

CADRE Webinar
Perfect Together:
Aligning and Leveraging State Education Agencies & Parent Centers in Shared Work
Presented by Helen Post and Kim Fratto
January 10, 2018

>> Hello, everyone. I'm Melanie Reese, the director of CADRE. Welcome to today's webinar, "Perfect Together: Aligning and Leveraging State Education Agencies and Parent Centers in Shared Work." We are delighted that you can join us today. The webinar continues a series that began in 2010, and today's is being presented by Kim Fratto and Helen Post. Phone lines have been muted to minimize interruptions. You can enter questions or comments into the questions box, not the chat box, please, on your control panel. The PowerPoint for this webinar is available in the handouts box on your control panel and on the Cadre website. We are extremely fortunate to have Kim and Helen with us today. Helen is the Executive Director of the Utah Parent Center and Utah's statewide Parent Training and Information Project. She has been affiliated with the Center since before 1986 and has served as the executive director since 1989, guiding the Center successfully through a period of significant growth. Under her direction, the award-winning UPC operational philosophy that values reciprocal relationships, teamwork, cooperation, and the highest levels of fully-engaged collaboration. As a parent herself, Helen is a passionate advocate for families and the systems that provide services to their sons and daughters with disabilities. In her capacity as the director of Utah's Parent Center and Information Project and the Utah Parent Center. Helen has had a leadership role in the development, implementation, and evaluation of numerous initiatives related to special education services and programs, and cross-agency collaboration among the many systems that serve individuals with disabilities and their families. Kim Fratto works with the Utah State Board of Education as an education coordinator in the special education services section. She supports local education agencies in the areas of least-restricted environments, English learners with disabilities, specific learning disabilities, and the Utah multi-tiered systems of support. Kim earned her bachelor's in special education - mild to moderate from Utah State University, and her master's in special education with an emphasis in severe disabilities from the University of Utah. Kim also

holds an administrative license and an ESL endorsement. Throughout her teaching career, she has taught in both private and public school settings in the general and special education classroom. She has experience from preschool to post-high school settings. Kim served on the Board of Directors and Professional Advisory Board for the Learning Disability Association of Utah, and is invested in helping all students increase their access and participation in a general education curriculum and setting. With that, I present to you Helen and Kim.

>> Thank you. It's a privilege to be with you this morning, or afternoon wherever you are. We appreciate the opportunity to talk about what we've learned by trying stuff. Of course, what we do in Utah is what we do is what we know. What we know is what we know and what we do is what we do. But we want to share some things that we think have worked for us that might also be helpful to you. We really appreciate the culture in Utah that's characterized by principles and practices that are proven time and time again to be effective in helping us to establish, build, and sustain effective partnerships, and these partnerships have been really important to us. They are able to be sustained over time and through many kinds of changes in our organizations and staff as well. Yeah, we tried stuff, and we tried many different strategies and ways of working together, and we found some things that have been really useful for us. So, the title of this presentation is "Perfect Together," and what we mean by that is that it is perfect because we are together in this challenging work. We believe that the way we work together is excellent, and it's based on mutual respect. We are pleased to have been invited to talk about this important topic by our colleagues and friends at CADRE.

>> It is our hope that as we share information about how we accomplish our shared work in Utah you'll hear some strategies that will seem practical and easy for you to implement in your state. We want you to come away with some things that you can do and some behaviors that maybe already exhibit that you can build upon to build your sustained collaboration. We also want to just make sure that we let you know again and again that these are examples of what works for us. You might hear something that you think might not be doable for you, and that's okay. Again, they're just examples. We'd like you to pick

something that if you walk away with something that you could start to implement that where you could start small, maybe some area that you're already having some success in that you could build upon. That's always a great place to start. So, we'll go ahead and describe what we've done and what we're doing to sustain partnerships that have continued over time, that have been able to provide changes in personnel, and endure across some long-term initiatives and some initiatives that were short-lived.

>> In our introduction that Melanie provided, she described for you the organizations that we're aligned with, and the Utah Parent Center is Utah's parent training and information center, and the state Board of Education is our state education agency. And those designations come from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. And so, with that said, I think most of you recognize that within the act and within the work that we do, we're kind of expected to work together and to work together well in our various roles related to that important federal law and the way it's implemented right down to the school level across the country, and in Utah, we've taken that relationship very seriously over time, and we have what we believe to be a very significant historical relationship the start of the very beginning of our organization history as an entity. The partnership that we have is being characterized by all kinds of investments and all kinds of resources that have been shared and things that have made it possible for us to do our work, and we believe that this historical relationship serves as the foundation for what we're able to do now and what we know we can do in the future. This includes keeping the Parent Center as a key partner representing families at the table in a regular way, valuing our voice and expecting us to be able to represent families and interact with families to bring that informed voice to the table. We have always felt like a key partner of being supported in a very significant way by our state Board of Education. They have included in their support to us, it's been helping provide us a home. And they've helped us have our office space available to us for the many years that we've been in existence, and that lets us use limited resources then to meet our mission to serve families. Over the years, our relationship has continued to grow and develop through a number of levels of collaboration, including contact, cooperation, and collaboration. Now, the choice of these words to describe our relationship is purposeful, and we'll talk more about that in a few minutes. We value each

