP or resolution meetings
 - Parent-to-Parent Assistance
 - Case Manager
 - Telephone Intermediary

Conflict Coaching

- One-on-one support to build trust and analyze conflict perspectives

Source: The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE). [*CADRE Continuum*](#).

Strategies for Resolving Conflict With Educational Advocates

Early Engagement

- Early involvement promotes transparency and collaboration among stakeholders.
- Engage parents with advocates early to build collaboration and prevent conflict escalation.
- Invite parents and advocates to support planning for the child, not just to the crisis.

Clear Communication

- Share goals to align focus.
- Define advocates' roles, responsibilities, and communication protocols to avoid confusion and align efforts.
- Clarify advocates' roles, responsibilities, and communication protocols to ensure alignment and minimize misunderstandings.
- Set clear expectations early to foster trust and prevent adversarial dynamics.

Collaborative Partnership

- Frame advocates as partners committed to supporting parents' success to build trust and mutual respect.
- Emphasize shared purpose: "We're all here to support the student."

De-escalation and Conflict Resolution: Resources

De-Escalation Guide for Principals: Working Alongside High-Concern or Escalating Parents



CADRE 2022: Conflict Coaching for Special Education: *Trust is The Issue*



The Office for Dispute Resolution (Pennsylvania) *Six-Step Conflict Engagement Model*



CADRE Continuum: Prevention and Disagreement

CADRE Continuum of Dispute Resolution Processes & Practices																		
Levels of Intervention	Prevention				Disagreement			Conflict				Procedural Safeguards			Legal Review			
Assistance/ Intervention Options	Family Engagement	Participant & Stakeholder Training	Stakeholder Council	Collaborative Rule Making	Parent to Parent Assistance	Case Manager	Telephone Intermediary	Facilitation	Mediation Models	Ombudsperson	Third Party Opinion/Consultation	Resolution Meeting	Mediation Under IDEA	Written State Complaints	Due Process Hearing	Hearing Appeal (Two-Tier Systems)	Litigation	Legislation
Dimensions that help clarify placement of the options along the Continuum	Third-Party Assistance							Third-Party Intervention										
	Decision Making by Parties							Decision Making by Third-Party										
	Interest-Based Focus							Rights-Based Focus										
	Informal & Flexible							Formal & Fixed										

Source: The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE). [CADRE Continuum](#).

Strategy Review

Communication

Strategy 1:
Communication Techniques

Strategy 2:
Collaborative IEP Practices

Strategy 3:
Support Proactive and
Collaborative IEP Meeting
Engagement

De-escalation and Conflict Resolution

Strategy 1: L.C. and the
3 Rs for De-escalation

Strategy 2:
Conflict Coaching

Strategy 3:
Using Conflict Resolution
Frameworks

Applying Strategies to the Reflection Activity

Independent Activity

Independent Activity: A Situation Comparison

Step 1- Watch the Videos

Step 2 – Complete the Comparison Chart

Step 3 – Reflect on Your Practices

- Be prepared to discuss in small groups when we reconvene
- Discuss insights from independent activity
- Share strategies and lessons learned

Independent Activity

Please make the following edits to this graphic:

Step 1 – Watch the Videos. **[Change hyphen to en dash; insert space before en dash; add period after "Videos"]**

Step 2 – Complete the Comparison Chart. **[Add period after "Chart"]**

Step 3 – Reflect on Your Practices.

- Be prepared to discuss in small groups when we reconvene.
- Discuss insights from independent activity.
- Share strategies and lessons learned.

[Add period after each sentence in Step 3.]

Are icons missing before each step?

Solution-Based Learning Series

The goal of the Lead IDEA Solution-Based Learning Series is to help principals and special education directors work together to strengthen partnerships with families and advocates to reduce conflict and improve collaboration.

Step 1: A Tale of Two Conversations

A Tale of Two Conversations is a two-part video originally developed by the Office for Dispute Resolution. The video features actors portraying a parent of a child with a disability and a school administrator meeting in the administrator's office at the parent's request.

In "Take One," the parent and administrator discuss the child's special education program, but their communication is ineffective—they talk but don't truly listen.

