

Melanie Reese: Hello and thank you for joining us today. I'm Melanie Reese, the Director of CADRE. On behalf of all of us here at CADRE, we are absolutely thrilled to present to you today's webinar from the Poway Unified School district of San Diego.

Melanie Reese: This presentation is another in our continuing series of valuable CADRE webinars archived and available on our website.

Melanie Reese: So, as part of our mission, CADRE actively supports and promotes the prevention and resolution of disputes through partnership and collaboration. And we hear your stories about building relationships, and how that benefits the whole system,

Melanie Reese: and the rewards of building a culture of trust and collaboration and cooperation between families and educators are self-evident.

Melanie Reese: However, when we see hard data that backs up what we know about the value of investing in relationships, we get really excited. And when we heard about what was happening in the Poway Unified School District, we couldn't wait to share it with you all.

Melanie Reese: The numbers coming out of their program are downright impressive, and very much validates the work that we do, and they do.

Melanie Reese: After talking with them about their program, we learned about the many cool things that they're doing to build a culture of collaboration. and more striking is that they have the numbers to back it up.

Melanie Reese: Their intentional efforts to engage parents as partners, helped save their district millions of dollars in attorney fees and settlement costs over the years.

Melanie Reese: So a few technical notes. The phone lines have been muted to minimize interruptions. At any point during the presentation you can enter questions or comments into the chat, and they'll be monitoring it and sharing with each other as time allows.

Melanie Reese: It is my pleasure to introduce to you the presenters today from the school district,

Melanie Reese: the Poway Unified School District in San Diego. I present to you Greg Mizel, the associate superintendent, and thirty year veteran in education. He's been a teacher, a principal and administrator.

Melanie Reese: And with him is Jodie Payne, the director of family engagement, support and resolution. Jody, too, started her career as a teacher, and then as a program specialist, and her current role supports all of the district's alternative dispute resolution, mediation, and due process cases.

Melanie Reese: And finally, we have Michelle, O'Connor Ratcliff, a Poway Unified School District Board Member and parent, and longtime member of the community. Michelle is serving her 8th year as governing board member, earning degrees from Stanford University and UC Hastings Law, and is now a parent of two current Poway Unified students.

Melanie Reese: So without further ado, I turn it over to our esteemed presenters.

Greg Mizel: So good morning. It's great to be with you guys today/

Greg Mizel: Before we begin our presentation. I wanted to just emphasize at the onset

Greg Mizel: that when it comes to navigating interpersonal conflict

Greg Mizel: no one bans a thousand.

Greg Mizel: No one.

Greg Mizel: So you will hear in our story today that we have made some progress, preparing broken relationships and restoring trust. However, we've not arrived.

Greg Mizel: In this category of work. There's no finish line.

Greg Mizel: We celebrate our progress absolutely,

Greg Mizel: but we're also acutely aware, right? -- of the families with whom we continue to struggle.

Greg Mizel: It seems in special education when it comes to the drama triangle, you're either about to step into it, you're deep in it, or

Greg Mizel: you're just beginning to come out of it. So

Greg Mizel: with that said, let me share with you just a few details about our district, and then we'll delve into today's topic and our story.

Greg Mizel: The Poway Unified School District was established in 1962. The district serves approximately thirty five thousand students, who reside in a hundred square mile boundary in North San Diego County.

Greg Mizel: Poway Unified is one of forty two school Districts in San Diego County.

Greg Mizel: As a point of reference. PUSD is the third-largest school district in this region, and the twenty first largest school district in the State of California.

Greg Mizel: Presently PUSD serves approximately 5529 students with IEPs, who represent 4848 families.

Greg Mizel: Each and every one of our 5529 children comes to us with unique needs, challenges, and stories.

Greg Mizel: Identifying the why behind an individual child's academic and or social emotional struggle, and creating a thoughtful plan to ensure they make progress towards goals

Greg Mizel: it's complex work, right? Where, understandably, disagreement can and often does, occur between members of an IEP team.

Greg Mizel: Navigating these disagreements skillfully, without compromising the relationship, has become a priority for our team in recent years,

Greg Mizel: because we all, right? - know who loses

Greg Mizel: the most when the adults can't agree.

Greg Mizel: It's the child.

Greg Mizel: In every context, when conflict is mismanaged, it breaks the relationship. Then

Greg Mizel: everything gets hard,

Greg Mizel: everything moves slower.

Greg Mizel: However, when conflict is handled in a calm, respectful, transparent manner, disagreements can and often do lead to new understandings, deeper empathy and appreciation, improve systems and processes, and ultimately improve student outcomes.

Greg Mizel: This morning, our team is excited to share with you highlights of our journey and learning, working to navigate conflict more productively. Next slide.

Greg Mizel: So as you can clearly see on this slide, achieving agreement through the IEP process beneficial for all concerned. As I know we all agree it is.

Greg Mizel: It can be quite challenging.

Greg Mizel: It's important to note that in the decade preceding the pandemic, due process filings in the State of California were up almost 75%

Greg Mizel: from the 2007-08 school year to the 2017-2018 school year.

Greg Mizel: And since the pandemic,

Greg Mizel: we've all experienced a concerning change in behavior,

Greg Mizel: both in our students, staff and parents.

Greg Mizel: Some researchers are referring to this phenomenon as a mass-stress fueled response.

Greg Mizel: Students are generally less mature, and many are more anxious. They're requiring more behavioral and social emotional support.

Greg Mizel: Adults, too, appear to have changed, at least for the time being. Staff are tired, some exhausted, and many report feeling burned out.

Greg Mizel: Parents are less civil,

Greg Mizel: some outright rude.

Greg Mizel: These changes in behavior on all sides only serve to further complicate an already challenging landscape. Next slide.

Greg Mizel: So during the same time period due process, case filings or skyrocketing across the State of California,

Greg Mizel: the number of due process case filings in PUSD were steadily on the rise, as well.

Greg Mizel: As you can see on this slide, during the 2017-18 school year there were 44 due process filings brought against the district,

Greg Mizel: a high watermark for us.

Greg Mizel: 44 instances of

Greg Mizel: a conflict escalating to the point where attorneys were required to help us resolve our differences.

Greg Mizel: In the 2018-19 school year, my first year in this new role, there were a record 49 due process case filings.

Greg Mizel: Imagine that.

Greg Mizel: Back-to-back years where we set new high watermarks.

Greg Mizel: The cost in these cases was enormous,

Greg Mizel: lost time, lost trust, lost opportunity,

Greg Mizel: and yes, lost revenue.

Greg Mizel: Before we delve into how our team leaned into this leadership challenge, improving systems, and ultimately student outcomes. I think it might be helpful to expand our understanding of the problem itself.

Greg Mizel: Here to provide us some additional context. Understanding the backstory behind these numbers as school board, member, Michelle O'Connor, Ratcliff.

