

# Collaborative Communication in Special Education

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Special Education Mediation Services





# Collaborative Communication in Special Education



***Special Education  
Mediation Services***

*Working Together for Student Achievement in Michigan*

# Special Education Mediation Services

## Grant-Funded

A Grant-Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education (OSE).

## Free

Offer FREE mediation, IEP facilitation and collaborative communication training to schools and parents across Michigan.

## Federally Mandated

Enables the OSE to meet its obligation under the IDEA to provide statewide mediation services at no-cost to schools and parents to resolve special education disputes.



# What We Do



We support students who receive special education supports and services (IFSP/IEP) birth to age 26 by fostering cooperation and effective teamwork among those who plan their education. The overall goal is to help students, parents and educators make decisions that improve education outcomes.



# How We Do It

Free • Effective • Fast

## Mediation

A FREE neutral mediator leads families and schools through a process to resolve conflict and come to a mutual agreement on a plan to benefit the student and improve outcomes.

## Facilitation

We help families and schools navigate complex meetings, stay on task, and make sure all points of view are heard by providing a FREE neutral meeting facilitator.





# Mediation and Facilitation Comparison



## Mediation:

When you know you disagree.

## Facilitation:

When you don't know what you don't know and you do know that you should know, call us, we'll help you.

Both are **voluntary** processes.

	Mediation	Facilitation
Goals	Resolve a specific dispute	Complete the process efficiently and collaboratively
Process	Mediator establishes	School establishes
Who attends	People who disagree	Special Education team
Existence of "sides"	Mediator must be neutral	Facilitator must be neutral

# How To Request FREE Service

(Did we mention they're free?)



Call  
833-KIDS-1ST  
Mikids1st.org



Participate in  
Intake Process



We contact parties,  
arrange schedules  
and process  
paperwork.



Parties Meet



# Why Should You Use SEMS FREE Services?



Behavior plan  
not being  
implemented  
as discussed.

Disagreement  
about an  
independent  
evaluation for  
speech  
therapy.

Personality  
conflict  
between Dad  
and Resource  
Room Teacher.

School wants  
student  
placed in a  
self-contained  
classroom and  
family  
disagrees.

When you don't agree with one another.



# Why Should You Use SEMS FREE Services?



Family feels out of touch with what's going on at school and wants better communication.

School wants family to stop texting teacher at 10pm and wants improved interactions.

IEP not being implemented as written and need meeting to discuss improved plan.

School believes student needs specialized instruction but family disagrees.

When you need help finding a solution that is focused on the student.



# Where We Provide Services

- Mutually agreed upon
- Local
- Virtual



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# When to Use Mediation



- Disagreements over
  - Eligibility for programs, services
  - Evaluation interpretations
  - Transition
  - Discipline
  - Service delivery
- Communication and/or relationship issues
- Due Process or State Complaint

Call us early call us often!  
1-833-KIDS-1ST



Attorneys and advocates have no role in mediation.

**FACT CHECK!**  
**True or false?**

**False:** Mediation is designed to let educators and parents speak for themselves and develop solutions to meet student needs. Attorneys and advocates may participate in mediation to support the parties and the process.





# The Mediator's Role



## Will

- Remain neutral
- Conduct the mediation
- Ensure that all parties have equal opportunity to express their ideas and thoughts
- Make sure everyone abides by rules for appropriate conduct
- Help the parties stay on the topic of their disagreement
- Guide the participants towards creating an agreement
- Record the agreement.

## Won't

- Take sides
- Give legal advice
- Make a decision
- Enforce decision.





Mediation Agreements are written by the family and school.