other as essential partners, and it takes different kinds and levels of collaboration to really make this work. From the beginning of our work together, we've always valued and recognized that we need the other to do the things that we do effectively and well. We are also working on it. We need to attend to it all the time, particularly as we experience those changes that we've brought friends. And we do have a solid relationship as a result of that. Our partnership has been shaped by mutual investment of resources to produce the very best outcomes that we can influence for children in use with disabilities in Utah. The resources that we invest are knowledge and expertise, perspective, materials, staff time, and funding. We share and look at data to identify trends and shifting environments. We talk about everything from educational service programs to be sure that what we are doing as a parent center and what the state Board is doing, and their role really maximizes the resources that we have available to us and it supports and builds on what we're doing in our shared work. So, we align what we're doing as much as possible and we leverage all kinds of resources to make that happen. So, as we talk about what we do together and how we work together, you're going to hear evidence of some of these things and how we're involved together, intricately involved in development, implementation, and the evaluation of our various initiatives at the state Board of Education and vice-versa. I want to talk for a few minutes about some very practical things that we think have helped our relationship be where it is. Some things that have helped. The very first that we'll just acknowledge is that in our state, because of where our population is and where our offices are located, we're in close proximity to each other. In fact, the state Board and the Parent Center offices are just a few blocks from each other. So, we literally are close in locations that what that helps to do is to facilitate all kinds of interactions in a very easy way, and it keeps us engaged in multiple collaborations. It's easy to be in the same room, to know each other, and when it's needed, we can easily use a variety of ways to communicate and meet. We go to them and they come to us. It helps that we know each other and that proximity is something that contributes to that, but it really requires that we take the time and invest the energy and be open with one another so that we really do know one another, that we can have that confidence that our relationship is based on lots of shared and common things that we have together. We use every method of communication that we can. We are on each other's' list serves. We get all kinds of things our state board puts

out to special education directors and all of the stakeholders, and we try and reciprocate that in every way that we can, sharing with them the things that we disseminate to families. We use e-mail and phone and video conferencing and we get in the same room every chance that we have. So, communication is key to all of this. We also recognize in our center that this is not helpful to have only my perspective as the director -- not that I'm the one that's invited to participate in systems-level activity. Over the years, we're recognized that this is not a healthy way to sustain relationships. We have fabulous people who work here who have a wealth of knowledge and experience in many different perspectives because of that, and so there are many of our staff who are involved in all levels of collaboration that occurs between our center and between the state, and it really enriches the contributions that we make with each other. And so, this goes deep in our organizations, that we know each other and work with each other. All of the specialists in the state Board are involved with us, and all of our staff are involved in ways together. We recognize that a key element of relationships is being able to show trust and to be trustworthy, and that trust is a real firm belief that we know how things are going to be said and done and that we know that we can rely on and have the ability in our relationship, and the strength in our relationship, to be trusting in the things that we say and do together. We know how things are going to work out when we head into it. And being trustworthy is also a really important element of this. It means that we're dependable and that we know that when we're drawn into things and we're asked to do things on both sides that we follow through and make sure that we do it and that we do it well. It helps that we have mutual respect and that is a key characteristic that we really value and foster and continually exhibit in our behavior and in our communication. And it helps that we have a culture based on the belief that we really can't do this work without each other. This means that everything we say and everything we do sends the message that we're partners, and we model it at every chance that we get. For those of you who may not have these kinds of things in place in your state and in your relationship between your parent center and your state agency, as Kim stated earlier, it's great to find a place where you can start. Just wherever you are, open the door and walk through and find ways to work together effectively. Sometimes that might mean that you're resolving some conflict or problems from before, but that's kind of the point in all of this. That's an

important part of what we do. We help families do that and the services that we provide in both of our roles, and we really need to be able to do that between ourselves as well. We've also want to just set this up to say that we've chosen to frame what we're going to present in the continuum of collaboration that helps, and that we became aware of through our state's involvement in an activity called leading by convening. This will be familiar to some of you. You're going to hear more about this, but I wanted to just quote a couple of the key phrases that came from our work in leading and convening to reinforce the kinds of things that I've just shared. One of that we're interested in practice change at every level that it's needed, and so this means that when we need to, we change what we do together. Another phrase that came out of our work together in leading by convening was the partnership way. That's the way we think. We work together. And this kind of working together, these practices, build connections, and this is essential in today's complex and interconnected system.

>> So, in 2014 we implemented a different way of defining collaboration and engaging stakeholders, including the Utah Parent Center. So, what we were really looking at is building on our relationships and having authentic engagement and collaboration, and pulling the stakeholders in and hearing their voices. So, we participated in a state-wide initiative to improve outcomes for all students by moving beyond just informing the stakeholders of what we were doing to creating opportunities for true interaction and building consensus across special and general education groups and sharing the leadership opportunities, and it really enhanced our collaborative effort. So, instead of just talking at our stakeholder groups, we wanted to talk with them. We examined our relationship across all the stakeholder groups and aligned with the collaboration continuum that Helen mentioned that was developed through the multi-year efforts that created the resources for leading by convening. And we really wanted to examine the quality of our relationship. What we expect and ask of each other and raise expectations that we will engage, not just participate. That was a critical element. So, we really wanted to move from, you know, many of you have heard the phrase, "After all is said and done, more is said than done." We wanted to really get some things done that had meaningful impact and meaningful outcomes for students with disabilities. So, this is shaping our

ongoing collaboration efforts between stakeholders, partner, and across all systems. So, some of the things that really helped to build that authentic engagement was having a person from the outside facilitate for us. Help facilitate the conversation, 'cause so many times you get stuck and then the conversation gets stuck and then it's really easy to get off into the weeds. So, having that facilitator helped with building the relationship, provided instruction for us in coaching. They would take the no so people could be really engaged in the conversation. Helped us provide a solid framework for the discussions, and for discussions that could be hard discussions. Really hard topics. And although we have really strong collaborative relationships across agencies and organizations in Utah -- we're very proud of that. We know we can always do better, and that we always need to work to improve. We can sometimes get complacent and we get busy, we're overworked. I don't know an educator that's not overworked, or a parent of a child with a disability that's not overworked. And so, we want to make sure that we were clear and intentional in our conversation, and we did what was needed and expected so that we could really continue to build those meaningful relationships. So, initially our efforts were organized by Glenna Gallo, our previous state director of special education, and the staff at USBE, and the facilitation was done by Joanne Cashman, the director of the IDEA partnership. So, our efforts are continuing under the leadership of our new Director of Special Education, and USBE has done a little bit of shifting in their organization. So, her title is now assistant superintendent over student services, and we're trying so hard to focus on alignment we pulled in--she oversees other groups. Our student advocacy services as well as special education and the other federal programs. So, we can really align effort because that's how serious we are about it in our state and then working with our stakeholders. Another important aspect that I think has helped us is not starting over but building on what we do well and committing to different ways of collaboration. We've had a lot of changes internally with staff over the years. I've been at the USBE for a little over five years now, so we've had staff turnover. There's been staff turnover at the Utah Parent Center. And being able to start from where somebody left off and not start all the way back at the beginning with something or just switch gears when you have staff turnover is very important. And one of the things I want to mention is when I came to the USBE from a large school district in the state I had previously worked in two different districts. I