Greg Mizel: Michelle?

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Thanks, Greg. Um, I'm here to give you the sad, sad backstory on some of these numbers on what led to it, but know that as negative as this is going to sound for a short time, it gets way way better. By the time we get to Jody I hope some of you will be feeling really really excited. I, as Melanie said earlier, I've been a member of the School Board in Poway Unified for almost eight years, and again it will become obvious as we continue to tell our story here is that

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: the district's special education approach has changed tremendously over that time. So I'm going to take us way, way back to when, maybe just before I decided to run for school

board. My children at that time were in preschool and kindergarten, and I was at my first board meeting, ever,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: watching my mom receive an award there. So I was fascinated. I knew there was an agenda item coming up, though, after the awards concerning the special education. So I decided to stay put for the rest of the meeting, and oh, my gosh! The rest is history. But I left that meeting feeling

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: disappointed and thoughtful. So the way that the staff and the Board members spoke about special education then didn't seem right to me -- as if it was an expensive burden that they were being forced to fund at the expense of regular kids

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: who didn't have so many behavior problems. Um, yeah, stop me if you've ever heard that before. So this there was just so much wrong, and this was a public-facing discussion. So what must have been happening in the background to make that okay to say in public?

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: As a parent at the time of an autistic preschooler, now an eighth grader, I was worried. So, although my child's experience in his own autism, special Day Class had been great, so far, the broader district attitude was just off.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: So for that reason and many others, I decided to run for office pretty much right then and there, and I won that election, and really the right to peek behind the curtain at what was causing that attitude.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: So I began my crusade to change attitudes about our students with disabilities, and I was on that journey also as a parent, so always learning and my own understanding of disability and special education, evolving through that time.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: and I think it still continues to this day. I began advocating for change, citing our district's core inclusion statistics, our lack of staff training, legal duties to students with IEPs under the IDEA that we weren't fulfilling,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: and we just weren't following the well-known, well-established, best practices. I mean really long time, well-established best practices, and that behind the scenes work that I was trying to do

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: was falling mostly on deaf ears when it came to the administrators that we had in place at the time. And I was frustrated, and I went looking for allies,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: and I decided I'd try out the Special Education Community Advisory Committee, the CAC.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: It seemed a great place to look, because that group's made up of mostly parents, some district special education staff, some disability service providers, but parents of kids with disabilities. So from that very first meeting I attended as a brand new school Board member, I

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Wow. The reception was frosty, at best. So, despite being one of them and a potential huge ally for everybody in that room, I was instantly, instantly, met with distrust, and really some outright hostility

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: from some in the room there. So a tough room, I would say, even toxic?

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: And I stopped going to their meetings after awhile it was unproductive, in the extreme. Special education was just the the land of No. There was comfort in the inertia. Parents had grown to expect that from literally everyone associated with the district,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: I did find some allies eventually, and one of them brought to my attention a 2011 report from FCMAT,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: the fiscal crisis and management assistance team.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: That group had been in our district, presumably at somebody's invitation,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: because we weren't having a fiscal crisis, so that means that the district invited them in. They wanted some management assistance.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: They had done a pretty comprehensive assessment of our special education program back in 2011 and, yet, it wasn't complementary.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: But here it was in 2015 and that report was completely forgotten.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: But it had really, really substantiated so much of what I've been saying, again behind the scenes, trying not to knock the district on the head too hard in the public facing forum of the School Board meetings, trying to get everyone to do the right thing from behind the scenes,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: But having one board member say something in the face of that, I think I already called it inertia, especially from directors of specials to education -- who should have known better.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: it just wasn't effective. So I started asking for another FCMAT visit, and finally, likely to shut me up, and really thinking maybe they'd just get to throw it in a drawer again, administration agreed. So

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: when that FCMAT report came back validating again everything I'd been saying recommending a two-year plan to shift to an inclusion based model based on LRE. I was overjoyed. Again. Vindication!

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: But change still, still, might have eluded us had it not been for our board

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: being able to hire a new superintendent, and this... Well, okay, let's let me pause there because there was a long period of interim superintendent while we were trying to -- while we were in the process of hiring our permanent leader. And I convinced our interim

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: to create a committee to discuss those new FCMAT findings and those recommendations. So she hired an outside consultant. Oh, boy, we brought in an outside consultant because we couldn't do it ourselves -

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: we didn't have that know-how. Maybe we didn't have the will. I'm not sure where that fell apart. But okay, we brought in an outside consultant and SEAC was born. This is the Special Education Advisory Committee,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: very well-intentioned group, but really unwieldy. We had an absolutely enormous number of people in the room. It was nearly impossible to achieve any kind of consensus about anything.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: We were struggling. We were delaying, again, and I couldn't help thinking, Oh, my God, this is what they were hoping for.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: But after way, way, way too many meetings over way, way, way, too many months we were trying to recommend. We, I say, seek the whole committee trying to recommend a more inclusive model of instruction delivery. We were agreed that we needed some staff capacity building,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: and we needed to improve the welcome for our families who were just coming into the IEP world. Make it friendlier. Try not to let them get sucked into that that very, very negative feeling right off the bat, and that lack of trust in the district before we could even get started.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: So that's about as far as we got.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: This is the speed of change for me as a board member, I was losing my mind. Um, I am just not that patient a person, and as a parent I can see the opportunity slipping away from my own child to have more to, to get more out of his education, and knowing that, Oh, my gosh! I'm. In a position to make a change, and this is the speed? Ahhh!

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: So in the face of that organizational dysfunction, frankly, we had parent distrust, high litigation numbers, and costs as you were seeing.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: The board, finally got to hire our new leader, Dr. Marian Kim Phelps, as our new superintendent, and so, after a fairly short time, under her leadership,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: she recognized the issues I was pushing needed a dedicated person to work on it. Um, a dedicated associate superintendent, and the reorganization and reprioritization of special education happened. So, after all that struggle,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: the system neglect the lack of vision, the low morale, the distrust everywhere, and students really being left in our wake,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: just in in that land of inertia, in walks Mr. Mize! Woohoo!

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: So I will say he didn't know a lot about special education - at the time - but his strength in system organization, and his highly, highly personal touch in outreach. Um, that absolutely, you know

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: no problem -- he's going to pick up the phone and call you, and it doesn't matter who you are. He's going to pick up the phone and call you and work it out. Personal touch.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: That was exactly what we needed at exactly that right time. And oh, my gosh! If we had had to stall for another second I would have lost my mind. But in walks Greg, and he got to work. So here's where our Poway Unified story starts to change, and I'm going to hand it back to Greg.

Greg Mizel: Thank you, Michelle,

Greg Mizel: So can you -- I'm just going to take a moment to appreciate the fire in her belly.

Greg Mizel: Ah, it is so cool to be paired with leaders who care about our kids. And when I say our kids, I mean each and every -- all of our kids, all of their stories.

