

>> Why don't we get rolling? Sound good to everybody? All right. Well, welcome to our presentation, uh-oh, here we go. Not changing. Hold on one second. There we go. So we're going to give you an overview of alternative dispute resolution for students with IEPs here in San Francisco Unified School District, and hopefully be able to share some ideas with folks from other districts or families who might be supporting their district and starting an alternative dispute resolution program. We're from San Francisco Unified and the Bar Association and tell you a little bit more. So I see now people are sharing some information in the chat. Thanks so much for doing that. That's our connector. We're going to take you through some introductions that you can get to know the three of us, we'll talk about alternative dispute resolution in SF Unified and then we'll take a look at a case study and then we'll close out. All right. So I'm Adriana Aro. I'm the alternative dispute resolution program administrator in San Francisco Unified. The primary piece of my role is coordinating ADR sessions and making sure that folks who are participating in alternative dispute resolution have what they need to have a successful ADR, intervention. Mildred?

>> Oh, good morning. My name is Mildred Brown, and I'm the alternative dispute resolution consultant. Have been supporting in San Francisco since 2012, 13, and have been very active with state SELPA in regards to the alternative dispute resolution committee as well as our district ADR team. My role is to work with Adriana and Carol in their capacities to troubleshoot cases as well as continuing to update and monitor how ADR is doing in the district as well as the support and feedback from our community partners. We work on an ongoing basis to improve our strategies and supports as far as the offerings for alternative dispute resolution in the district. I'll turn it over to Carole.

>> Thank you, Mildred, and welcome everyone. I am the director of ADR, at the Bar Association of San Francisco and have been coordinating with SFUSD around these strategies and services for going on 6 years I believe this is our 6th year. And so I am recruiting and otherwise managing and maintaining the facilitator panel which is a group of professional neutrals with deep background in special ed. I'm also the liaison with Adriana for any case assignments and then of course we continue as any good program would to evolve our strategies and improve all the time, and it's one of my joys to be a thought partner on this project.

>> Thank you guys. All right.

>> Our ADR grant history I think is probably the story of many districts in that we had a high number of parent complaints and concerns and to the point where we certainly drew the attention of California Department of Ed. San Francisco Unified, along with nine other districts, who also had high parent complaints all received an opportunity to work in a collaborative with our community partners in developing an ADR proposal for a 5 year grant. It was seed money, certainly not enough to be able to say that we do an awful lot just with that money, but San Francisco was very helpful in providing actual program administrator as well as other supports to be able to continue the work. Our continued current reality is that we're really thankful for the distance learning plans and learning loss and FAPE recovery dollars that came from our funding from the State Department this year and as a result of that, we've been able to reset after the pandemic. So we're looking at where we are as a district, and a community, and how do we support our parents and staff as we come back from a very challenging 18 months. So we really want to be able to press upon our community to continue to keep us in mind rather than jumping to the end of the continuum as far as going to our actual due process procedure. Carole, do you want to add?

>> Well, I just wanted to reiterate that we've been, as the years have progressed, we've continued to add strategies and refine where we are what we need and of course nothing more pressing than this particular year in the realm of learning loss and recovery. So will be speaking to you a little bit more about how those strategies are evolving and what we're putting in place what I hope is helpful to you all as well.

>> Absolutely. All right. So a little bit about SF Unified. So our mission for the special education services diversification is that the special education department is committed to providing innovative, effective services resulting in positive outcomes for the lifelong success of the students. In compliance and in compliance with state and federal regulations, specialized academic instruction, and related services are designed to meet the needs of students with the qualifying disability as outlined in each student's individualized IEP program. I think that our ... I think that the alternative dispute resolution program fits very nicely into our mission because when you have a conflict between families and schools and you're not able to resolve that sometimes we do see an impact on how that student is receiving their services or their specialized academic instruction. And so it's a really important program to have in order to make sure we're fulfilling this mission for all our students and not just some of our students. We also have some district-wide guidelines, and we call them our HUG guidelines. These are to honor, understand, and guide both our students and our families and any stakeholders we may interact with. I won't read all of these to you but we call these our service standards, right? So we really want to make sure that we're being positive and proactive and timely and professional and that we're being active listeners and productive listeners, right? It's one thing to actively listen. It's another to actively listen and not do anything about it so we really want to use our active listening skills to build empathy with our families and with each other. And we also want to be solutions-oriented. We don't want to be all talk and no action, so a big part of what we're looking at in San Francisco is making sure that we're moving forward with any plans that we have to support our students or our families and that covers both special education and general education.