already knew about the Utah Parent Center. I had had close interactions with the Parent Center through a Parent Center representative that was assigned to our district from the Parent Center. So, it was a real easy way to continue that relationship 'cause I had already had a relationship with the Parent Center, and it wasn't like I came to the Utah state Board of Education and was like, "Oh, who's the Parent Center and what do they do?" I had that information. So, establishing common understanding then giving buy-in is another very important aspect. So, for partners who have not been as intimately involved in our work, they need to understand what is being asked of them, and we need to make sure that it's reasonable, that it aligns with what their responsibilities are in their relationship and that it's something that's doable for them or we won't have the buy-in. And if you don't get that buy-in, and if it's unrealistic and people don't understand the need and where you're going with it, then it doesn't help build that relationship. So, we also want to align and leverage our initiative, because we have many initiatives going on in the state, and like I said in the beginning, some initiatives are long-standing, and others are short-lived. And we want to make sure that we're aligning and that we're maximizing all of our efforts. So, this helps parents for our Utah state systematic improvement plan, which we call our SSIP, and when we were looking at deciding what would go in our SSIP, we worked very closely with the Utah Parent Center and contacting stakeholders and getting information back and really carrying the voice of our stakeholders to say, "What do we think are the key things that we need to work on?" From that information, we came up with our three areas that we really needed to focus on. We had feedback that we didn't have high enough expectations for students with disabilities. We need teachers that had effective content knowledge and you had to deliver effective instructions, and we needed to increase support for multi-tiered systems of support in a secondary setting, and all that work around our SSIP came from stakeholder feedback and through this authentic relationship in engagement that we have, like, the Utah Parent Center.

>> Yeah.

>> So, as we've talked about, the collaboration continuum. Up on the screen you'll see a graphic. This is for you to refer to as we go through the next parts of the slide. Okay. Oh,

and then you also have it as a hand-out. I apologize. So, this shows the five levels of the collaboration continuum, and statements that define the various levels. Some of the information, as Helen said, will be familiar to many of you, for those of you who have been involved in leading by convening. A number of parent centers in states have been trained and are using this process in the tools, and for some it might be new. We want to provide the information about what we are doing by describing our work and what we're doing together as evidence of how these levels of collaboration are important and useful, and this really just provided, you know, a framework for us to really move to a deeper level of collaboration and authentic engagement. So, on the first part of the collaboration continuum you have contact, and then cooperation, coordination, and convergence. Oh-- why do it in the wrong order. Collaboration and then convergence. Helen and I had a discussion about this – Do we think some of these need to be shifted around? So, you can work on that in your state, what works for you.

>> Okay. So, it takes investment, risk, and then it leads to hopefully what you would think as a benefit. We think it's been a great benefit for us. So, for contact, this is the part where you really just share ideas and information. So, you have to have open and honest dialogue to engage parents. And this is really where we had our focus groups and stakeholder feedback where we really started sharing the information. Just really getting to know one another. Do panel discussions. These are some of the things that we did to move this work - facilitated discussion, and really an open invitation to provide feedback where we can have open, honest feedback, non-judgmental, like that safe zone where people can really speak freely. So, through the results we have recognized that it includes more informed and active parent perspective. So, we felt like if we did these things, our outcome would be that parents would be able to feel like they were a valued member of the table. Their voice was being heard and incorporated, and we could learn a great deal as well to help us move forward to implement these initiatives.

>>> So, the first level of contact is essentially just that it's kind of the meeting. The communication is sort of starting a bit of a relationship together. Well, then the next level is cooperation, and this is characterized by and leads to some shared goals between us as

partners. So, cooperation then is the process of us actually working together to the same end, and there are a number of things that we have done. We've indicated a little bit that some of the goals we had something - a role to play in determining what the goals were on the SSIP. The Utah Parents Center also operates from a strategic plan, and we use our grant funding often to guide what our activities are year to year, and so our goals very often align with the very ones that are being discussed in our state and being addressed through these state-level or systemic plans, and that goes across all of the agencies that we work with, not just education. But education is key. It's the one place where all of our kids are. So, in doing that, we share data. It goes both ways and we use this data from what we learn in serving and working with families to what the state Board learns as they collect information and work with LEAs across the state, and there's this great cross-pollination of information sharing going back and forth all the time, and we use this to base our goals on, and identify the priorities that we have, and we also use it to document our common interests and the needs that we're identifying so that we can be creative in addressing those things that need to be taken care of. We also recognize then that as we share data and we learn things about what needs to be done, we need to do some cross-training of staff. We want to be on message with the things that we talk about. We want families to know what they're telling educators, what is all of that about and vice-versa. So, we want our staff to be well-informed about all of the state initiatives and what's going on. So, in doing that, we have found a really important way to have them come and work with us to identify and work on common goals. It's not been an uncommon thing for us to get a phone call from someone from the State Board to say, "We're working on this under our SSIP and we want to talk about ways that the parents, you can help us with the parents to help move the needle on the things that are important in our state." So, that's been an important part of that. And as we worked on common goals, then we also know that we have to keep learning and building skills and doing more, and so we have an open invitation to participate in professional development as a parent center, and we often facilitate some of our parent leaders across the state also, and participating in state-level conferences and things that are provided to administrators and educators to help them do their work. We're learning the same things at the same time, and that's been a really important part of this. So, what all of this leads to is a common language. We know what