Greg Mizel: Through her advocacy, right, the door was opened wide for someone like me to walk through. And

Greg Mizel: yeah. So picking this up, let's uh,

Greg Mizel: let's continue this story. Next slide.

Greg Mizel: Yeah. Fun headline here. So

Greg Mizel: all right. One of my first opportunities to set a different tone in our division

Greg Mizel: occurred when I agreed to meet with a small group of parents turned critics.

Greg Mizel: This group had been expressing concerns about the issue of dyslexia and reading instruction in PUSD.

Greg Mizel: They've been coming to school board meetings for several years, and sadly they've been largely ignored. As Michelle had alluded to, right, it was a culture of, No.

Greg Mizel: So listening to their personal stories,

Greg Mizel: taking an interest in them, and

Greg Mizel: listening, really listening, to how their children had been negatively impacted by our sidesloppy craft and practice and pedagogy,

I agreed to investigate.



Greg Mizel: So during my first ninety days in this new role I walked every special education classroom in the district,

Greg Mizel: and I began to recognize that the concerns this vocal and small group of parents had shared with me were valid.

Greg Mizel: Our staff did not universally screen students to identify children at risk for experiencing reading difficulties.

Greg Mizel: Our staff did not participate in robust professional learning, focused on applying the science of reading, implementing, direct, explicit sequential, systematic and multisensory instruction to support students experiencing delays in learning to read.

Greg Mizel: And our staff did not have access to evidence-based curriculum.

Greg Mizel: So when I met with this group a second time to update them on my findings. They were elated.

Greg Mizel: Someone was finally listening. Someone was validating their lived experience.

Greg Mizel: It wasn't long thereafter, and I actually contracted with one of our most outspoken critics to provide professional learning to our staff classified and certificated.

Greg Mizel: As it turned out, this parent critic was a bona fide expert. Who knew? Using a specialized curriculum design to support students profoundly impacted by dyslexia.

Greg Mizel: Unfortunately,

Greg Mizel: even as I was starting to make headway with this group and leading change, I was too late for one family, for one family in particular, and you can see them here in this slide

Greg Mizel: right their story, and it's it's a challenging one. It's featured in the LA Times in the fall, 2019.

Greg Mizel: So I want to pause for just a moment. I want to encourage you.

Greg Mizel: Look at the photo featured in this story closely.

Greg Mizel: What you see?

Okay, I see folders,

Greg Mizel: lots of folders,

Greg Mizel: stacks of paper, reams of paper, and a huge binder.

Greg Mizel: Clearly right, lots of time and effort was expended documenting a struggle.

Greg Mizel: Now I want to encourage you to look at Mom and Dad.

Greg Mizel: How did they appear to you?

Greg Mizel: So I'm going to describe them as resolute.

Greg Mizel: Believe me, they were.

Greg Mizel: And there, seated on the left, was their son and our student,

Greg Mizel: a casualty in the disagreement.

Greg Mizel: The case was eventually settled before it went to the Circuit Court of Appeals.

Greg Mizel: This photograph of this family reminds me of the price everyone pays

Greg Mizel: when we don't navigate conflict well.

Greg Mizel: Next slide.

Here we go.

Greg Mizel: So, recognizing there had to be a better way,

Greg Mizel: the special education team was reorganized during the 2018-19 school year.

Greg Mizel: Staff made a commitment to engage with our parents with more intentionality.

Greg Mizel: We agreed to work at resolving conflict at the lowest level.

Greg Mizel: Instead of assuming a defensive posture, as had been our past practice, staff agreed to focus on making it right versus being right.

Greg Mizel: Staff committed to listen with the purpose of understanding -- a principle Stephen Covey turned into an entire chapter in his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*.

Greg Mizel: We became more visible,

Greg Mizel: accessible, and open to problem solving.

Greg Mizel: And Jody Payne, who you'll be hearing from in just a few moments, was made the special education director responsible for overseeing family engagement, support and resolution.

Greg Mizel: Looking at this slide, you can clearly see the changes implemented, moved the needle

Greg Mizel: pretty quickly and significantly!

Greg Mizel: I want to invite you now to take just a moment to review this slide before we go on to the next.

Greg Mizel: What stands out to you?

Greg Mizel: Okay, next slide.

Greg Mizel: So let's break the data down.

Greg Mizel: The first thing you may have noticed looking at the previous slide is that while our total student enrollment is stagnant or slightly decreasing, the number of students with IEPs we are serving has steadily increased.

Greg Mizel: You would think that would result in more conflict.

Greg Mizel: Right? More customers, more conflict, more cost than litigation,

Greg Mizel: but it hasn't.

Greg Mizel: Next slide.

Greg Mizel: Due process filings have steadily decreased

Greg Mizel: from an all-time high of 49 just a few short years ago,

Greg Mizel: to most recently 18 this last school year.

Greg Mizel: Come on. That's crazy.

Greg Mizel: It's crazy even on our side to look at these numbers.

Greg Mizel: It's crazy.

Greg Mizel: Next slide.

Greg Mizel: So, not surprisingly, with the 59% decrease in due process filings, attorney fees are coming down as well.

Greg Mizel: From 2017 to 2022 we've seen a 22% decrease.

Greg Mizel: Next slide.

Greg Mizel: So due process filings are down 59%, attorney fees are down 22 and as you can see here average due process settlement costs are down as well -- 54% from a high of almost two million dollars, in 2018-19

Greg Mizel: to just over two hundred thousand dollars in the 2020-21 school year, which was mostly pre-pandemic.

Greg Mizel: And this last school year, working through the challenges of the pandemic

Greg Mizel: without a waiver to IDEA, our staff still managed to contain our legal costs and minimize the district's legal exposure.

Greg Mizel: Next slide.

Greg Mizel: So shortly after Director Payne's appointment,

Greg Mizel: our team recommitted to two things:

Greg Mizel: resurrecting the alternative dispute resolution process ,which had existed at PUSD previously, but had been largely underutilized, and increasing staff accountability --

Greg Mizel: systems work.

Greg Mizel: You can see from this slide in four short years, conflicts resolved through the ADR process at PUSD have increased a staggering 1100%.

Greg Mizel: So part of the back story, right, of our department's success, has been focusing on utilizing with greater intentionality the alternative dispute resolution process.

Greg Mizel: ADR uniquely allows staff the room to problem-solve creatively.

Greg Mizel: Through alternative dispute resolution we focus on the student and identifying shared interests.

Greg Mizel: As I shared earlier, we listen to understand.

Greg Mizel: Participants are encouraged to suspend judgment, assume good intentions, and change their focus from being right to making it right.

Greg Mizel: This shift to a mediator's mindset has helped improve community relations, preserve trust with the families we serve, and enabled staff to resolve conflict more creatively and responsibly.