>> And I'll say, similar to the HUG service standards, honestly, professional neutrals operate with many of those very same understandings. And what we want to bring out, which I think may be more obvious to this crowd than maybe others, but ADR is an alternative to litigation. That's really the origin of the term. And it's structural in the sense with this program that it's actually an outside provider of those professional neutrals. For the special ed differences that need resolution. So we really value ADR, as a proposition in the space, to build and relationship repair. It's voluntary. It's confidential. Nobody is forced to do it so we like to say there's no downside. Try it. Due process is always right there available, no other process is disturbed by entering into an ADR session, and it can be effective at empowering for the family's and especially also for the district if agreements can be reached, a reconstruction of dialogue can happen with those families and the movement forward is constantly building progress in the relationship. And that's the ultimate goal.

>> I just want to add that when we started the work we wanted to be sure that we were keeping the heart as our symbol and what we wanted to be sure parents understood that when we're building the repair and relationships, we also wanted to value those relationships because many of our parents start out with children first grade, and we want to be able to sustain and have this heartfelt relationship until the student leaves the district and ADR will help us. In that goal.

>> And then quickly, thank you, Mildred, just want to ... You'll see there's a no lawyers symbol there and I just want to iterate this is an alternative path and we don't ... It's a lawyer-free zone. The reason for that is we want to really distinguish it from due process and we also want to create a slightly more casual forum where people can speak for themselves, especially parents. So that's part of that is preserving the parent voice in these sessions.

>> Absolutely. All right, so we're going to dive in now to talking about our various strategies so right now in San Francisco Unified, we have four different strategies for alternative dispute resolution. And so I would say we'll go into more detail but I would say collaborative conferences are really like our bread and butter. That's what we hope people want to use. It's where we find that the most resolution is found and that could lead to other strategies being used or vice versa. Other strategies can lead to collaborative conference being used and then the other ... I would say the second most commonly used strategy is facilitated IEPs, which are just like what they sound like. It's where we bring in a neutral facilitator to help run the IEP meeting. We also have two one-on-one strategies. One is called communications strategy, and the other is called guided consultation. And both of those are individual consultations to help support next steps in some sort of communication related or other dispute related concern so I'll click onto our next bit of info.

>> Thank you, Adriana. So I'll just jump in to explain a little bit more about collaborative conferences: Technically they really are the mediation session, mediation-styled session. We don't call it a mediation. We call it a collaborative conference. Why? We want to distinguish it from the due process track which has something called mediation in it. And we also want to get the word collaborative there. We really want all sides to be heard and for understandings and impasse to be worked through. So this is really the concentrated moment, where if there have been historical conflicts and often there are more historical, this is a way to take a little longer period of time, these are two hours in length, and unpack some of that history. Focus on relationships, the communication methods moving forward, and then if we can come to an agreement around certain kinds of understandings that could be specific to what otherwise would be codified as an amendment to the IEP, or it could be progress made in just how are we going to communicate going forward so we don't repeat where we've been in this kind of historical back and forth upset. So sometimes it's about acknowledging and memorializing. What progress has been made on the human to human communication front. Other kinds of things or, and/or included maybe some specific agreements around the IEP itself.

>> A facilitated IEP is something that I know that most of our audience is probably very familiar with. This is where we started in San Francisco as far as looking at what strategies we already had in place, and then how would we take those strategies and involve a neutral facilitator? Many of our training ... Our staff had already been trained around facilitation and facilitating IEPs. So this strategy involves our neutral facilitators from the Bar Association. They work ahead of time with both the staff and the parents. They want to be sure that all voices are heard at the table and understood. So there's a lot of prework that happens before the actual facilitated IEP, where everyone is comfortable when they come to the table and know what agreements are being reached that day. So conflict management is certainly a tool that has to be utilized because many times parents come, very upset with the system and then many times the facilitated IEP is paired with another alternative as far as our ADR strategies so we're talking about bringing in communication strategies as well as our guided consult. So we really do feel that, and we looked and talked the other day about how many facilitated IEPs we had. It was amazing that number has decreased and we have more parents interested in the collaborative conferences.