each other's' talking about and we have a shared understanding of the processes and the policies and activities and needs for all of the stakeholders that are involved, and this has been an important aspect to the work that we do. We think that this common language and the shared understanding are really essential in our success when working together here. It takes time and purposeful communication around really specific topics to accomplish this, and one example is one that was mentioned earlier on high expectations as part of our state systemic improvement plan. We were approached and have been interested in from the very beginning finding ways. So, what would that mean for families? We know that families often don't engage with teams in quite the same way if they don't have high expectations as well for their students. And so, we've had some very targeted activities to help influence a little bit perhaps where families are and where they can be in terms of possibilities and high expectations. The next level on this continuum is coordination, and now this would be essentially defined as organizing different elements of something that's really complex so that it works better, and this definitely characterizes the collaboration and the activities that we do in our state. Not only do we have shared goals, we have shared achievement of those goals. All of those steps that lead to the outcomes that we're looking for, and ways that we have worked together at this level include being, as we have described, directly involved in writing plans and writing for funding that supports what we do and various grants that come into the state. We serve in advisory capacities including often have had members from the State Board of Education – staff from the State Board of Education - serve on our board of directors. We have a staff who have served on our state advisory panel. We have lots of shared responsibilities related to the implementation of the goal. The activities that lead to the goals that we're wanting to accomplish together. We also work closely to align our activities to make sure that we're not working at cross purposes, as I described before. Families and educators are getting the same information, the same kind of training. Maybe carefully-crafted so that families know what that means to them and how they can use it, but still the same message. And I wanted to just note that as a parent center in our grant that is our core funding for us as the parent training and information center. We purposefully wrote in some flexibility from year to year and what the topics would be that we would address so that we could align them with whatever the priorities are if they shift in the

state. So, we recognize that our five-year grant or a chunk of time, we have things that are far more dynamic than what you would do over that longer period of time. We need to be a little more nimble in how we work together. We also report information back and forth in that shared data that we talked about a little bit earlier so that it helps. We understand the progress we're making toward achieving those goals. And we work together on the development of materials and training presentations and things so that our message, that common language, that common understanding, that shared understanding is commonly delivered to all of the stakeholders who are involved. And this leads them to some increased capacity for us as partners to identify, understand, and implement the kinds of training and development activities for all of our stakeholders that will have the kind of cross-pollination and the shared information that we need in order for us to be successful. There are many other things that we could list that are results of this kind of work together, but at least we recognize how important it is to have direct and redirected resources sometimes to help us get after the gaps and address the needs that we identify them as we go.

>> So, the next level along the continuum is the collaboration. So, Helen mentioned where we share goals and we share resources, and this is where we not only jointly share resources or goals that the information that we have we create together. So, it's not just the sharing but it's the creating together of these resources. So, some of the ways that we have done this include working on co-funded activities, and so our investment in our funds demonstrates our commitment, and it doesn't exist in all states, so we understand this, but we really value this as evidence of how we have for this trusting and ongoing relationship. So, the UPC staff is active on our implementation of our state leadership team, and we feel this really helped us keep our message clear so that we're saying the same things and it really shows a commitment to our public and other stakeholder work group how committed we are in building this relationship and working together. It also shows a high level of trust that we have in one another and each other's' expertise. We really feel like UPC is a value to the state Board of Education, and it goes both ways. So, both agencies value one another, and it shows in our presentation. So, we present together a lot out to our LEAs and to different stakeholder groups. So, some of the

examples of presentation is we have a large Utah multi-tiered systems of support conference, and we have many breakout sessions at that conference. It's a two-day conference, and we present with the Utah Parents Center for advocacy, how to write IEPs, 504 plans, just a multiple, you know, multiple ways to help facilitate conversations between parents and IEP teams and the LEAs, and how to help your students. So, those are some of the examples of some of the co-presentations. Other examples are we will work together and we'll have the Parents Center come and present at meetings at the USBE for different groups in our different departments in our state Board of Education, and then we will come and present and get information to UPC as well. So, it's just this real back and forth. So, our dissemination of materials from the Parent Center and to our LEAs. They're often jointly developed and we give feedback to one another. So, we will post the information on our website for the Utah Parent Center. They post information for us. We share feedback that we're getting from the field so that we can make sure we address any concerns and make sure we correct anything if information's going out in a way and it's being received different than we had anticipated or expected. That's very important. And then we have LEA-specific collaboration to increase parent participation. So, we report and promotion Utah Parent Center's model of parent consultant to serve in our LEAs, and that's something that I mentioned earlier that when I came to the USBE I already had a strong understanding of the Utah Parent Center and what they would do for an LEA and what they could do and how they could help us work with parents because I worked in two LEAs in our state that had a Parent Center consultant. And we also work jointly together around early dispute resolution to try to solve problems early on. We have problem-solving and joint implementation of our strategies that we outlined in our SSIP plan. One of the things that we work on that we're doing jointly together now that's been very well-received in our state is a book study. So, we have a parent book study where we have a USBE staff member and a Utah Parent Center staff member that co-facilitate an online book study for our parent. The book we're doing now is "Mindset." This is the second one that we've done. We have up to 300 participants -- parent participants -- on this book study at one time, and the reason we only have 300 is because that's as large as our Adobe room can handle. So, we had such success with that and such interest that we have people on waiting lists and waiting for us to do the next rounds. So,