Greg Mizel: We don't always agree,

Greg Mizel: but our efforts have yielded many positive results,

Greg Mizel: including contributing to reduced CDE and OCR complaints the last few years. We also established a new protocol in 2018-19.

Greg Mizel: Every single due process and ADR case is analyzed, and staff at the sending school sites are debriefed on findings and concerns.

Greg Mizel: Implementing this practice has helped improve accountability in the system, supported new understandings, and helped staff identify where processes and protocols require improvement.

Greg Mizel: Next slide.

Greg Mizel: 99.97% .

Greg Mizel: I have to say, I love this number.

Greg Mizel: As stated earlier, PUSD presently supports 5529 students, with disabilities, who represent 4848 families.

Greg Mizel: To date, only point zero three percent of our families have filed either due process or participated in an alternative dispute resolution.

Greg Mizel: Put another way,

Greg Mizel: 99.97% of our families are somehow successfully navigating the tense and often stressful and overwhelming landscape of disagreement that is inherently a part of the IEP process. Working directly with education specialists

Greg Mizel: without requiring any formal conflict mediation.

Greg Mizel: So I expect by now you have to be wondering, right, about the backstory behind all these numbers.

Greg Mizel: What's the difference that's made the difference? Because just a few short years ago our numbers didn't look like this.

Greg Mizel: Truthfully, there are a lot of variables that play in this work which have helped contribute to our district's improved outcomes. Some obvious, many more subtle.

Greg Mizel: However, when you really break it down, our team's success has been dependent upon two things:

Greg Mizel: a commitment to systems improvement,

Greg Mizel: and careful attention to the relationship.

Greg Mizel: You've heard a bit about our effort improving systems, joining me now to share more about attention to the relationship. Is special education director, Jodi Payne.

Greg Mizel: You're up, Jodi.

Jodi Payne: Thank you. I was unable to unmute. I thought that was a sign.

Jodi Payne: All right. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Mizel.

Jodi Payne: Well, as you heard a school board member, Michelle O'Connor, Ratcliff, share earlier

Jodi Payne: relationships with parents, and our district were strained. When I was first tasked with family engagement and support, family engagement, support, and resolution. Before we could hope to improve those strained relationships, we needed to get our house in order.

Jodi Payne: We began by organizing as directors. We worked to eliminate ambiguity, and that helped to improve accountability. Then we worked with our program specialists.

Jodi Payne: Program-specialists were trained in the ADR framework, and encouraged to adapt a mediator's mindset. It's a fine line we've asked our staff to walk, balancing our interest and creatively solving problems, while not giving away the store.

Jodi Payne: The Program Specialists involvement in the IEP meeting process, shortly thereafter, helped improve the district's welcome, as well as help to support our stronger student outcomes.

Jodi Payne: Program Specialists attended an average of 85 IEP meetings per month last school year. Additionally, they participated in an average of 20 pre-staffing meetings monthly with IEP teams.

Jodi Payne: The support our program specialists have provided to education specialists and administrators has helped PUSD more skillfully navigate disagreements as well as reduce procedural errors.

Jodi Payne: Next slide, please,

Greg Mizel: I think, hey, Jodi, I think we might be one slide off. I just wanted to make sure you saw that.

Greg Mizel: So we might want to. Yeah, there you go. Thank you.

Jodi Payne: Okay. So double checking right now, this is showing Slide thirteen.

Jodi Payne: Is that what you're showing here to let me double check. Yeah, the CAC.

Jodi Payne: Excellent. We're lined up again. I like, when it happens all right.

Jodi Payne: While staff had always attended community advisory meetings, they had assumed a passive role.

Jodi Payne: Parents were frustrated with the district,

Jodi Payne: and meetings often took a negative tone.

Jodi Payne: In 2018. Greg and all the directors began attending a monthly CAC meetings, increasing our visibility,

Jodi Payne: demonstrating a commitment to be present and available.

Jodi Payne: It went a long way towards helping reset the relationship.

Jodi Payne: Our team began assisting in the creation of meeting agendas, and offered to present on a variety of topics of interest within the community.

Jodi Payne: This effort went a long way towards restoring trust and credibility.

Jodi Payne: Finally, as concerns were shared with us, and they were regularly, staff followed up diligently, and returned monthly with updates.

Jodi Payne: We were listening

Jodi Payne: and responding.

Jodi Payne: And that became obvious to everyone.

Jodi Payne: It made a huge difference.

Jodi Payne: Next slide, please.

Jodi Payne: Our Special Education department was tasked by the Special Education Advisory Committee that Ms. O'Connor Ratcliff mentioned earlier,

Jodi Payne: and the CAC, again in the fall of 2018, to work on improving the welcome.

Jodi Payne: Parents whose children were newly qualifying for services, or parents moving into the district from outside, reported feeling intimidated, outnumbered, and often marginalized, and IEP meetings.

Jodi Payne: As a result they were seeking the support of advocates

Jodi Payne: and attorneys to help even the playing field.

Jodi Payne: An action committee was formed and included our parent engagement liaison, a director of special education, inclusive practices teacher on special assignment, and four hand-picked parent partners.

Jodi Payne: This committee crafted a three-year strategic plan to roll out our system supports for our families. One prominent idea that emerged from the conversation was to recruit and train a parent ambassador volunteer for each one of our thirty nine schools.

Jodi Payne: A parent ambassador was envisioned to be a lifeline for our families. Someone who knew the school and staff well.

Jodi Payne: Someone who had a child with a disability and who could empathize and support families new to special education, as well as new to the district.

Jodi Payne: Someone familiar with the district and resources available to support families.

Jodi Payne: We began with four parent ambassadors the first year,

Jodi Payne: and ended the year with ten parent ambassadors.

Jodi Payne: Recruitment was ongoing. A blackboard message was sent out to our families who had children with disabilities explaining the volunteer opportunity,

Jodi Payne: and that Blackboard announcement also included a link for the application for those parents who were interested in applying.

Jodi Payne: A website was also developed, and you can explore it at [powayusd.com](http://powayusd.com).

Jodi Payne: The tab for Parent Ambassadors program is located on the Special Education page.

Jodi Payne: Upon approval of the application,

Jodi Payne: the parent is introduced in their new role to the site administrator as a parent ambassador

Jodi Payne: the parent engagement liaison schedules a time for face-to-face meetup with the school's special education team.

Jodi Payne: Once a parent ambassador has officially or once a parent has officially become a parent ambassador, they're invited into Slack, that's our primary communication platform.

Jodi Payne: Through this platform the parent ambassadors receive consistent communication from each other,

Jodi Payne: the parent engagement liaison, and me.

Jodi Payne: Here the ambassadors come together twice a month, once for new learning, exploring topics, like our exceptional family resource center, their supports and services they have available,

Jodi Payne: transition planning for students matriculating perhaps between Pre-k to K, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school and beyond, and have navigate challenging situations amongst others.