>> We'll show you a little bit of that data later. All right. So our communication strategy session is a really great standalone or partner to the other strategies. It's a confidential one-on-one or small group meeting with the facilitator and sometimes these arise from communications issues related to a snarky e-mail that was sent or some tension that somebody on the IEP team sensed in a phone call or something like that. But sometimes it's a way just to strategize on how to improve communication related to the IEP or how to improve communication related to moving forward. Like, let's say the team isn't ready to move into a collaborative conference so they don't think they need a facilitated IEP. The communications strategy session is a great place for the uncomfortable members to really unpack their feelings and unpack what they're worried about and gain some confidence going into whatever the next steps might be. So I think this is a really valuable ... Sometimes it's a valuable first step but sometimes it's a good follow-up step too. Sometimes folks need that little bit of extra to reassure them that the way things are moving forward are the right way for them to move forward. Related to the communications strategy session is guided consultation and this is our connection back to COVID and how we're dealing with things during the pandemic. So we recently added this strategy it is also a one-on-one confidential meeting with neutral facilitators but it's completely related to unpacking COVID related educational concerns. So in the State of California this year we have a new law called AB 130 that requires school districts to provide an independent study option for students who may be medically unable to return to school in-person and the guided consultation is a great place for folks to go to unpack whether that is or is not the right path for a student. We can also talk about other COVID recovery services that are related to that student's case, whether or not that's an appropriate path for the student to go down, and these conversations can happen with either a family member or an educational rights holder or other members of the IEP team who are school-based. This is new territory for all of us and so this has been a really valuable option for folks to really figure out how to move forward related to COVID. Because sometimes our gut instincts are like no, that can't ... This student can't do this, or my kid can't do that. But once you have an opportunity to talk to someone who's not emotionally invested in the situation, it can kind of clarify the best paths for moving forward so it's a great strategy opportunity.

>> And I'll just add quickly, Adriana, to and for everyone ... The guided consult is really constructed to be that first moment of dialogue around all the stresses and the difficulties of COVID and educating a child with special needs and so for that reason we like to refer to this as a thought partnership because the facilitators are very facile, I guess. At knowing how to kind of ask what questions to get open up a sense of options and possibilities and that's generally our goal here is to really try to get people thinking as creatively as possible around solutions.

>> I just want to tag on just a little bit to say that the guided consult may mean that it's not a special ed issue at all.

>> Right.

>> It may be an issue just regarding resources that the parents are seeking. Our communication with a particular staff person. It's amazing that we start out thinking that ADR is just special ed related. And then based on all the communications that we have been able to see around COVID related educational concerns, that the concerns are far broader than just special ed services.

>> I'm just going to actually jump in. There's a question in the chat about who's the audience for the guided consult? And it's both parents and district staff.

>> Yeah, absolutely. All right. There we go.

>> So the typical types of disputes ... You know, it's very interesting that the typical types of disputes has gotten a lot broader after our return from distance learning. However, there's still the same similarity about disputes over FAPE, and school placement and many of those disputes are what happened during distance learning. Disagreements with eligibility where many parents are dealing without the opportunity to be in a classroom with a teacher that the student might need something more or higher level of eligibility in regards to more segregated versus inclusive settings.

Relationships with school staff and special ed office staff that continues to be an ongoing concern. I can recall, when we first got started we had a collaborative conference because the parent no longer wanted to speak with the principal or the case manager. So how are you going to operate and be working with the school if you won't speak to them so we had to resolve that first and then of course, safety and bullying. Paraeducator support, and then what's happening now in regard to AB 130 which is a California legislation about online learning. So the ADR team has tracked this information in the past to be able to see what trends and demographic issues there are and based on that tracking we've been able to plan training for staff and training for our parent community as well. And we do anticipate that we will just continue to get more and more different and broader disputes as they come about based on concerns around distance learning as well as some of our parents still feel that there's a concern about the instruction that is being offered now that school has returned. There's a handout. Carol?

>> Oh yeah. I believe we'll have time for questions in a minute or two. Do you want to hold the question for then, or do you feel like it's more timely now?

>> We can wait for that question.

>> We're just going to kind of complete the set of disputes and then we'll definitely be entered ... There's a couple questions in chat as well.