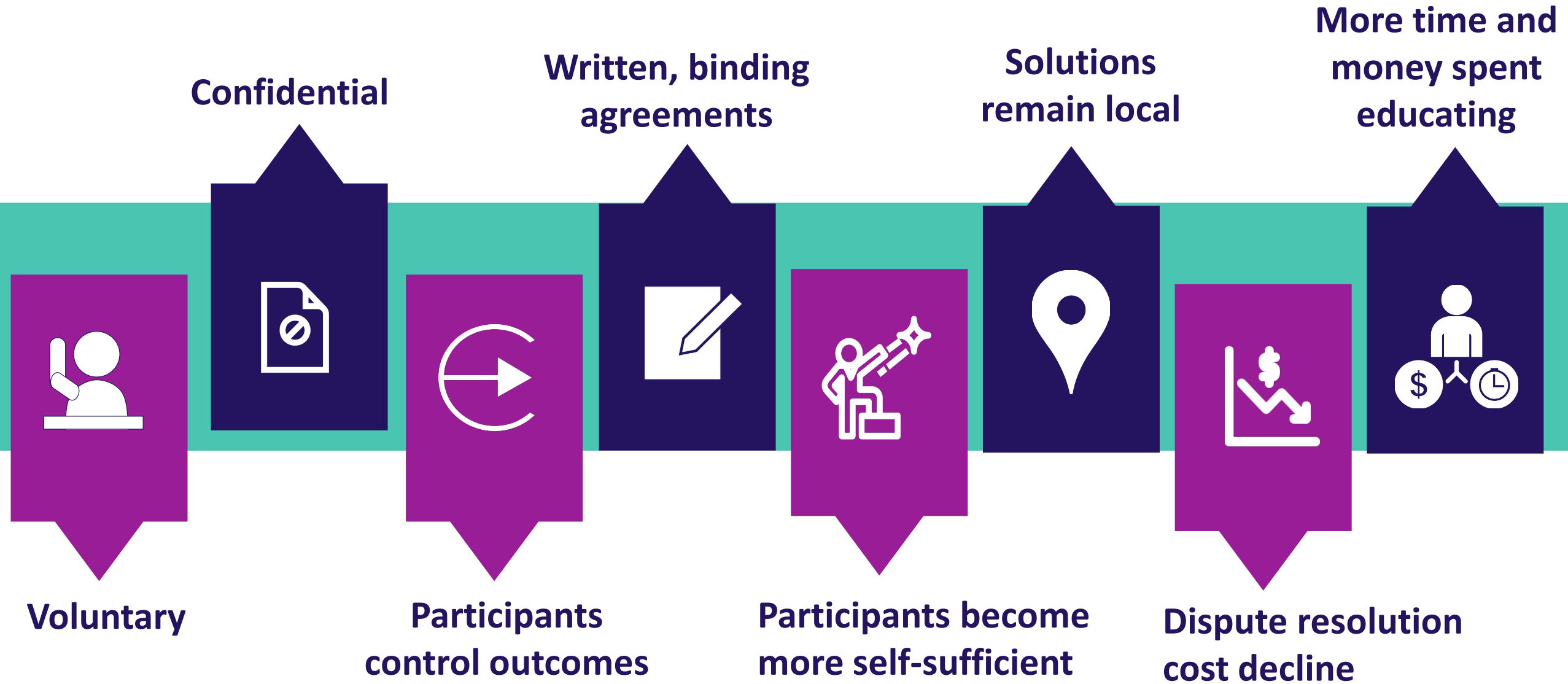
**True:** The parties remain the decision makers in mediation. The mediator cannot decide the issues for them.


**FACT CHECK!**

**True or false?**



# Benefits of Mediation





Mediation is considered a district failure.

**FACT CHECK!**  
**True or false?**

**False:** The OSE is aware that there are disputes in special education. Its primary concern is how they will be resolved. OSEP and OSE policy favors dispute resolution among the parties first through direct talks or mediation. SEMS reports data in the aggregate only.



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# When to Use Facilitation



- Complex issue
- Relationships strained
- Need help focusing on student issue(s)
- IEP/IFSP
- Disagreement
- Manifestation Determination Review
- Resolution Session related to Due Process.

Call us early call us often!  
1-833-KIDS-1ST



# The Facilitator's Role

## Will

- Receive information about concerns in advance of meeting.
- Acknowledge/Review agenda understanding and meeting guidelines
- Make sure everyone abides by rules for appropriate conduct
- Keep the meeting centered on the student's needs
- Help negotiate disagreements
- Keep the meeting on track and on time
- Conduct meeting if requested.

## Won't

- Be a part of the team
- Give legal advice
- Take sides
- Make a decision.







Mediators and facilitators are  
**NOT** advocates.

**True:** Mediators and facilitators are obligated to remain neutral. Advocating for a school or parent could upset the balance between them and make solutions harder to reach.



**FACT CHECK!**  
True or false?

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# The Big Picture

## Michigan Special Education Communication Continuum

	Stage 1	Stage 2				Stage 3	Stage 4				Stage 5	
Level of Intervention	Prevention	Discomfort, Questions, Complexity				Disagreement	Procedural Safeguards				Legal Review	
Assistance, Intervention Options	Conflict resolution skills training	Informal party-to-party discussions	MDE toll-free information phone line 888-320-8384	Conciliation (telephone intermediary)	IEP, IFSP facilitation	Pre-filing mediation	Mediation under IDEA	Complaints	Resolution sessions	Due process hearings	Litigation	Legislation
Dimensions	Third party assistance						Third-party intervention					
	Decision making by parties						Third-party decision making					
	Interest-based						Rights-based					
	Informal, flexible						Formal, fixed					

# Communication Workshops



## Possible workshop topics

- Collaborative Communication Skills
- Effective IEPs
- Engaging Families
- Conflict Resolution
- Meeting Management
- Customized upon request.