In "Take Two," both individuals demonstrate more effective communication skills, resulting in a more productive conversation.

The assigned videos were produced by the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE).

Step 2: Complete the Comparison Chart

Step 2 – Complete the Comparison Chart

Check the cell to indicate the presence of each proactive conflict resolution strategy item.		Take One Did the Administrator or Parent ...		Take Two Did the Administrator or Parent ...	
		Admin	Parent	Admin	Parent
Procedural Safeguards	Had an opportunity to review education records	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Contributed to creating an environment or feel comfortable disagreeing with decisions made by the school system related to identification, evaluation, placement and special education services	☐	☐	☐	☐
Collaboration	Limited use of jargon and overly technical language	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Provided time adequate information sharing	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Established clarity of roles and alignment of expectations	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Acknowledged differing perspectives or values	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Reduced pressures regarding time or resource	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Acknowledged emotional responses and daily stressors	☐	☐	☐	☐
Communication	Kept an an open mind and held off judgements	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Used reflective listening and asked open-ended questions	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Used silence strategically	☐	☐	☐	☐
Building Trust	Created a trusting relationship by demonstrating mutual respect for situations and experiences	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Made the family feel heard and valued	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Ensured that the collaboration will support their child's needs	☐	☐	☐	☐
	Delivered or planned for timely and complete information	☐	☐	☐	☐

Step 3: Reflect on Your Practices

Be prepared to discuss in small groups when we reconvene.

- One successful strategy I noticed in the videos was . . .
- One challenge I noticed in the videos was . . .
- One thing I'll do differently in my next IEP meeting or meeting with parents is . . .
- One way I'll engage advocates more effectively is . . .
- One barrier I'll work to address is . . .
- How can the interactions observed in the "Take Two" video build the parent partnership and reduce the need for the family to seek support from an advocate?

Additional thoughts I had while engaging in this activity are . . .

Solution-Based Learning Series Next Steps

November 13, 2025	Independent Work	December 4, 2025
Virtual Session		Virtual Session
Knowledge Development Session 75 minutes 6:00–7:15 p.m. ET		Reflection Session 45 minutes 6:00–6:45 p.m. ET

Closing and Next Steps

What Is On Your Mind?