>> Yeah I think we'll cover the questions after this piece. So we do want to share our workflow with folks. This is a relatively new workflow, and this is actually a two slider, so brace yourself. So step one is that we really want ADR to be a first step, something that happens before we engage our legal department and San Francisco Unified being a larger school district, we do have a legal department, not really on site right now because we're not on site. But we do have a legal department we can access when we need to. Smaller districts might not have this, this option readily available, and so what we really need to do in our district and want to do ... Are doing in our district is shifting that cultural ... I guess, instigation to go directly to Legal and shifting things to alternative dispute resolution because we want families and we want the rest of the IEP team to also feel like they have some agency and some ability to figure out what the best solution is for that particular case. We don't want our legal department to come through and say nope, this is the way it has to happen and obviously we do have to work within the bounds of the law but we really want to make sure that alternative dispute resolution is a first stop for everybody. We only want things to elevate to Legal once they get to a certain point and we want that to go through our directors only. So the next part of our workflow is more ... I guess the part that's more relevant to the folks here is probably how to know when a case is brewing and I'll let you guys read all the rest of the stuff but I think the most important things to think about, as someone who might be referring something to Alternative Dispute Resolution, is thinking about FAPE issues. So what things have come up a lot? Has someone missed services because of service provider is on leave and they weren't replaced? Have goals been unmet year after year or even just one year? Has the parent decided to make a unilateral placement outside the district? Or are there unsigned IEPs, or even IEPs that haven't even been partially consented to? I think that's actually something relevant to folks here as well, since we're a national group. Cali has affirmative consent laws so we can't actually implement an IEP unless a parent confirms yes I want this to happen. They can give partial consent, but it sometimes happens where year after year we don't see consent and we can't implement what we hope is the best service for that child. Other things that might lead to alternative dispute resolution is adult affects. So how are the adults in this situation behaving? The kid might be fine, but the adults might be expressing tension and frustration. There might be really big differences of opinions on what FAPE means or how we should resolve an issue. We might see people on the school side of things or people on the ... Our parents and educational rights holders really digging in on what they think the right path forward is, and we just kind of get stuck. So these are some of the things that we like to look out for, to figure out whether or not a case is brewing, and ultimately what we hope is that these alternative dispute resolution strategies are an opportunity for everyone to kind of take a deep breath and listen and really find thoughtful way to move forward. That makes everyone not necessarily happy, but satisfied the student is getting what they need. So with that, I think we'll open it up ... Oh, go ahead, Mildred.

>> I think the one thing that we need to be mindful is that we really when we started the work we wanted to be sure we were serving our families ... Frequent fliers, as far as due process. So we're talking about having an opportunity to reach out to the underserved family community to be sure that they are also a part of this process so equity the cultural lens, all that has to go into the work with the mediators, our facilitators, as well as our staff because there is an in San Francisco, we celebrate diversity. But we also know that many of those families are going unserved. So even though we have done a very good job, I think, in terms of looking at that we're always thinking about how we can do more and bring those families into our work.

>> And recognizing that it takes time to build trust when trust has been broken so we want to take those small steps that eventually add up to be a bigger step to engage families in these processes.

>> Absolutely.

>> Do we want to ...

>> Yeah, I think we can open it up to questions now.

>> So I'll just quickly ... There's the first question from Scott, about we might not call them mediations. We're calling them collaborative conferences but is that term and ... Are they mediations for purposes of IDEA? I'm going to quickly jump in and then maybe Mildred, have you answer that. When they said it's like tantamount to the mediation, what I meant there is mediation ethics apply, and confidentiality applies.

>> Yeah.

>> In the mediation world's sense of things as a protected set of communications but Mildred, go ahead.

>> I just want to start out by saying that in San Francisco because of the value of and working with our legal team, when we started out the work they wanted to be sure that we can separate for parents and staff, what was alternative due process or dispute resolution and what was due process. So we were very careful when we were creating the strategies to be sure that we were not using the same terminology as far as saying mediation because mediation is on the other side. It's the part of the due process. So our work and branding is all in regards to if you're looking at the continuum of the [Indistinct] continuum for ADR. We're before the line, goals, and to do process. So no, we don't refer to our collaborative conferences, even though they still have that same tenor as far as the mediation, as a mediation conference.

>> Um there's another question here which I think is really ... This is where the rubber meets the road so how do we share and train what we've learned with staff so [Indistinct] in the parent community when we've had what strategy in place, a guided consult and what learning's come out of that, how do we share it.



>> Yeah. I can try to tackle that. So what we ... So as far as doing outreach, we do work closely with our ... I was blank on the term. The parent education group. Support for Families is what they're called in our district. We work very closely with them to give presentations to the community and to share information with families. We ... San Francisco is unique in that we are a district and a SELPA, and so we do share a lot of information through informal professional development and we were able to share information trickle it down through principals, so what we do is we share education with principals and then there's ... They follow up with staff members and share that information and now we're able to bring information back to the AR program. We also work very closely with the community ... I'm sorry, I meant public so I can't remember what any acronyms mean. Our CAC.