Visit [www.mikids1st.org](http://www.mikids1st.org) to complete form  
or call (517) 334-0034

Keep in Touch



## Newsletter



## COMMUNICATION CONNECTION

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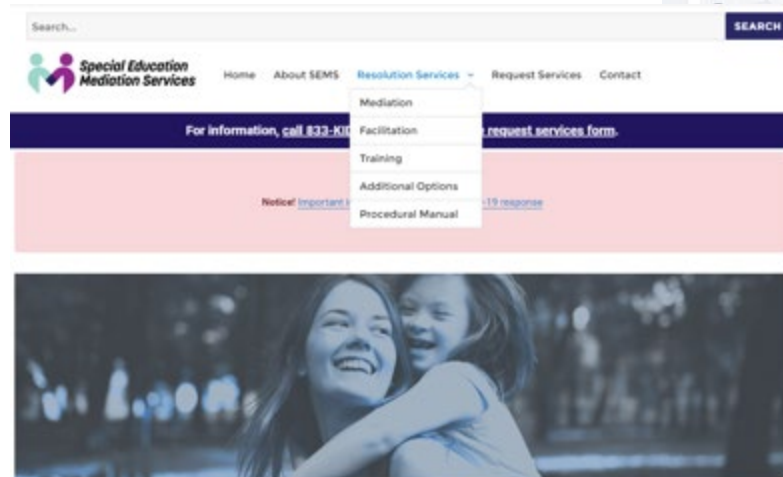


**SEMS Is Open to Help You VIRTUALLY**

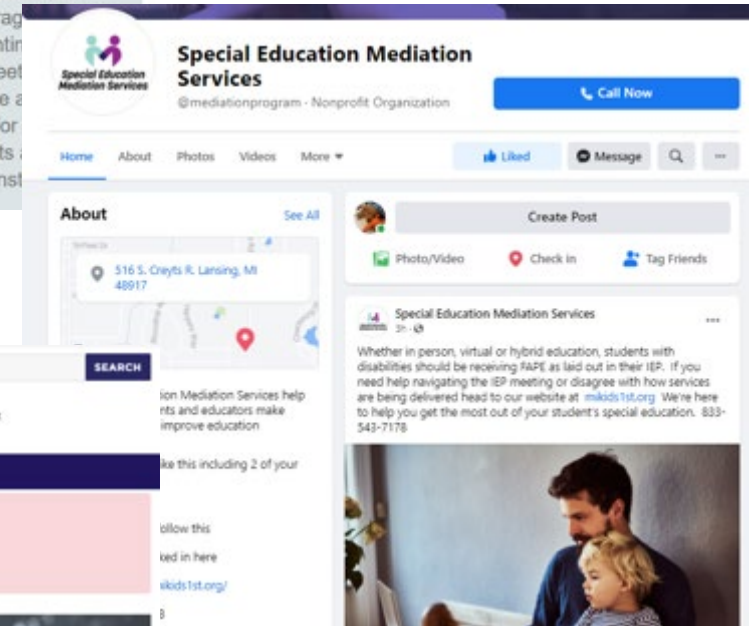
### Contingency Learning Plans and Recovery Services

Recent guidance from the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education encourages districts to implement Contingency Learning Plans to help meet the obligation to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. As districts determine the appropriate mode of instruction...

## Website



## Social Media



# Remember SEMS Is...



**FREE**



**FAST**



**CONFIDENTIAL**



**EFFECTIVE**







# Results

- Improve communication and relationships
- Created safe space to problem solve
- Build collaboration skills
- Improve student outcomes.



# Contact SEMS



## Services

1-833-Kids1st  
(833-543-7178)



## Program Information

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Lansing, MI 48917  
Phone: 517.334.0034  
Fax: 517.220.4181  
Email: [info@MiKids1st.org](mailto:info@MiKids1st.org)



## Website

[Mikids1st.org](http://Mikids1st.org)

# Thank You

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Cindy Van Neste, Outreach Representative

Laura Zangara, Intake Coordinator



Michigan Department of Education  
Office of Special Education



# Stay Connected

**[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)**

**[info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)**

**1-800-552-4821**



 **@MichiganAllianceForFamilies**

 **@mialliance**

 **/MichiganAlliance**

# Disclaimer and Compliance

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Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 is the landmark federal law that bans sex discrimination in schools, whether it is in curricular, extra-curricular or athletic activities.

Title IX states: “No person in the U.S. shall, on the basis of sex be excluded from participation in, or denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal aid.”

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## **For inquiries and complaints regarding Title IX, contact:**

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Michigan Department of Education, Hannah Building,  
608 West Allegan, P.O. Box 30008, Lansing, MI 48909



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# Michigan Alliance for Families

Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Michigan's federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

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