all of this results in increased parent awareness and knowledge about the resources available to help improve outcomes for their children. So, these are just some of the examples of things that we do. We have a lot of little things, but these, like I said, are some of our big ones that we have going on. The next part of this collaboration continuum is convergence, and this is the last one on the continuum. So, this is where that synthetic infrastructure -- and what we mean by that is it's not organic, you actually have to build it. So, it's a custom build job when we're talking about this area. And so the USBE and UPC have ongoing, extensive, engrained, and assumed relationship that's part of this infrastructure. And, again, it's not something that just happened. It's not organic. It's something that we've worked at and that we've built and that we continue to work at and that we refine to take into, you know, whatever direction we need to go based on our goals and where's the areas that we need to improve and what initiatives we're working with at the time. So, it's a planned, purposeful relationship and it requires work. We have to work at it. But we are very invested in the success of each agency because if we are successful in working together and we can create this relationship and it's authentic, then we will be successful in working with parents and then working with students with disabilities to help increase outcomes and to have it be more positive for all. So, we problem-solve and we jointly implement strategies, and so by doing all of this, we think it leads to that collaboration that withstands the test of time. So, when we have the change in personnel and the change in initiatives and all these things that come up, if we built this much time with really engaging into authentic conversations and relationship and trusting one another and being really invested in one another's success, then it does withstand the test of time and the outcome for our students which is our main goal is much more positive.

>>>As I head into sharing a couple of other of our collaborative efforts, I want to just give some examples again. Sometimes when we talk about these ideas and ways we do things, it's helpful to have some concrete examples of that, but I've been struck even as I've listened to Kim talk and the things that I've shared today with just keywords. I'm a collector of words. So, you've heard multiple times together, shared, common, investment, resources, communication, making it, knowing that it's not something that's just going to

happen. We have to make it. And that we can do that through one of the next words, changes. And it's work. We also, as she just ended some of her comments with, "Have a real commitment." I hope you're getting a feel for the kinds of things that characterize the way we work together, and it might sound pie in the sky and it might sound unbelievable but it is completely doable, and so while Kim has shared with you that she had been with the organization of the state Board of Education -- she'd been in education for a while -- for just a few years I've been the director of the Parent Center for about 28 years and we've watched a lot of those changes occur at the state, and when that happens we've been through--I've lost track of the directors of special ed. Around five or six. And each time that occurs it's a time of reflection when we hold our breaths just a little bit. "Are we going to get someone who gets us and who is willing to work with us and do the things collaboratively that we need to do and that can help us have this be the synthetic infrastructure just the way we do things because it's the way we do things?" And time and time again, we are not surprised by the fact that the people who do this work are the very people who hold these kinds of beliefs and values that facilitate this kind of work. It's almost like meeting an old friend even though we might be newly acquainted in these particular roles or newly acquainted to begin with. But think about those words that we've said and ways that you can help make that happen in your collaborative efforts. Just to touch on a few that will sound familiar to many of you in the indicator eight is that terminology for the survey. It's the indicator we report on to the Office of Special Education Programs through the state office to ask our families about the kinds of outcomes they're seeing and what their experiences are like in working with teams to advocate and work to get services and programs for their students. We help to come up with the questions. We review the results that come back. We strategize ways to help LEAs improve things where that's the case. We talk as a state. Are there things that we could do differently? We've talked about funding. One of the things that has come about over the years, I believe, in large part to make sure that families have a good experience is a financial investment that the state provides to our Parent Center and funding to help us do what we do, and it takes more money than any of our grants will ever provide, and some of that is reinforced over and over again by a role in activities like helping with the parent survey. We have a parent member who serves on our state-level monitoring team

that goes out visiting the LEAs to help them improve their practices and compliance and practices that lead to better outcomes for students, and we've had that parent role on that team for a fair number of years now, and have earned a high level of trust in our responsibilities on that team to parent focus groups and interviews with professionals in the schools and contribute in the conversations around ways to provide support. One of the best parts of those monitoring team experiences is that we get to see all the fabulous things that really do happen for our students and in practices with families. We also collaborate on not only the conference that is held annually around our Utah's multi-tiered system of supports, but our annual law conference in the institute that is held annually for primarily for educators and administrators, but we have a number of our parent leaders, but all of our staff attend that meeting every year. We present. We co-present. We're a presence during that important conference where we have a high number of our folks around the state and it helps to raise visibility and awareness of what we're doing to contribute to the things that are practiced in the state. We've described some of our involvement on the state systemic improvement plan on part B, and we also, I just wanted to mention, participate with part C, which is another state agency in Utah. It's under our department of health. We've talked about our co-sponsoring with training events, and we do a great deal of that including hosting them as well as doing things together in other ways. We've mentioned this book study a couple of times, and one thing I want to give kudos to our state Board of Education about this is this was an idea that they shared with us that they've done with educators with great success and having people study the book, read it, go online then for discussions. They have study guides that are provided. And then they facilitate this interaction around it and it is truly helping to raise expectations, and we decided to offer that to families and see what would happen. The State Board of Education provides both books free of charge to the families who enroll and participate in that. That's a huge investment on their part naturally, and we're seeing what we believe to be really positive outcomes in multiple ways from this kind of new strategy that we've tried together. The Utah Parent Center also produces a fair number of parent handbooks and resource guides and handouts and online resources and all kinds of things, and we've worked collaboratively. Everything that goes up around special education or that we use in our training activities has been I was going to say

vetted and think that's really a true statement, and we've seldom had a lot of changes that come back from them because it was collaboratively developed in the first place. That kind of relationship is important to us. We want to be sure that what we're saying and how we're saying it is clear and that it conveys the very message that we need families to have and understand about working with their team. And we talked about our co-presentations at conferences. So, we found as many ways as we can to collaborate, to coordinate, to have contact, to do all of the levels that we've kind of talked through today, and hope that maybe some of these examples will be useful to you.