>> Support for Families.

>> Support for Families, CAC, and we make sure that were sharing a lot of information via those channels. We also do at the beginning of the year, and throughout the year we do presentations with our administrative teams as well as with any new teachers that come into the district to share information about the program with them. Because the site level, that's often where they start to see things brewing. By the time it reaches somebody at the district level, things have really gotten pretty uncomfortable for everybody. And so we want to catch things a little bit sooner so that power imbalance doesn't start to feel so big and so that families can feel like they have an option for how to move forward. Yeah.

>> Then I'm not sure if there are other questions or any raised hands at the moment but I don't see anything more ...

>> From Lee from Maine ...

>> Lee from Maine, yeah. Your hand is up.

>> Okay.

>> I think you might be muted.

>> All right. Any other questions from the group?

>> I have a question. Can you hear me okay?

>> Yep, absolutely.

>> Sorry about that, I'm driving, so let me ... I'm pulled over, but ... Um. I just wanted to ask whether there are ways that ... I work for a parents' center here in Northern California and what I'm seeing is a lot of problems right now, and I put a little bit about this in the chat, are really could be solved with some short-term kind of diagnostic interventions, you know, can we try this, can we try that. But often what we see is that only some families care about those options. And to Dr. Brown's point it's like which family finds out that if you go to the special ed director and you ask for XYZ services temporarily or [Lost Signal] restrictive placements. So I just wonder how you guys deal with that because we see this coming up in our work all the time. Question of how do you make sure everybody gets the same message about what options are available?

>> Yeah. I think that we've ... Done ... We have a pretty consistent program in our district, and so I don't see a lot of that happening where a parent goes to a higher-up and then something is implemented because the parent asked someone who was higher up on the chain of command. We have pretty consistent and solid systems in place so that, you know, if something is requested or somebody wants to speak to a special education director or a chief of special education there's always some sort of discussion about what's happened and an investigation into what the conversation has been thus far. And then we look at how to solve that problem within what we can do and what we have offered previously in our district. And I know that sometimes ... I'm pretty new to San Francisco Unified and I worked in two other districts previously where sometimes that did happen. A parent would appeal to someone higher on the food chain and something would be implemented because they asked but I really haven't seen that happen in our district. I think oftentimes things are passed back to alternative dispute resolution. I worked closely with our directors and our chief of special education on cases that have been elevated to them, about how ADR might help bring the team back together to discuss the options that are available for that level of dispute.

>> Thank you. I guess I just wanted to quickly add that I ... I was actually talking about kind of the opposite problem which is that a lot of our families who have limited English and other issues [Indistinct] even know that they could ask. Like they're told, this is what we can offer.

>> Uh huh.

>> This is the offer, and then they don't know and because people don't take the time to review the procedural safeguards or they're hard to understand or whatever.

>> Right.

>> So it's actually how do we get to those people, as opposed to the other one, if that makes sense.

>> Go for it, Mildred.

>> Want to comment to Sheryl about that. And that is really something that is part of our work this year with COVID state grant. How do you reach and be consistent as far as messaging what ADR, is all about. What we found during COVID is that many of our parents were still calling the school thinking that they would get an answer, and no one was at the school ... No one communicated with them. Part of the alternative dispute resolution process is also our ombudsperson and she has worked the hotlines as far as being able to be sure what the issues concerns and trends have been and then there's ongoing communication with the AAPAC organization which is the African American Parent Advisory Council. With DELAC, which is our district committee for language and also for our Asian speakers so there's so many different parent outreach groups.

>> Right.

>> That are very helpful as far as being able to communicate, and Adriana did not mention that she worked with the council of parents about ADR, just a few weeks ago, to talk to them about what their needs were so we'd also be sure we incorporated those needs into the new grant in all our strategies.

>> Yeah and one more thing to add, another piece of my roll is looking at compliance, and those on the flowchart, the things that we can look out for where we know a case might be brewing, so I'll actually go into SASE, which is our IEP management system, and I'll look for unsigned IEPs or I'll look for you know, partially consented-to IEPs and I'll reach out to case managers and say, hey I noticed that this family hasn't signed an IEP in six years. Tell me a little bit about that. Or I noticed that this family hasn't signed their IEP and it says on the info page that they are Cantonese-speaking, and I noticed in the notes that there wasn't an interpreter. Can you tell me more about that? And then so I go through our interpretation channels and I'll reach out to that family and say, hey, you know I noticed ... I noticed that there seems to be some disconnect about the IEP. I'm wondering what's going on with you, and so I gather information and I do direct outreach to various families as well in hopes of bringing more families to the table who might not have all the information they need or want to support their children. What's the other question in the chat? Do you share strategies that you come up with during ADR, with other families though? Families don't know to ask for things they don't know are possibilities. Sharing ADR outcomes could be helpful for that. Yeah, that's a really good point. We do gather feedback after every strategy session and so one thing I actually just realized is we don't ask for narrative input and I would love to have more narrative input, even a question about what ... How do you see this being more effective in the future and so I'd really like to have that feedback so thank you for pointing that out. That's something we can do better, for sure. Carole and Mildred, do you have any thoughts on that question about outcomes?

