



## Communicating for Student Success

Good communication between parents and the school district is critical in working together to meet the educational needs of students. However, sometimes challenges may need to be addressed with additional support. How parents and schools communicate with each other plays an important role in finding common ground. Facilitators and mediators support collaborative conversations to help build a foundation for student achievement. The value of mediation is recognized by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* and the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education. Facilitation and mediation services are available free of charge through Special Education Mediation Services (SEMS).

### Facilitation

To ensure your voice is heard at special education meetings, you can request help from a trained, neutral facilitator. A facilitator can manage special education meetings so discussions are collaborative and everyone at the meeting has a chance to contribute ideas and provide feedback. Any special education meeting can be a facilitated meeting, including individualized education program (IEP) team meetings.

### Mediation

When there are challenges about an educational issue, such as your child's services or placement, you can request free mediation. Mediation provides a confidential setting for participants to explore options to meet your child's needs. Like a facilitator, a neutral mediator supports a collaborative approach to finding a mutually agreeable solution. The solution may result in a written binding agreement.

### Facilitated Meetings and Mediation are:

- **Collaborative**  
Facilitators and mediators guide a productive discussion. Mediators do not offer or enforce solutions. Team members make all the decisions.
- **Voluntary**  
You and the school must both agree to have a facilitator or mediator.
- **Confidential**  
Mediation discussions are confidential by law. Facilitated meeting participants can agree to sign a confidentiality agreement at the meeting.
- **Free**  
SEMS provides the services at no cost to you or the district.

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## Benefits of a Collaborative Approach Through Facilitation and Mediation

- Learn more about the educational process.
- Develop and maintain a positive working relationship with the school team.
- Understand each other's perspective.
- Keep the focus on positive outcomes for your child.
- Find solutions agreeable to all involved.
- Resolve issues quickly and avoid lengthy investigations or costly court proceedings.



Call **833-543-7178 (833-Kids1st)**

### SEMS Provides Mediation and Facilitation Services

Special Education Mediation Services (SEMS) provides free facilitators and mediators for special education. The SEMS intake coordinator will work with you to understand and prepare for a facilitated meeting or mediation.

#### Facilitators and Mediators Will:

- Remain neutral.
- Keep the meeting on track and centered on your child's needs.
- Document the agreement (at mediation).

#### Facilitators and Mediators Will Not:

- Give legal advice.
- Be part of the team.
- Advocate for a position.
- Make decisions for the student's education program.

## Resources

- [Special Education Mediation Services \(SEMS\)](#)

The Michigan organization provides free mediation and facilitation. SEMS helps parents, educators, and service providers develop positive relationships and resolve issues related to early intervention and special education.

- [The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education \(CADRE\)](#)

A national organization promoting collaborative processes in finding solutions to educational issues. CADRE includes a library, articles, webinars, and other resources.

- [IDEA Special Education Mediation](#)

A guide for parents about mediation from CADRE.



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