>> So, working on perfect. So, we are proud of all the good things that are going on in Utah, but as good as it is, we are always seeking to sustain and improve how we align and leverage our shared work. So, although this session is called perfect together, we really keep working on perfect because that's where we want to be. So, some of the things, just to recap. On our contact, some of the things that we need to really improve on that we've identified as areas that we still want to work in increased capacity is increasing our reach, bringing in new families and stakeholders to the table. That's very important. Through cooperation we need to build support in our LEAs that lead to increased cooperation among the staff, the students, and the parents. Coordination. We need to support LEAs in educating parents about Utah multi-tiered systems of support. We've had a SPDG grant for a number of years and we still have a lot of parents who don't understand about the different levels of support that their students can receive. So, we really want to help engage parents in this process. With collaboration, we really want to help increase family engagement on all levels. The LEA and school level, the classroom, we just don't want parents at the table, we want them to be actively involved and contributing what it is that they have to offer in this important work. So, we want them actively and meaningfully engaged because that is the true definition of inclusion and getting you to that collaboration piece. So, for convergence, what does this look like, okay? So, the parent and the school relationship is we want it to be like the relationship that we feel we have between USBE and the Utah Parent Center. We want it to be extensive, engrained, and assumed. We want parents involved at all levels. We want to have communication that is multi-directional, that real back and forth communication. We don't want schools just

talking at parents. We want them talking with parents, and really engaging around the problems of practice and what we can do together to solve those. And we want parents to feel valued, like, that they're just a really integral part of the relationship, like, how we value each other with Utah Parent Center and the Utah State Board of Education. So, the definition under convergence: a vision and a goal. It aligns with our current initiatives from our state systemic improvement plan to our SPDG grant, our three-tier critical component. We have parent community involvement. That is a real big focus, and we're really working on creating common language so that we have that shared understanding among stakeholders so that when we're speaking about things, we're not speaking, you know, we have a habit of speaking with terminology and acronyms that don't resonate well with parents. They don't understand what we're talking about. So, we want to make sure we have that common language, and we really want to make sure that we're all using it. So, we have a lot of areas that we need to improve in. These are just a few samples of some of them. They're definitely not all of them. But we're working on it. So, I think now we have time to go to questions.

>> Great. Thank you so much, Helen and Kim. There are a few questions here. So, first off, do all LEAs in Utah have a liaison from the Parent Center?

>> No, they don't. This is the model, though, that we've been working on for quite some time and we are about 13 years into it and we now have dedicated staff in seven of our largest school districts across the state, and they work varied amounts of town, but we contract directly with those school districts, with those LEAs, to provide that support in that district, and so our staff who are assigned there just work with the families in that district, and it's a model that we believe has not only expanded our reach significantly. It provides a higher level of service in those districts because the folks, really, the workflow that's entirely generated there. So, just to give you an idea, we have 41 school districts and about 100 charter schools. 140 charter schools, which is relatively new in our state. We're a few years into having more charter schools. So, seven of the 41 school districts already have dedicated staff, and that makes a huge difference to us, and we're able to cover almost about 70% of the state population of families with those seven positions. So, it's

been a huge model that has been hugely successful in helping us do more of what we do. I'd be happy to provide information to anyone about that.

>> Another question. "Does the Utah Parent Center get any direct funding from the Utah State Board of Education?" Some parent centers do get funding from their SEA in addition to the federal PTI funding, and the questioner asked, "I'd imagine that the nature of the relationship would be very different in those situations compared to what you've described."

>> Yes, the Utah Parent Center does contract directly with the State Board of Education and we receive funds on a number of different contracts that combined together is more money than our PTI grant. They are our largest funder, and that has come about over time. Some of that funding comes from grants such as our multi-tiered system of supports grant that we just had renewed in the state to help us support the activities that we do there, and some come from other sources. So, we've had a long time investment. So, whether it was them donating space to us that has value or other kinds of supports, money and direct funding is something that we literally cannot live without. So, it is a very concrete manifestation, we believe, of our partnership and relationship that they invest in that way, too, in what we're doing.

>> Okay. The next question. "You said that your overarching goal was to increase meaningful outcomes for students. Are you collecting any data to see if this is happening? And if so, what type?"

>> So, we collect a lot of data in a lot of areas. So, right now, with our SSIP, we're looking with our focus is on our state's systematic improvement plan that we worked so closely together on to develop, we're collecting data through that and on the outcomes for students with disabilities. The focus on that was improving outcomes for students with disabilities in the area of mathematics, and we were trying to close the gap. We have nine intensive LEAs that we focused on that we were working in that area to see if we could move the dial and we've worked very closely with the Parent Center. We do the book

studies that we're doing with "Mindset" and increasing the expectations for students. That's part of it. So, we've taken data from surveys. We're looking at student outcome data, end of level data, formative assessments, and then just a ton of data around our SSIP model because that's where we're targeting some of these efforts and where our book study and a lot of our co-efforts are combined around that SSIP. So, yes. We are taking that data.

>> At the Parent Center, we also--this is a really good question because we know that measuring long-term impact is one of the toughest things to be able to do. But some of the data collection is clearly aimed at trying to accomplish that. We're doing more each year in trying to collect some of that down the road kind of data for families to tell us, "Yes, the Parent Center services and the things that we are seeing in classrooms and in working with teams are leading to our students being in a better place. They know more, can do more. We have better outcomes." And you have to believe what people tell you on that sometimes. It may not be measurable on a pen and paper test or some of the other things, but when a family tells us that their students' outcomes are improving because of not only their role on the team but the things that they are experiencing with the professionals that they're working with, we believe that that's evidence of all of these efforts and moving toward those outcomes. That may be a little bit soft in terms of evidence, but it is a really challenging thing to collect that hard data on outcomes in the way we'd like it. We wish we had better access to some of that, but we do believe we have better information than we've ever had around some of those issues.