>> Yeah, I think one of the things that you're speaking to there, Adriana, is about constantly serving and evaluating our process. Is it really effective for people? Are they getting from it what we hope they're going to get from it. Sharing specifically created solutions for particular kinds of circumstances, I think there's more work we can be doing that way to analogize and work with facilitators who are the holders, in some ways, of those kinds of solutions so that there is a sharing, and I know statewide there's a kind of way in which across districts we all want to be sharing with one another in California around how are ... How we are going to navigate these solutions. To best achieve FAPE where possible. And recognizing that it may be very difficult to achieve FAPE in some instances, too. How do we convey the ADR process to all parents with disabilities in our district?

>> Immediate advisory council does a great job in working with us ...

>> Yes.

>> ... And like I said, the one role we didn't ... The highlight is our [Indistinct] ombudsperson. Certainly that is her ... She's a community partner with so many organizations.

>> Yeah.

>> And always, ADR comes up. This year Adriana has done an excellent job as far as updating the website [Indistinct] who are able to access the website or able to go there, and then like I said, she's a strong partner with the support of her family. And has done several workshops and trainings around alternative dispute resolution with the ... All of the community partners who are part of Support for Families.

>> And one other connection that I recently found was that ... So we have all of our different parent organizations. I think there's about 13. We have our community advisory council, we have our AAPAC, which is our African American Parent Council, DELAC is the other one Mildred mentioned, and there's several more. But they're all such small organizations that they don't operate separately and there's one liaison that works with all of them and she's our parent. I can't remember the exact term but she's been my go-to person for sharing information with family councils. We also had a conversation recently about doing outreach to our Pacific Islander family specifically Samoan families and bringing facilitators on to the Bar Association panel with background in the Samoan community. And so I've been working with one of our parent leaders, and we're trying to get more information from one of our board members related to bringing in more support for the Samoan community in our district. So we do have our fingers in a lot of different places. I noticed that the person who asked that question said how do you reach everyone? How do you do outreach to all parents? And that's the challenge I think in any outreach situation. So every time I'd find out there's another channel, I'd try to reach out to them and do a presentation or share information or bring them in for a conversation. Just to figure out what more channels are to do more outreach. We're really lucky to because we have a really great interpretation program, in our district anyone who needs an interpreter to speak with a family can dial this hotline and we have an interpreter on the phone within 3 minutes. If it's a less-common language so that's really helpful, and then we also have an internal interpretation and translation department so we can always translate documents, within about 10 days or bring in an interpreter for any meeting that we need to have. So we're very lucky in that sense as well.

>> I just want to also add that this year in particular, we're working with ... We're working to develop a specific communication plan for just this issue because you're right. I think it's Debra who said from [Indistinct] SELPA that you can ... You can let people know but then somehow they don't know about it. You know? Or they missed it or it wasn't quite front and center for them and they don't understand it. So we're working actually with a communication ... to develop a communication plan where we have much more targeted like messaging for people to be sure that we're speaking in ways that people can hear it. To put it bluntly and so we're still working to try to improve. How much we can again engender that sense of trust, and value add with these processes for the families .... Well we think all families but a particular, certain underserved families could really benefit from the process.

>> So I think with that, those are all really good questions, and I think they prompted us to think about what we left out of our ... Of what we shared previously, so thank you for asking those. We're going to move on now and share a little bit about data, in just a little bit more detail and then we're going to go into a case study. So when we get to the case study just to give you a heads up, I guess this is the teacher in me. I want to preview it. We're going to put some questions in the chat so we want you to think about those questions while you consider the case study and tell us what you would do from an ADR perspective. But first, we're going to give some data. All right. So this is ... Since the program was initiated in 2016-2017, this is sort of what our ADR program has looked like so this is adding strategies and taking strategies away. So you can see that the number of collaborative conferences rose over time. And then about what we would expect them to be when we look at 2019-2020 and then when COVID hit things really started to decline. And we're actually starting to see things tick back up already this school year, so we're feeling really optimistic that people are hearing about the program and wanting to use it because it's not fun to go through litigation or go through due process. And it's not for everybody, so we want to offer this alternative as well. And so we're excited to see our numbers going up. We've also mentioned a few ADR partnerships, and ... Go for it.

