

>> All right. Wonderful. Well, I think I've got 10:15. I know the recording has started, 10:15 my time here in northern Utah. So we get started, Greg? Are we good to go?

>> Yeah, go for it.

>> Wonderful. Well, welcome, everybody. We're just excited to be here with you. I think we have about an hour or so, and I'm going to ... I've been charged with not talking too much. My name is Norm Ames, and I'm the Director of the Center for Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education. Some of you may have heard the term TAESE. It's a one-syllable acronym with a long title. We are housed out of Utah State University but help projects across the country in about 30 or 35 states, and one of the major projects that we have a lot of energy around is our dispute resolution and special education projects for a number of states and also have in collaboration with Greg Abell and Sound Options Group, and his partners have created a Center for Special Education Leadership and Conflict Engagement, and it's an interesting title for a center, and I think by the end of the session, you'll hear based on the content that's expressed and the thoughts and the thinking that has gone into this concept of authentically engaging conflict. We talk about authentically engaging stakeholders. Well, you can view conflict as a stakeholder in the work that you do in your various roles across the country. I want to thank CADRE just briefly real quickly for this opportunity. Appreciate here a taste of the partnership that we have with Greg and this notion of Special Education Leadership and Conflict Engagement Center in addition to the dispute resolution work. As you all know, more and more, the work under alternative dispute resolution, ADR, those activities have become more and more of the forefront as you all work to and help states and systems at the state and local level be proactive, be established systems that are preventative and moreso that are under that proactive umbrella, engaging with that conflict as leaders and using it as opportunities for systems improvement, ultimately creating systems that are more supportive of and result in higher results for our students with disabilities that we will work to support. So with that said, a couple of the the things that we will be talking about here today, and Greg is going to take the lead on our discussion. I'm here for his moral support, and I think I'm already on a time grade. But things like IEP facilitation, the nonformal IDEA expressed options for dispute resolution, the ADR pieces are so important. And so we are actively working to support that work. And with that, I'm going to turn it over to Greg for our presentation.

>> Great. Thank you. For those of you on the screen, can I just see a thumbs up? Am I screensharing? Can you see the slides there? Okay, great. Thank you so much. So, great. It's fun to be here, and I was sharing with Melanie as we were waiting to come on here that I have maybe the distinction of having attended every CADRE conference since the very beginning back in Washington, D.C., which may tell you something about me. Either I'm obsessive or old. I'm not sure which it is, but I found this conference to be really seriously one of the highlights of my professional career. I've forged relationships within this context, learned so much within this context, and my only sadness right now is that we're not in the same room and don't have the chance to chat together face-to-face. So for those of you who may not have met me before, again, my name is Greg Abell, Sound Options Group. We are a conflict engagement firm located in Washington state. Historically, I started working under the context of the IDEA in 1979, which is when I entered the field as a school psychologist. I did that work for a number of years, moved out of role of school psychology and moved into more of a central office program administrator context for that work, but I continued to work in that field. I left special education, entered the emerging alternative dispute resolution field in the late '80s, starting a nonprofit community center and then launching in the early '90s Sound Options Group, and our first contract was to design and implement special ed mediation system for the state of Washington. So this was prior to it being a mandate within the IDEA. My director at that time had a vision that we needed to create that opportunity. So given that information, I am in a point in my correct where I'm engaging kind of two conversations, and these two conversations I often structure as the what and the so what, and the what conversation is, what have I learned in 30-plus years working in this field of dispute resolution? And then the question is, so what do you do now? What do you do with that information? How do you move forward? And so the presentation that we're going to be sharing with you today is really sort of a summary of that conversation of the what and the so-what, the so-what ultimately being in this context what Norm introduced was the Center for Special Ed Leadership and Conflict Engagement which we'll talk a little bit more as we move through this particular process. One of the whats that I've learned over the years in working in this field is that there's a significant intersection between three sort of construct ideas, and that's the intersection between leadership, conflict and change. And the way I most simply describe that is, leaders cause conflict because they initiate change. And so that's just been an ongoing theme for me because why does that connect that way? Well, one of the core ideas of leadership is, they have vision. They're not just managing a system. They have vision for how we improve. The vision typically involves change, okay? What do we know about change? People don't like change. Change produces anxiety. Change is perceived as a threat. And so what is conflict? Perception of incompatible difference or threat. So in systems, we often find that there's this leaders initiating change, getting resistance and being surprised when that change initiative is received as a sense of threat. You're pushing me outside my comfort zone. This became really clear to me a number of years ago when I was doing a training in education that was attended by a superintendent, and he said, "You do any work on leadership?" And I go, "No, I just do conflict." He says, "Do you know how much of my life is spent dealing with conflict?", which really began for us to open up the door of outside the traditional framework of alternative dispute resolution and the beginning to think about, what do we have to offer the system? And I think we have a tremendous amount to offer the system, and one of the things that's happened in the 30 years since we started this work is, we've learned a lot, okay? We've learned a lot. And so I want to summarize where that learning has taken me, and I