>> And I want to add, too, we also have several coaching team cohorts that just keep growing each year, and then we disseminate information through the Parent Center that's linked to our SSIP plan and also the book study and the mindset and the growth mindset, and we are engaging with one of our universities on a study to look at our outcome data there. Some of the data that's harder to measure, like Helen just talked about, one of the things that we know through these efforts and raising expectations and it's been very powerful to have the Parent Center involved because when you talk to parents about putting their student who has a disability in math in a general education math class with

support, sometimes parents are a little nervous about that. They want their student in a separate class where a special ed. teacher can deliver that instruction. So, the Parent Center has been integral in helping us talk to parents about why we want to have these high expectations and some of our preliminary data coming out of that that it's harder to measure on a outcome of where a student improved. We know they're not going to, you know, just be proficient after one level. But the positive thing is we have students with disabilities in gen ed. classrooms accessing gen ed. core with the appropriate support, and that's something that they didn't have, they weren't doing before.

>> Okay. So, the next question is, "Is there a similar collaboration with your disability rights group?"

>> So, I presume that you're talking about our protection and advocacy organization in the state and in Utah that's the Disability Law Center, and, yes, we have a very close relationship with them as does the state Board of Education. I believe I'll let Kim speak to how they collaborate and what that kind of looks like, but we have a monthly meeting most months during the year with the staff who do particularly the education supports in their offices, but as their services have changed over the years and they are like the rest of us -- operating on limited resources -- we receive a lot of the referrals on those early triage calls where it may not be as clearly a legal issue but perhaps more relationship-building on IEP teams and getting support for the family to understand the processes and things like that. So, we work very closely going back and forth with them. We also share our data with them, and look for trends in what they see and what we're seeing and how are you answering these kinds of questions and what kinds of resources could we offer to families. So, we are deeply involved with them, and also have a member, actually one of their staff members also serves on our board of directors as well. So, we have multiple avenues open to us. We also host workshops for families where we do just question and answers where one of our staff and one of the staff from our disability law center we just open the doors and the folks come in and we present a little bit of basic information about processes, and then answer questions. And that's been a very successful activity, and we

typically do that twice a year. So, that's a couple of the things that we do with them as well. I'll let Kim address it from her perspective.

>> So, similar, we have a relationship. We meet with them. So, we have monthly meetings. We share information. We disseminate information back and forth. We talk. We look at trends and we look at things that we need to address. If they're getting a lot of calls around a certain area, they'll let us know, and so it helps us form a type of technical assistance we need to give to the field based on information that they're receiving. And so we just try to, you know, keep a really open door and work together so that we can, you know, really help families and LEAs and, you know, make sure that we're doing the right things for students, and if we do something that's a trend or, like, it could be a systemic problem based on calls that they're fielding or that we're fielding, if we have an increase in something they'll have calls and questions and concerns. We'll ask, "Are you hearing this, too?" You know, "Is this a pattern? Do we need to address this?" So, it's just really nice to have that open communication in that relationship.

>> Hopefully that's helpful.

>> Great. Thank you. Another questioner asks, "How do you address reaching families in rural districts?"

>> That's also an excellent question. The way our population is distributed in the state of Utah, we're a large geographic state and about 80% of the families live within about an hour and a half drive of where we're sitting right now. So, we have a lot of resources concentrated in this area. A lot of the work that we do on our parent training and information thread is designed to get to rural families, and we, like many of our colleagues across the country and other parent centers, have found a real challenge in reaching rural families, and because folks access information in many different ways and that seems to be evolving over time with the advent of different kinds of technology, we found it to be one of the best things we do to get out with the families and one of the most challenging things when families don't come. So, it can be an expensive way of providing services to

have folks travel to them. So, we have a couple of different ways that we approach that. And one is that we have a project funded by another one of our state agencies is, of course, people with disabilities that have helped us develop family leaders in a number of our rural communities, and they are our local contacts, they host activities, they host trainings, they work with families one-on-one, and so we've built a presence in that respect in many communities around the state. It's not as much as we would like for it to be, however that is one strategy is using volunteers and/or leaders that receive some stipends to be helpful to us in that respect. And we use as much technology as we can. We do the distance things, the online things. We have a huge repository of video modules that are most of the workshops that we present live are available online that we've built that repository over about the last dozen years, and we seek additional funding each year to help us add more and more topics that are of use to families. So, we welcome to -- anyone viewing those on our website -- and we watch those members just skyrocket all the time by we're certain all over the state, not just in the rural areas. But it's one way where when families can get the information any way they can, and whenever that works for them. So, we're always looking for new ways to do that using Facebook Live, doing webinars, doing every strategy we can so that folks can access it. So, it's rural, for us, is a challenge because a lot of it is remote and frontier and not concentrations of families. So, we use every avenue available to us.

>> One thing, also, that we do is we try to connect some of our rural families with community-based resources that are in their area. So, we try to make that connection. If there's anything available that could also be a resources we make sure that they're aware of it.

>> And we travel a lot in the state.

>> Yeah, we do.

>> We get out there and do whatever we can.

>> We could cross the state.

>> Yes. And one of the funding sources that we have through the State Board of Education is one that allows us to attend really challenging IEP meetings with families. So, sometimes we have a local person or someone close regionally who can go do that, and sometimes we send someone from our main office here if the situation warrants that kind of support for the family and for the team in resolving concerns and questions and solving disputes before they become a higher level. Hopefully that's helpful as well.

>> Great. We had a couple more questions. "Our SEA is concerned that if they gave our PTI funding, it is double-dipping, as we already get our PTI grant to work with families. In the past they'd given us funding, but recently stopped and this is one of the reasons given. Can you speak of this at all? Was this ever a concern?"

>> No. It hasn't been a concern from--

>> That's Kim from the State Board perspective.

>> Yeah.