>> Okay. As I shared before we do have an ombudsperson, and certainly she keeps the heart in our conversations always because she has a child also that has an IEP. So the ombudsperson is often the first point of contact. She does some preliminary investigation of complaints and advocates for those students, and many times those complaints don't need to go to Adriana as a formal ADR referral. She also works and identifies the San Francisco staff that can address concerns for those parents and then like I said the final step is referring the parents to our ADR program administrator. The program administrator coordinates all our ADR referrals, that's Adriana. She's the liaison with family [Indistinct] and special ed staff, and she's also the liaison with the Bar Association for all of our work with our neutral facilitators. And then she tracks and compiles the data, and has a pretty good view of district lens, community lens, on alternative dispute resolution, as well as the complaints around trends and issues and initiatives that she brings back to our ADR team which meets weekly. And then our Bar Association we could not do this without Carole and the team. The four strategies there. One we are adding is an aftercare strategy and this aftercare strategy would be able to circle back with parents sometimes as quickly as 30 minutes after the collaborative conference sometimes the next day the next week. But we want to be able to see what went well for that parent, what processes do they still need to have information about and then what are the next steps? So this after care will add it as a fifth bullet, but we just processed and talked about parent needs that are meeting last week and now it's going to be added as a strategy. The overall ... I have to say the expertise and the skill level of the facilitators really bring about trust in the process for our parents. So like I said we could not do this without the Bar Association. Adriana?

>> Yeah? Sorry, I was getting ready for the case study. There we go. Last bit of detail.

>> Well, I just ... Very quickly thank you Mildred for that lovely segue into who are the folks doing this work? They are certificated mediators in the Bar Association Mediation Services program. They all come to the work with deep background in special ed and we've also had some [Lost Signal]

>> Uh oh.

>> Specific trainings that they take. So that their ongoing knowledge, competency, and the issue of a cultural lens, and spotting for bias which is of course a mainstay foundation for mediators. I think my connection might have been unstable. Sorry about that. And so these are again professional neutrals that are managing these communications and often as Mildred said once trust can be built, both on the District side and then with the families, with a given facilitator, then what we find is that relationship building starts to progress, and in the safe container that the facilitators provide.

>> Absolutely. All right, so we're going to dive into our case study. So the way we're going to do this is I'm just going to read this out loud to folks because I know different people process things differently and I'm going to pop some questions into the chat. So I'll wait until I'm done reading this before I do that. And if you can just think about this for the next few minutes and respond to the questions either individually or overall that would be great and then if you have a few minutes at the end we'll have a conversation about what we would do in this situation. All right. So in this scenario: "Every time you message your child's case manager, you receive what feels like a short, irritated answer. You've also requested an IEP meeting to talk about this dynamic and the case manager says that they're happy to have a meeting but it doesn't need to be an IEP, since you have no plans to change anything in the IEP. It's been like this with the case manager for several years and you're afraid to ask any questions or make any suggestions in IEP meetings. When you meet with them to talk about the dynamic between the two of you they sit with their arms crossed and barely give any response whatsoever to you. The principal is in this meeting with you, and you don't feel that they helped move the conversation forward or that you have a better understanding of why your relationship with the case manager is like this." All right, so I'm going to go back to the slide, so you have a visual. But the questions that we want you to respond to are: What part of the conflict should be the focus of the ADR session? What strategy should the ADR admin recommend? How might ADR help support more equitable outcomes for students? And how might the relationship be repaired by using ADR? So here are the questions in the chat, and I'm going to go back to the previous slide if I can. There we go. And we'll give you ... Let's say three minutes to process and type in some answers, and we'll just stare awkwardly at each other in the meantime.

>> So, Adriana, do you want to call on people? There's not a lot in chat right now.

>> Yeah, I don't want to put anyone on blast so I don't want to call on folks, but I'm thinking while folks ... Yeah absolutely. There is a definite need for communication support. I think while you guys kind of process the questions I'll start sharing what we might do. Does that sound good?

>> Well now there are some ... You might want to look at ...