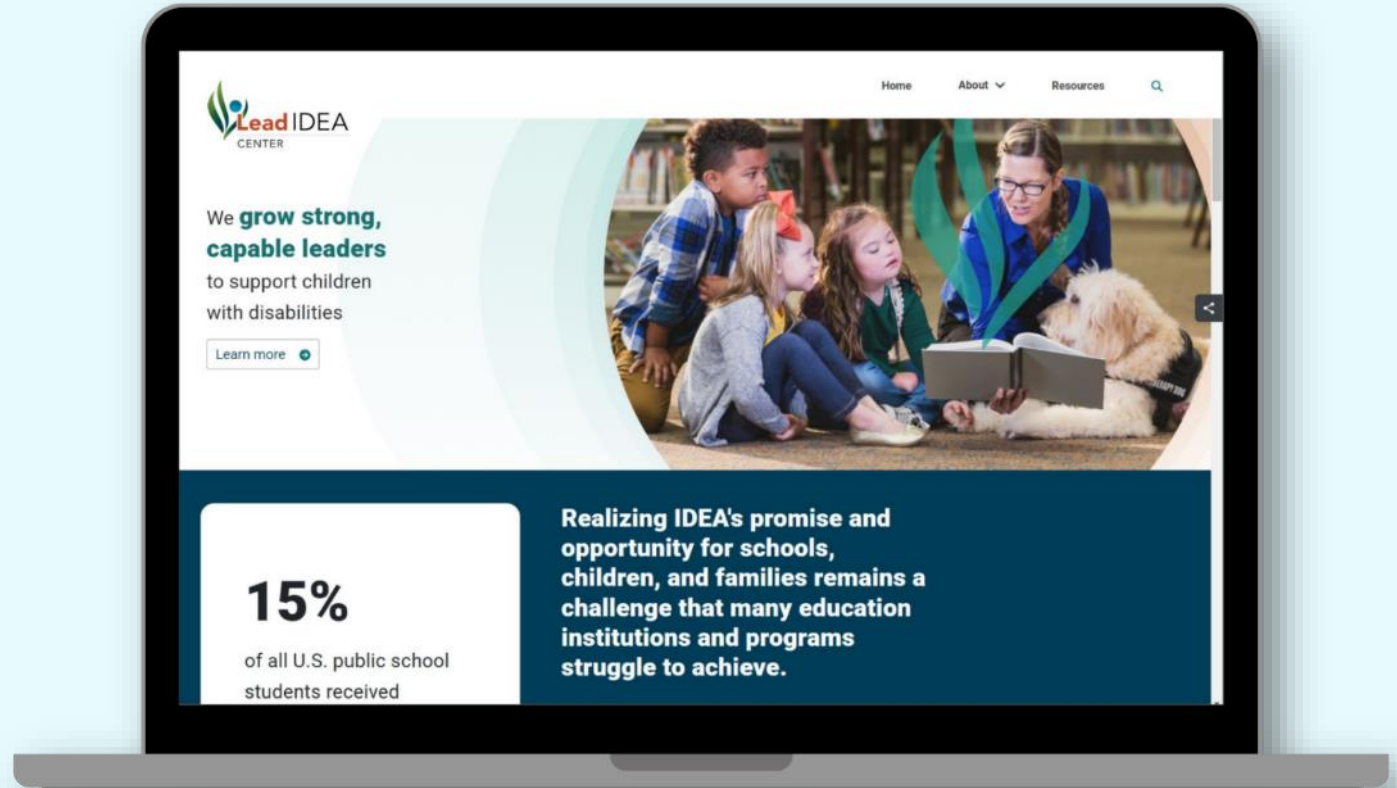
Check-In

Certificate Requirements

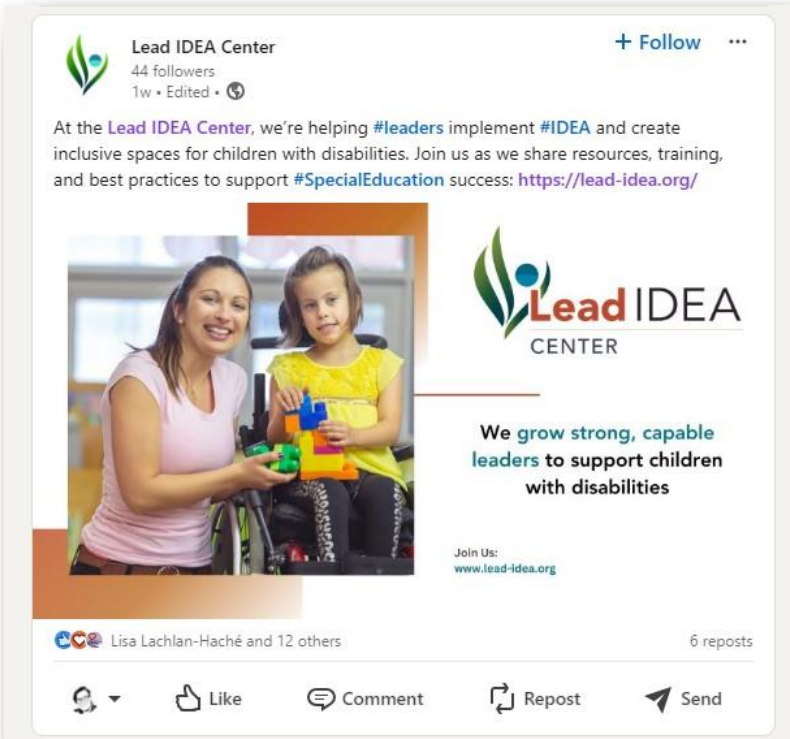
- <insert information about cert>

Connect With the Lead IDEA Center

Visit Our Website:
<https://lead-idea.org>



Follow Us on LinkedIn, Instagram, and X!



Contact Us

LeadIDEA@air.org

1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor

Arlington, VA 22202-3289

202.403.5000

<https://www.air.org/centers/lead-idea-center>

www.air.org



This material was produced under the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Award No. H325Z230007. David Emenheiser serves as the project officer. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, or enterprise mentioned on this website is intended or should be inferred.