>> I've heard these kinds of concerns expressed before, and let me address this in this way if I may. I'm not certain that I would say it certainly is a way of double-dipping. The Utah Parent Center, as we mentioned early on, we've been here for 34 plus years. We outgrew the federal funding that comes to our parent training and information grant about 30 years ago. So, it is our core funding. It helps make sure that our doors stay open. Yes, we're mandated to serve the entire state with that funding. And it will never make that possible for us to do that in a way that is really meaningful, and the demand. The phone rings too much. There are too many needs and we've been here too long. They know about it. We believe the State Board and our SEA has an investment in being sure that we are a strong resource available for the families, and we believe that we help them do their job in the very best way that they can, and that's the way it's always been

conveyed to me and expressed to me. I wanted to also address the fact that we've had the issue raised for us before as to whether or not that compromises us in the work that we do for families. If we take money from them, does that influence then how we interact with the state board? If we think they're doing something as an example or a policy thing considered or legislation thing looked at or whatever the policy issues might be that we believe would be detrimental to families, we feel very trusting and comfortable in our relationship. We tell them what we think families need. If there's a problem, we raise the issue, and don't feel compromised at all in doing that, and believe that this mutual investment of all kinds of resources is really what makes us strong partners, but if I ever felt at the parent center that receiving their funding compromised my ability to be a strong advocate for and on behalf of families, we'd have to consider that to be something that we would have to address. In these district positions that I talked about where we receive funding to provide a parent consultant to work with families in that district, we've had that same question come up. "Well, you work for the district. Does the district pay for your position?" And what we have found to be really helpful is we believe that that is also an investment in getting the resources we can offer to the local families, and the role of those parent consultants in that district is to support the families. It's not to defend the district. It's not to, you know, convince families that what the district is doing is what they need to do. It puts them in a strong position to be well-informed about the processes in the district and the people in the district and to be able to be positioned to be a strong advocate in support of families' perspectives to make sure that they are heard, that the process works the way it's supposed to, and that they're a valued member of the team. And so, we have not ever found that funding did anything but help us do our job in the very best way that we can. That may be more than you are looking for, that kind of an answer, but having spoken many times over the years with other directors of parent centers and other staff from parent centers, I know this is very real in other states, and so figuring out a way to address that and perhaps have them as peers reach out to other state agencies to see if perhaps they would share that perspective and hear another perspective on how another state might work with their parent center in terms of funding. Might be a helpful exercise and a strategy that could be suggested to just say, "Why don't we get

some more information about how this works in other places?" Because I do believe this happens fairly successfully in a lot of states.

>> Great. The last question is, "What has been your number one obstacle?"

>> Hmm. [INAUDIBLE] question.

>> We're ending on a challenge.

>> Well, I think one of the obstacles that we have is really the high expectations in our SSIP.

>> Mm-hmm.

>> That's been more of a challenge than I had anticipated it would be when we wrote it in our state systemic plan, in our improvement plan. Going out and delivering professional development and, you know, through this collaboration and co-presenting and really working together to strategize to help parents. Really increasing expectations for parents and for teachers, not just the parents. Incredibly, most students have higher expectations and beliefs about themselves than some of the adults that are working with them. So, that has been more of a challenge than I had anticipated that it would be, but I'll Helen begin.

>> Yeah. So, I think clearly, like everyone, our biggest challenges are those big-picture things. How do we really improve those outcomes? And that's kind of a big one out there. I would think in our relationship and our collaboration and this working together stuff that we're trying all the time, some of the biggest challenges have to do with changes in personnel. I really believe that that has a lot to do with it because that could, depending on the individuals and maybe a change in the thought process like the one that was just addressed in that question would be, "Well, we think differently about this now," or maybe it's a new person. It's sustaining a positive relationship that you can build on and not be worried that you're going to have it retrench or take three steps backwards often

occurs when you have changes in people, and so you could see that as maybe an obstacle. We also see it as a great opportunity because, again, we've yet to encounter somebody that we've not been able to if they weren't in our corner we can win them because we can see how our mutual investment in this really pays off in the end. The other thing with the, I think having done this for as many years as I have at the Parent Center to be still talking about the very issues that we were talking about 28 years ago at a systems level is a really interesting dynamic, and to be able to look back over 28 years and see that, my goodness, we've made a lot of progress and we have seen better outcomes, and we're still talking about some of the same topic areas. We're still talking about transition to adult life. We're still talking about training and support for teachers. And we're still talking about IEP teams working well together and dispute resolution. All those things. And it's just the elements of our work and just staying nimble and not burning out is really a challenge, I think. But I have great faith in the people in this line of work, and I think it's been borne out many times in our ability to if you butt up against any challenge, whatever it is, we just sit down and say, "This is a challenge. How can we work on this together?" And just be open and honest and trusting and trustworthy as we work through that. Kim, do you have anything you'd like to add?

>> Well, just I think, you know, just to reiterate what Helen said, I think when we're faced with, you know, feedback and pushback that we can't do something. We take that as a challenge and just kind of go, "We're in special ed. There's a workaround. We'll take that on." So, can't doesn't mean no.

>> Well, great. Thank you so much, Helen and Kim. This is obviously a topic area that has a lot of folks looking at their systems, and we really appreciate your time. And thank you all so much for joining us today. Please feel free to contact us with your questions or comments at any time. Please click on the link in the chat box to fill out a very brief survey monkey to evaluate today's webinar. We would greatly appreciate you taking a few minutes to do this. And we're extremely excited about our next webinar, "Skilled Dialogue: Minding and Mining the Riches of Differences," which is scheduled on March 6th from 11:30 to 12:45. This webinar will be presented by Drs. Isaura Barrera and Lucinda

Kramer. More information about the webinar is available on the Cadre website, and look forward to joining us in March. Thank you all so much. Have a good afternoon.

>> Thank you.

>> Thank you.