>> Yeah.

>> ... The chat. Seems like you would want a communication strategy session?

>> Yeah. Yep. Absolutely. Yeah. So I guess I'm thinking the best way and I think each of you guys can keep continuing to share in the chat as we talk, we don't want to be that awkward, I think you guys are absolutely right and that we would identify using the communication strategy session. In other presentations like this I've noticed folks often choose ... Sorry. We would want to use the communication strategy session to start, to really dig down and figure out what it is that the parent is concerned about. I think at first glance, it sounds like this just might be a surface level communication issue, but then we learn as we talk to the parent, that they actually feel this way in IEP meetings and they've felt this way for many years so there's a broader communication issue that might need to be examined and so as I'm doing intake on the case I'll be asking questions that lead me to further conclusions. And so we might start with communications strategy session especially if the parent doesn't want to make waves and doesn't want to say anything directly to the case manager or the principal but ultimately I would recommend a collaborative conference for this case because it's related to the IEP. Because the parent feels so reserved and because they feel like they're not getting support from the school site folks we want to make sure that we build their capacity and they build their ability to say, hey, you know what? Actually I think this other thing might work better for my kid. Or I think that ... I think that's a really good point, but have you guys thought about this, or did you know that. We want to empower the parent to share the information that will help the IEP team move forward. To find those more equitable solutions, right? With the collaborative conference, we might see that relationship open up and bloom a little bit. And what might happen, and I think I saw someone just type this into the chat what might happen in this case how I was saying that the strategies kind of come together. We might make some decisions about the IEPs. The parent might say, you know what? Last month in the IEP I felt like I didn't have a very good conversation about goals and actually want to update, talk about updating the goals. We might have that conversation in the collaborative conference and then send the group off to either an IEP meeting or a facilitated IEP meeting if they still need that communication support. And as far as repairing the relationship, I think that just having that opportunity to break the ice and permission to say, like, "I feel weird about the way these IEPs have been going," can be really empowering to a parent and they see that unfold, which is a nice ... It's a nice aspect of my job. Because oftentimes people come to my ... Come across my desk, because they're mad about something and it's a two-hour conversation. We're not fixing five years' worth of issues in two hours but we are starting to scratch the surface as to why things are going the way they're going. And we are starting to rebuild those relationships so that everyone can come together in the future, hopefully more independently.

>> I'll just signal we've got 4 more minutes in this session, so I think everybody is so right on point identified the issues and this is the bread and butter of what we're really working with and again having a conversation is so much more powerful than filing a due process action. We'll just get further along with achieving their goals. 80% of the time.

>> Yep. Absolutely. So with that, yeah thank you Andy, it is. It's true. A safe space for communication is a great starting place for constructive resolution. I'm totally in agreement with that. We have about like Kara said we still have 4 minutes, 3 minutes left now so I'm going to pop up our contact information, so if you have any questions you're welcome to reach out to any of us with those questions after today and I realize that we're missing our ADR website here so I'm going to put that in the chat again. There you go. So there's the ADR website .... Ooo! Looks like it didn't copy it. Hang on. And please take down our info and oh my goodness, it's not pasting. Feel free to reach out to us at any time with any questions whether it's about how should you approach a conversation with your child's school? How can you start a ADR program in your district? What are some of the structures in place? Or whether it's about outreach or something similar to that. We're happy to answer questions in any of those capacities. All right. There we go. There's the website.

>> Thank you. Thank you all for coming and participating and hopefully we'll see you in person one day.

>> Yeah. It's great to see so many people here.

>> Yeah, it's really lovely.

>> Hi, Carole. Hi, Mildred. It's Joe Goyuz. How are you doing?

>> We miss you so much!

>> I miss you all!

>> So great to hear your voice.

>> Oh it's nice to see you all.

>> Likewise. Well we don't see you but we hear you.

>> Take care.

>> How's the weather in San Diego?

>> It's nice.

>> I bet.

>> I notice there's still 40 people here so if any of you have questions feel free to chime in as long as the Zoom is open.

>> We still have a couple minutes, look at that!

>> Please fill out the SurveyMonkey that was also put in chat to evaluate this session.

>> Yeah. We're always interested in how we can do things better all the time. And thank you for the CADRE support!

>> Yeah, you made it easy.

>> Thank you, Carole, Adriana, and Mildred for lending your expertise to this symposium.

>> Thank you.

>> Thanks for having us. We're so excited to be here.



>> Take care continuing doing the great work that you do.

>> Thank you. You too.