

Interviews with Exemplar States

JoAnne – Clip #5 Transcript

Jo Anne: Well again, when we started our center, we had a commitment to having a process that stakeholders could trust. No one really wants to find themselves in due process, but if they do, they want a system that they can trust. They want a system that they know will be meeting their needs. So we had to make numerous changes to do that. We knew that we would have to do a lot of training; that we would have to really prepare a system where the goals would meet the needs of all our stakeholders. So we needed a compensation package that, as we invested money into those Hearing Officers, they were paid a substantial amount that they would stay. Before, they were paid very little, so they practically did their hearing officer work as pro bono work and we had a huge turnover. So we wanted to develop a panel of Hearing officers that were well educated in the law, understand the unique nuisances to conducting special education hearings. So we went through a process where we sought the stakeholder input. Schools in our state pay for the cost of the hearing officers. So we went back and we surveyed the school districts who had participated in due process over the last, prior five years, and asked them about where they felt the costs were difficult for them to pay and we just asked questions to kind of find out what they thought was important. And generally what we found is that they believed that they paid what they got and they were willing to pay a rate which was comparable to what other state agencies paid, which was more in line with what attorneys earn. All of our Hearing Officers are attorneys, but we were careful to structure a payment schedule that wasn't off the charts for the school districts either. So we went through a process, it was embraced by our district, the stamp of approval by our superintendent and it has been a very effective process... One of the benefits is that by restructuring the pay system, our Hearing Officers have stayed. We've paid a lot of money for their training and invested a lot in them. They're a very close group, a lot of camaraderie and no indication that we're going to be losing them. So it's been a good investment of our state dollars.