Jodi Payne: This school year the new learning opportunities have been open to all parents and guardians of students with disabilities in our district.

Jodi Payne: The second monthly meeting is with the Parent Ambassadors, the

Jodi Payne: parent engagement liaison, and me. In these meetings we review the trending issues or concerns we're receiving from our get connected button on our website.

Jodi Payne: Parent Ambassadors also share out about their current experiences in this volunteer role.

Jodi Payne: It's an opportunity for collaboration and celebration within our group.



Jodi Payne: The Parent Ambassador program has certainly improved our parental outreach effort. Over 54 parents have now volunteered to participate in this innovative program. Since the Parent Ambassador's launch

Jodi Payne: we have distributed over 4500 informational flyers on the parent ambassador program. We've distributed these to the school sites, and they then provide those who are students with special needs on IEPs, and they're sent home in their backpack.

Jodi Payne: We have our "get connected" button that I referenced earlier. It's a QR Code that has been accessed over 110 times since November 2021.

Jodi Payne: Of the 54 volunteers committed to supporting this program, we've collected a few parent ambassador testimonials.

Jodi Payne: I thought it might be fun to just share a few with you.

Jodi Payne: First testimonial:

Jodi Payne: As a parent of a child with an IEP and a child without an IEP, I saw the big need to promote inclusion beyond mainstreaming in the classroom at my school site.

Jodi Payne: In general, my family and I felt excluded from the school community events.

Jodi Payne: At a poster party, even at the start of the new 21-22 school year, my child and other kiddos with special needs -- they were in tears. They thought they didn't belong because they were unable to find their name on a list.

Jodi Payne: As this parent joined the parent ambassador team, she also joined the school foundation to work with the principal

Jodi Payne: and the foundation to improve the special education student experience at school and community events.

Jodi Payne: Historically, the events were not very inclusive or unintentionally highlighted special education students in a negative way. So some examples she shared were: Our students with special needs, their names were left off a poster party list at the start of the school year.

Jodi Payne: Our students with special needs were given red capes at a Fun Run fundraiser while no other students were.

Jodi Payne: Our special education, our students in special education and their families, they were excluded from the General Education room parent mail list, resulting in exclusion from play dates, birthday parties, social opportunities, many of which their children really needed to be able to be invited to.

Jodi Payne: Special education students were never, never in the general education classroom pictures,

Jodi Payne: and instead had labeled portrait pictures on pages with big bold lettering "ASD - autism spectrum disorder special day class."

Jodi Payne: The child wasn't on the general ed roster from day one that led to being excluded from back to school night opportunities

Jodi Payne: where parents were unable to meet other parents. They didn't receive the weekly general education newsletter.

Jodi Payne: The general education teacher did not view or treat their child as their student, and they were sent back to the Special Day Class.

Jodi Payne: Since her work as a parent ambassador,

Jodi Payne: and a foundation member,

Jodi Payne: This parent recorded that in collaboration with her principal, they've begun making small changes.

Jodi Payne: All students will be photographed with their general education peers,

Jodi Payne: and the fantastic ASD staff will be photographed and highlighted for their amazing work separately.

Jodi Payne: Highlighting opportunities to include and support the special education community, and faculty. The Special Education Faculty are now included in fundraiser opportunities. Like the biennial book for it fair.

Jodi Payne: The speech and language pathologists and other staff are invited to select books and materials at the Book Fair,

Jodi Payne: where families and the foundation can then purchase these materials for those providers. The special education staff seem so excited and positive that they're included in events, and can get materials to use to work with all of their students.

Jodi Payne: From day one. This parent ambassador's child was on the general education teacher roster. They were able to attend back to school for general education

Jodi Payne: and for special education, and to meet the teacher outside of the IEP. They understood the teacher's expectations. They could see the general education, classroom and hear what kids were mainstream with experience for their birthdays and other classroom celebrations.

Jodi Payne: At the start of the school year for this very first time all students with special needs, were invited to come to campus before school started. They were invited to come see their classrooms and meet their teachers before the first day of school.

Jodi Payne: This parent got such great feedback from families that this opportunity reduced the first time back on campus anxiety, especially since they had a new teacher in the classroom, and the walls were bare. With this level of proactive communication,

Jodi Payne: the shock of a new teacher with a delayed start date, a completely bare, stale Special Day classroom, gave us parents the ability to help our kids through this transition. It was so huge for our families where the children traveled by bus.

Jodi Payne: The parent ambassador outreach opportunity At Back to School night, the principal allowed the parent ambassador to introduce herself to the special education teachers and parents.

Jodi Payne: The principal made herself available in the ASD classroom and engaged with parents

Jodi Payne: After back to school night, she saw a huge increase in special education families that attended the school's community events.

Jodi Payne: The foundation created a portfolio for the inclusion and equity work, and now she has she's VP of inclusion and equity on their school site foundation.

Jodi Payne: As a parent ambassador and foundation member, she's also actively working to include our special education support staff on the foundation's budget,

Jodi Payne: so that they may be able to purchase materials needed to get their kiddos, all Kiddos, excited to learn and to hit their IEP goals. This was so amazing and vital for the staff members to feel present, to feel valued.

Jodi Payne: Another parent testimonial:

Jodi Payne: Becoming a parent ambassador has improved my experience as a parent with a child with a disability and Poway Unified school district in a couple of ways.

Jodi Payne: As a parent ambassador,

Jodi Payne: I've been getting to know both my school, formally and informally,

Jodi Payne: working with all the people who are the conduit to improving our school was my first priority as I would forward concerns in essence to our singular voice, to support our students.

Jodi Payne: Working with the principal, I was able to learn so much about the special education needs of our school. One issue that came up last year was that our school did not have a diaper changing table.

Jodi Payne: I know the previous principal and Special Ed teachers have been trying to figure out this this problem over the previous years.

Jodi Payne: She was able to voice the concern and the need through the peer and ambassador program. And with help of myself and another director we were able to secure a changing table the very next day.

Jodi Payne: This year she worked with the principal to plan and design a sensory room for the students with special needs during the school's first festival.

Jodi Payne: Moreover,

Jodi Payne: the principal and fellow special education parents and friends encouraged this parent ambassador to bring her son to the Steam festival. Since the pandemic, her son's community exposure was very minimal, even nonexistent.

Jodi Payne: With school support and encouragement, she brought her son to the festival, because, even if he had behaviors in the community, they all knew him, and they would support him.

Jodi Payne: Also, the sensory room was there to help our our students with special needs to find their emotional regulation if they were coming out of their comfort zone.

Jodi Payne: Mom shared as a parent, I was able to come out of my comfort zone because I was supported from the school, which in turn helps me mentally grow, and helps me and my child confront their individual challenges.

Jodi Payne: All right, lastly, one more to share

Jodi Payne: As a parent ambassador

Jodi Payne: I really appreciated the way that becoming a parent ambassador makes all the special education machinery of the district more understandable.

