

**Collaborative Communication  
in Special Education**

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Special Education Mediation Services



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**Collaborative  
Communication in  
Special Education  
Dispute Resolution**



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**Special Education Mediation Services**

Grant-Funded	Free	Federally Mandated
A Grant-Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education Office of Special Education (OSE).	Offer FREE mediation, IEP facilitation and collaborative communication training to schools and parents across Michigan.	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.

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## Why are we HERE?

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## More need to know!

### Enhanced efforts on SEMS program outreach

- Attend special education related conferences.
- Attend family serving conferences related to children with special needs.
- Speak with Parent Advisory Committees.
- Speak with ISD, LEAs and PSA administrative staff.
- Professional development.



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## 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.



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## 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.



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## Mediation and Facilitation Comparison

**Mediation:**  
When you know you disagree.

**Facilitation:**  
When you need help navigating complexity.

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

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## Why Should You Use SEMS FREE Services?

Behavior plan not being implemented as discussed.

Disagreement about an independent evaluation for speech therapy.

Personality conflicts.

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

When you don't agree with one another.

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## 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 10 pm 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.

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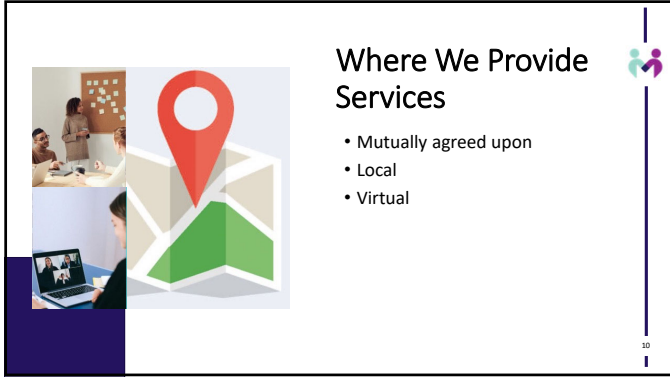
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**Where We Provide Services**

- Mutually agreed upon
- Local
- Virtual

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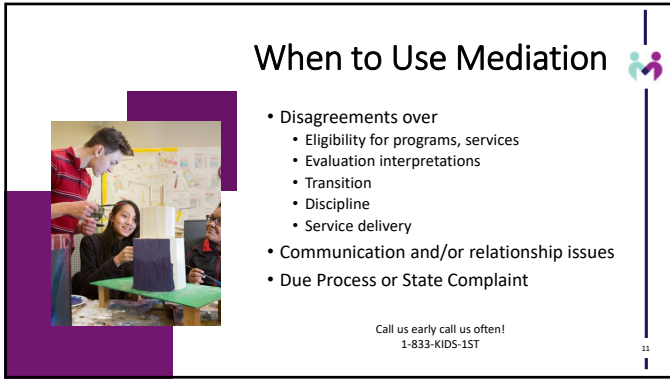
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**When to Use Mediation**

- 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

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**FACT CHECK!**  
True or false?

**Attorneys and advocates have no role in mediation.**

**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.

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### 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

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### 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?

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### Mediation is considered a district failure.

**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.

**FACT CHECK!**  
True or false?

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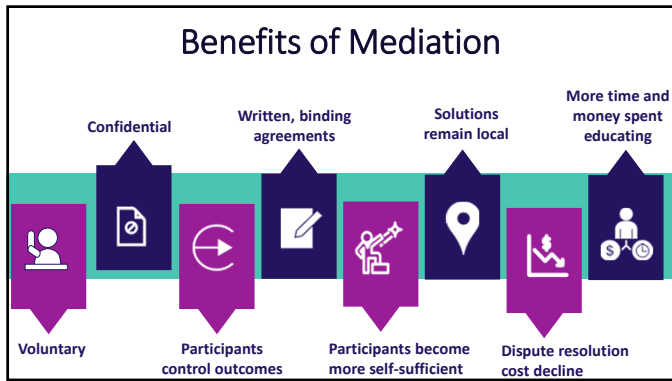
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### When to Use Facilitation

- 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!**

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### 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.

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**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	Mediation (in-person, telephone, video)	Pre-filing mediation	Mediation under IDEA Complaints Resolution sessions	Due process hearings Litigation Litigation
Dimensions	Third party assistance	Third-party intervention		Third-party decision making	
	Decision making by parties	Rights-based		Formal, fixed	
	Informal, flexible				

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### How To Request FREE Service

(Did we mention they're free?)

Call  
1-833-KIDS-1<sup>ST</sup>  
Mikids1st.org

Participate in  
Intake Process

We contact parties, arrange schedules and process paperwork.

Parties Meet

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Keep in Touch



**Newsletter**

Special Education Mediation Services  
COMMUNICATION CONNECTION

December 2020 | Issue 3

**SEMS is Open to Help You VIRTUALLY**

Contingency Learning Plans and Recovery Services

Recent guidance from the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) regarding Contingency Learning Plans to help meet Michigan's obligations to provide a free public education (FPE) to all students. An article on the appropriate needs of the...

**Social Media**

Special Education Mediation Services

**Website**



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**Communication Workshops**



**Possible workshop topics**

- Dispute Resolution Options in Special Education
- Conflict Resolution and Communication in Special Education
- Discipline for Students with Disabilities
- Effective IEP Team Meeting Participation Techniques
- How to Develop Trusting Relationships Between Families and Schools
- How to Communicate with the Most Challenging Personalities Customized upon request.

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

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**Remember SEMS Is...**

 **FREE**

 **FAST**

 **CONFIDENTIAL**

 **EFFECTIVE**

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## Results

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



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## Contact SEMS

 <p>Services</p>	 <p>Program Information</p>	 <p>Website</p>
<p>1-833-Kids1st (833-543-7178)</p>	<p>2111 University Park Dr., Ste.550, Okemos MI 48864 Phone: 517.334.0034 Fax: 517.220.4181 Email: info@MIKids1st.org</p>	<p>Mikids1st.org</p>

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## Thank You

Bern Dempsey, Training Coordinator  
 Taryn Francis, Outreach Representative  
 Beth Kohler, Outreach Coordinator  
 Rebecca Kozlow, Outreach Representative  
 Diane Kullis, Intake Specialist  
 Cheryl Levine, Project Coordinator  
 Cindy Van Neste, Outreach Representative  
 Laura Zangara, Intake Coordinator





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**We are here to support you!**

-  @MichiganAllianceForFamilies
-  @michiganallianceforfamilies /
-  MichiganAlliance



For more information visit:  
<https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org>  
Call: 800-552-4821  
En Español 313-217-1060  
لغة العربية 248-963-0607  
Statewide Email: [info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)



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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)  
1-800-552-4821  
[info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)



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