Jodi Payne: Being a parent ambassador is actually what inspired me to teach a class at the adult school for parents of children with IEPs related to the IEP process.

Jodi Payne: I feel like the parent Ambassador program has been a big deal for the parents, and I feel ready to do things out there.

Jodi Payne: All right. Next slide, please.

Jodi Payne: Exploring the CADRE website, we found a helpful link for the top tips for state dispute resolution system managers pictured on this slide.

Jodi Payne: Tip number three: Have the right people with the right skills and place to implement your vision. Understand your leadership style, and learn group facilitation skills in order to motivate and inspire others.

Jodi Payne: In reestablishing trusting relationships with our families. It was necessary to rebuild from the inside out.

Jodi Payne: As a director, I requested to change my title from Director of Special Education to Director of Family Engagement, Support and Resolution

Jodi Payne: Associate Superintendent Mizel supported this change, which then afforded our department more opportunities to rebrand.

Jodi Payne: Our parent liaison, Deb Williford,

Jodi Payne: was reclassified as the parent engagement liaison. The collaboration between Deb and I works well, as I tend to be a more big picture planner, and she is more linear in nature.

Jodi Payne: As partners, we've been able to collaboratively develop the necessary steps to make the parent ambassador vision come to fruition.

Jodi Payne: Having someone who thinks different differently than I do, was necessary to progress with our district's need for resolving conflict at the lowest level.

Jodi Payne: Tip number ten:

Jodi Payne: Emphasize early dispute resolution throughout your system. The earlier the resolution, the better the better.

Jodi Payne: Allow for open communication, and be certain that people understand their options. Look continuously for opportunities to find agreement.

Jodi Payne: We recognized our system was lacking consistency with resolving conflict, and developed the arrows noted at the top of this slide.

Jodi Payne: Simple systems improvements.

Jodi Payne: Parents were uncertain as to where to begin with their communications related to conflict. Where could they voice their concerns related to their children?

Jodi Payne: Making improvements to our website and creating this chart really helped direct people to staff and resources.

Jodi Payne: Our district had a relationship with Exceptional Family Resource Center,

Jodi Payne: EFRC, since the early 2000s, where they were invited in as third-party neutrals, and our alternative dispute resolutions.

Jodi Payne: During the summer of 2021, an opportunity presented where our parent engagement liaison and I were able to share a vision of partnership with EFRC more than their role as just a third-party neutral.

Jodi Payne: In this newly rekindled partnership, we meet every other week and share the trends and concerns we're hearing in our parent community.

Jodi Payne: Specialized parent classes have been created by our EFRC Partners, specific to our districts parents' concerns. These are offered to our families. Classes such as IEP 101, Destigmatizing Special Education,

Jodi Payne: and Thinking about Long-term Goals, these are for our parents with students with special needs. These were created based on feedback from our parent ambassadors and our other parents within the community.

Jodi Payne: As Greg shared earlier alternative dispute resolution was prioritized in Poway unified school district.

Jodi Payne: As a trained mediator. myself, it was important to have others with similar training to be available as needed in this conflict resolution process.

Jodi Payne: Our partners,

Jodi Payne: EFRC, sought out to recruit two parents of students with special needs, who were willing and interested to be trained as mediators, and would be on payroll with EFRC.

Jodi Payne: These individuals now serve as our third-party neutrals and ADRs, which require such support.

Jodi Payne: There are many times when a third-party neutral

Jodi Payne: may not be necessary.

Jodi Payne: In these cases, I will partner with one of our other directors to meet our families experiencing conflict to resolve those issues through a district facilitated. ADR.

Jodi Payne: Parents are made aware of our alternative dispute resolution through our parent ambassadors, our parent engagement liaison,

Jodi Payne: our program specialists, directors, and school site leaders and staff.

Jodi Payne: The stigma associated with teams being unable to fully resolve conflict without assistance is not as prevalent.

Jodi Payne: Again, referring back to the arrows at the top of the slide, when parents do inquire about ADR in the majority of our cases, they have already attempted to resolve the conflict at the lowest levels.

Jodi Payne: Next slide, please. And, Mr. Mizel, I'm going to turn it back to you.

Greg Mizel: Okay. So thank you. Director Payne and Michelle

Greg Mizel: for your content added to this presentation. We're coming up on fifty minutes close to an hour, it's a lot of sit and get for people in the audience. Let me just close this out, and then we'll take questions. I want to close by saying,

Greg Mizel: kind of like I opened, right, with humility. We can't predict the impact of a worldwide pandemic on our team's efforts, like

Greg Mizel: reducing due process filings and litigation moving forward ... like we really can't.

Greg Mizel: I mean, we're all hopeful, right, that the foundation we've laid the last few years will sustain us through this present moment and well beyond.

Greg Mizel: Our department

Greg Mizel: is really trying to reasonably meet our students and their families where they're at.

Greg Mizel: I think we've established in multiple contexts now that we can engage in disagreements in healthy and productive ways.

Greg Mizel: It's our hope that effectively partnering with parents, we can spend less time and energy embroiled in conflict and more time and energy exploring ways to continuously improve our students experiences.

Greg Mizel: So with that we'll conclude our formal presentation. Let's say that. And now we can look at questions. So, one of the first questions I saw

Greg Mizel: Bill asked with all the things the district was changing

Greg Mizel: there must have been some pushback, where did it come from and how did you address it?

Greg Mizel: Jody, you've done a lot of talking, so I'm gonna let you breathe for a moment.

Michelle, you want to jump in. Where was their pushback? Michelle, by the way, has probably never experienced pushback, but she's just ... Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Everywhere! Literally everywhere.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: I will say, though, that as much pushback as there was, the more that we talked, the more we didn't just offer training,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: say, we were gonna do it, but we actually did it, the more that started to recede. But I would say it came from everywhere. The Teacher's Union leadership was a big one. They were very nervous. This is a big change. A little handholding and a little reassurance that we're not just going to throw,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: you know. throw this out there and let you deal with all the fallout. That was building some trust, though we're not. We're not going to tell you. We're not just gonna . . .

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: We're not going to. . . . ah. . .

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Part of the fear was that we were going to just put all of these kids with disabilities into a classroom. We're just going to set these kids in your classroom and walk away.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: So building some trust that that wasn't how this was going to happen, we realized that all of our staff needs some support. And first and foremost, those kids need a lot of support. We're not going to leave them high and dry right away. So

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: really addressing that, and you know, to my chagrined, it's a slow process. We're going to go slowly. We're going to bring people along. It's not going to be an overnight thing. So that was at least from my perspective as a school board member and a parent, that was part of what I was seeing.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Greg. What what do you got?

Greg Mizel: So I can pick on our inclusions since you started there. Let's Let's just talk about that, because you know that's a topic that's wildly popular. I know everywhere. I joke like that. Isn't it interesting. I don't know what it's like in in other districts, but I can tell you Here we don't have parents storming the board meeting demanding more inclusive opportunities for their kids.

Greg Mizel: In fact, it's almost just the opposite. They fought so hard to get, right, the extra services and supports for their children that they're very reluctant to let them go. They're fearful, right, and they had to fight like crazy to get what they got. Like the last thing they want to hear is it's all gonna shift.

Greg Mizel: The other thing is, because we had so much programming, especially as it relates to supporting students with autism in this district, we've got a number of families move in to our school district for those specialized programs and services which really aren't in alignment with LRE or current research, right? So as you start to implement change, and then you add to it a pandemic,

Greg Mizel: it creates all kinds of challenges. Michelle, you're absolutely right, like the unions both on the classified and certificated side, like like they're supportive, I mean as long as they don't get too many phone calls.

Greg Mizel: But it's really hard, right, to stop those phone calls, because on every campus there's a few people, right, who are absolutely not just neutral against, opposed to, inclusion, and some of those staff members include people with special education credentials.

Greg Mizel: Like honestly, that's been shocking to me. Some of the folks with mild to moderate, moderate to severe credentials, are our

Greg Mizel: are super nervous for our kids, right, and what their experience would be like in a more mainstream general education classroom setting. So so shifting from, you know, excessive programming to all of our kids are general education kids first, is is massive. We hosted last week our very first all district

Greg Mizel: inclusion summit. How about that? We had Shelley Moore. Some of you may be familiar with her if you're not, Five Moore Minutes -- it's on Youtube. Check her out. She's amazing. We had her as our keynote,

Greg Mizel: and we had our program specialists, directors, and ed specialists like a whole group of people who led over thirty breakouts. And this was again district-wide. Four or five thousand people participating in conversation and having that lived experience. Training. What's coach teaching look like? What's universal design for learning all about?



Greg Mizel: um. You know all, all of those. How do we build a master schedule at the secondary level in particular, that affords general education teachers and special education teachers the opportunity to collaborate, common prep periods. Like all of those things, right, in in the weeds. So exciting, exciting work. But I was with special education labor yesterday at at the Union Hall.

Greg Mizel: Every time I go there, I'm a little nervous. I'm just waiting for, you know, like, okay, so where's it coming from? And what's it going to sound like? And I think in those contexts, just like in these contexts that we've been talking about this morning with our parents, right? It's so important that you start with relationships. It's so important that you

Greg Mizel: listen to understand the fear-based behavior is just that. So if you cannot respond to the behavior but really listen to what's driving the behavior

Greg Mizel: and answer that, like I think that's where we can, you know, continue to move the needle. We in this district with inclusive practices have started with volunteers. That's why it's a little slower. We don't want hostages, and we don't want to feel top down, and we had great success with that model.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Greg, let me make sure, this wasn't the focus of this presentation. But

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Greg's department also has a really innovative program with COSAs, classified on special assignment, and we brought in IA's and gave them a job to

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: to speak directly to their their other classified brethren. And IAs, our instructional assistance district-wide, and do that training and they speak with teachers too; and I think when it, when that training is coming from one of your own that's very helpful, too, and and really helps to calm any fears and that push back in coming from that sector in addition. And that program has been an incredible bright spot in our district.

Greg Mizel: I totally agree. The inclusive practices team. You guys can learn more about that on our website. Again, with the special education tab, just to slide down to the practices of our story is there. We have teachers on special assignment, and classified a special assignment who are leading PD. And, let me just say, classified on special assignment. Here's a great example.

Greg Mizel: That idea came from our Union President on the classified side. I wish I was that smart, and could take credit for coming up with that.

Greg Mizel: It wasn't me. So good things happen when we listen to our sometimes critics. Good things happen when we pay attention to relationship. When we include more people and more perspective, right, in the work and in the challenges we're attempting to to address. We get smarter, we we, we work better. So so yes, inclusion is a big story. The other example that I already alluded to. I'll just very quickly touch on this, because, Bill,

Greg Mizel: the big question, Yes, push back on all sides, as Michelle, said dyslexia. Let's just go back there. You know why we were ignoring people for years?

Greg Mizel: Because we had a balanced literacy program that we'd adopted. We'd invested, I mean, I don't even know how much money in it, and it's not deep. It's not strong. Like for 85% of the kids that

don't have a language-based challenge it's fine. But for the 15-20% who really do struggle, who need direct explicit systematic instruction. It lacks!

Greg Mizel: And then when you look at so what does intervention look like? Well, three years ago, right, it didn't look great. Like you had pockets of excellence. But you didn't have systemic. There was no systemic approach.

Greg Mizel: Right? So so. So now imagine I'm on the special end side of the house, and I'm trying to work with the learning support services side of the House.

Greg Mizel: I'm trying to get our Gen. Ed. Teachers, right, to recognize that dyslexia is not a special education, or uniquely or solely special education issue, right? It's like there's a lot of kids with and without labels who struggle learning to read.

Greg Mizel: What if we changed our instructional approach? So so sometimes the challenge, the push back comes from labor right? We like playing unions, especially if you're at my level and leadership. It's hard work. But you know what sometimes it's people just down the hall. Other instructional leaders who just have a different perspective. Right? Who don't see what you see.

Greg Mizel: And because of that, maybe aren't always leading with empathy or a deep understanding of the problem you're trying to solve, and how they might be partners. And so building those bridges, those relationships. It takes time.

Greg Mizel: Ah, we've made great progress right? I mean, I'm so proud to say we started training two hundred of our staff in a special education division on the IMSE, the Institute for multi-sensory education, some of you may be familiar with that.

Greg Mizel: This year our general education teachers, K-2 are having that experience. It's incredible, right. So it's step by step, it's incremental. And yes, there's push back, and then you add a pandemic and crankiness, You know,

Greg Mizel: everybody misbehaving right? The tipping point just below the surface. It's a really hard time to be a leader, but we have not slowed our roll. We are pressing forward

Greg Mizel: and super excited and honored right to be in these positions, and to have this opportunity. So, Bill, thank you for that question. I hope we we got it. There's a couple more in here.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Yeah, let me let me just close off Bill's question, and I will say that. I have offered to Greg and his team at all times, if you need to have an excuse for what we're asking people to do. Throw me under the bus -- all of that darn school board they're making us do this. I do not mind taking on

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: on that role and taking that hit. I frankly don't have to take it very often, because people are on board, and that comes from learning more. But I've been willing to take that hit as well.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: That next question we're about to move to, What advice do I have for parents your school district hasn't, yet done this hard work. What's a good first step

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: for parents and districts that aren't yet responsive, inclusive, et cetera, and I was. I was jotting down some notes when I first saw this one, and I could write a book if you don't want to run school board. That's the first one, boy. Jump in. Come on! We need great people in there.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: I had a lot of things that I wanted to note, and then I'll turn it over for more thoughts to Greg and Jodie. But I would say every single SELPA has a CAC. That Community advisory committee for special education. Our district happens to be, you know, its own SELPA. So we have. Oh, boy, I got a jet. I'm sorry that's gonna annoy you guys. Um,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: but join join your CAC.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: That that's a representative group. The membership is elected and approved by the SELPA, and in our district, the school board. Join that group because they bring a lot of attention to the issues. They really bring things to the forefront. I would say your child's School Site Council.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Get on your school Site Council. That group helps set priorities for how each school, each individual school site is going to prioritize money that they receive and different programs. On that note PTAs and foundations.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Please join whatever your school has. Because if you don't, how does that?

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: How do families that don't have experience with students with disabilities. They don't know what those different needs are if they're not aware that they need to have an area at their school dance for kids who can't handle the noise? Whose sensory percept . . .

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: they're overloaded. How are they going to do anything to accommodate kids with different needs if their families aren't there to advocate for that? So make your families needs visible. And the PTAs and foundations are really great ways to do that. You get a voice with your principal, your teachers and , your school leadership,

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: and you become a member of your school's leadership group, and they will start to look to you when planning events like. Oh, what do we need to do for our students with disabilities? Let's make sure we didn't forget.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: So that's a role that parents can definitely play. Give input on your on your LCAP, the local control accountability plan, for your district. Make sure that students with disabilities are not an afterthought. Jump in. There. Districts are required to take that parent input. Make sure you don't skip it, Do it. Take some time.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: What What else? I don't know. Again. I could write a book on this. I swear maybe I should. But, Greg, you have some other thoughts, Jody?

Jodi Payne: I was just going to chime in and echo what you had shared. The parent ambassadors, many of them are involved in multiple committees at the school site level. And even the testimonials they shared out. That's exactly what they said. Their voice -- they're putting it into every possible place that they can. So you know whether that be a part of the foundation, whether that be part of the PTA, or

whatever. Um. Many, again, of our parent ambassadors are already on three, four, five different committees for the site.

Jodi Payne: So that way they're not forgotten. They say they physically show up, and they're like, Aha! Let's think about all of our kiddos. So, Yeah, I think that's a great suggestion, Michelle.

Greg Mizel: I think you guys hit it.

Greg Mizel: I think, for parents it's challenging sometimes to know where to push in. Who to talk to, and what to share, and what not to share. But here's the deal.

Greg Mizel: Nobody advocates for a child like a parent.

Greg Mizel: Nobody. So never apologize for your advocacy. I mean there's a way right to engage with people respectfully and patiently. Remember they don't know what you know.

Greg Mizel: So give a little grace, but be persistent. That's what I would say. Be persistent, and if you have a crucial conversation, and you're not sure someone's going to follow up,

Greg Mizel: trailer up with an email so you have a time-date stamp. "Today. we met in the parking lot I shared with you this concern. . . .and you suggested that you were going to follow up, and that I might hear from a week or so. Really looking forward to hearing an update." Like, do that right? So you can create a paper from just little little like pro kips like that

Greg Mizel: kind of add accountability. So that good intention people do what they say they're going to do, right. And then, hopefully, you can move things.

Greg Mizel: I thought there was really great suggestions on parents. But

Greg Mizel: lean in. That's how we start. And thank you even for asking that question, because that tells me, right, you're interested.

Greg Mizel: So good stuff. Okay, I'm looking to see if there's any other questions.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: Okay, I'm looking to see if there's any other questions.

Jodi Payne: Yeah, there's one more, Greg.

Greg Mizel: Say that again.

Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff: There's a market for my book that I haven't written..

Greg Mizel: I know chapters, huh for sure, the training of IAs

Jodi Payne. I think there is one other question.

Greg Mizel: Yeah. I saw that there was a comment just affirming the training of IAs is a positive thing. I will tell you that our instructional assistance, our paras, they receive the message so much better when it's one of their own. When it's someone who's walked their walk, lived their life, earned their wage,

Greg Mizel: been a bit, kicked, punched, spit on, like all that stuff. Our classified staff are amazing. And so yes, trying to work with those teams to

Greg Mizel: to own their own learning right, like the leadership within the classified unions and the rank.

Greg Mizel: So often on a professional learning day, they're a kind of a they're kind of forgotten right like like that. I don't know that leadership spends enough time thinking about that group and their needs. So in our district, you know, I think we're making progress, working collaboratively and really

Greg Mizel: better understanding what our staff need, and then and then providing training and resources to ensure they get

get what they need?

Greg Mizel: Okay, Other questions.

Jodi Payne: Yeah. I can take the next one to start with. The question is, are there mediators you employ who are not parents of children with disabilities, as well as the two parents. So currently again as I shared, I am a trained mediator, so I'm one of the levels or layers of that. But as far as employing other mediators, it's the exceptional family resource center that employs the two parents. They're not parents of our own kiddos.

Jodi Payne: Um, and yes, they both are, as I stated earlier, parents of kiddos with special needs. So I guess I'm kind of just reinforcing that. No, we don't. Michelle, I think you wanted to answer a little more on that question. Oh, no, okay.?

Jodi Payne: All right. Are there other questions out there?

Greg Mizel: And we've cleared the queue,

Greg Mizel: And we've done pretty good on our time. We're at an hour and ten minutes, so I love a meeting that starts on time. It ends early.

Melanie Reese: That's absolutely true. I agree with you there, Greg. Well, thank you so much, Greg. Michelle, Jody.

Melanie Reese: We have much to gain from your examples and your efforts that you have done there. The combination of numbers and the testimony of families is very compelling, and we appreciate your leadership and the time you took to bring the story to the national community.

Melanie Reese: We hope that you found the information valuable today, and meaningful for your important work in the field, and know that we are always interested here at CADRE and learning about innovative practices. So please share with us what you're doing

Melanie Reese: out there. We'd love to hear from you.

Melanie Reese: We wanted to offer you a last-minute chance to register for the CADRE Symposium to be held October, 26-28 in Denver, Colorado. So while registration is officially closed. If you contact us at CADRE this week we'll see you in under the wires. So just email us at Cadre at direction Service, dot Org

Melanie Reese: and again, your feedback is very important to us, so please click on the link in the chat box to fill out a very brief survey monkey to evaluate today's Webinar. We we value your feedback, and we take it to heart. So please.

Melanie Reese: And then, if you have information, or excuse me, if you would like some more follow-up information about CADRE, or you would like to reach out to us. Here's our information, and you can always sign up for the CADRE Newsletter, where you can learn about what's coming down the pike.

Melanie Reese: So from all of us at CADRE, thank you for joining us today again. Thank you, Michelle Jodie and Greg. We appreciate you all and have a fantastic school year. Everybody. Bye.