want to summarize where I think that learning may take us as an organization. One of the metaphors that I've used to frame the thinking is the metaphor of an operating system, and I would say that the current operating system that we have, an operating system for ADR and special education, I'm calling it the IDEA ADR OS 1.5, and that's in respect to education's love of acronyms, okay? So it's an operating system that we have put in place, so to speak, to help us mitigate the level of conflict that shows up in our work. And as a operating system, it's based on a dispute resolution focus. It is an ADR system. It's called an ADR system. It's called a dispute resolution system, and within that system or on that operating system, we've added a number of applications. This is the word that I would use, okay? So we have an application of mediation. That's part of the system, okay, mandated by IDEA in 1997. We have an optional application that you can add to the system called facilitated IEPs. It's optional why? Because it's not mandated. It's optional because not every state offers it, and states offer it in a range of models and methodologies. We have an application called the complaint process. Basically, complaint is made. Complaint is investigated, and action is taken. We have an application called the due process hearing, okay, office of administrative hearings, hearing officer, again, more closely aligned with a litigation process. And then in 2004, we added a resolution session application which says that when a due process hearing is requested, you can offer a resolution session. Again, it's not required that you enter into that process, but it is an option. So we've got this system that we've honed over the years. We've developed. We've learned a lot about that system. And so as I look at the so-what, I think we need to move and upgrade our operating system, and the upgrade is to an IDEA CE, meaning conflict engagement, and for those of you who are familiar with the work of Dr. Bernie Mayer, that's based on his work around this notion of conflict engagement as differentiated from dispute resolution, but that we really need to create an operating system that isn't just designed to manage, mitigate, keep a lid on conflict. I think we need an operating system that really facilitates our fundamentally shifting relationship to conflict. And that's the so-what I think I am in this field is that a lot of our work has been around, how do we fix conflict? Well, Bernie Mayer, and we'll come back to this in a moment, introduced in his book, "Staying with Conflict" this idea of that's a great model if in fact the conflict is resolvable. What if the conflict is what we call enduring conflict or what he refers to as enduring conflict where in fact, it is not resolvable, however, you can't deny it or avoid it? You have to engage it. So I think I would say that my participation in CADRE, that's been one of the most profound learnings for me as a conflict engagement professional, that awareness of this idea that the work that we're doing is in the content of what he would call enduring conflict and that to the extent that we have a relationship with conflict that say it's bad, and when it shows up, it needs to be fixed or managed or controlled in some way, we've got to shift that relationship, and I'll come back and talk about that. So this system, this IDEA conflict engagement operating system is built on a conflict engagement as compared to a dispute resolution focus. It's designed to fundamentally not just offer a bunch of services but to begin to redefine our relationship to conflict. It's designed to build capacity in what Bill Ury calls the third sign. I'll come back to that. It's designed to create deep capacity within the community, the culture, educations, families to deal with conflict, to identify, again, greater local capacity and, again, I'm in a state right now which is working with CADRE to pilot their assessment for cultural linguistic competence of ADR systems. It's designing systems that are more appropriate to the broad audience and consumer group that we're serving. And fundamentally, it's seeing the value in conflict. It's this idea that we have this paradoxical relationship to conflict. Education as a culture, and having worked

in it for 40 years, does not like conflict. The challenge is, conflict is the context of new learning, and how do we leverage that? So that's a key sort of so-what for me as we think about, so what do we go forward with? Do we continue to tweak the current operating system? And I'm not saying it's bad, or do we say, we need to step up the operating system? We need to increase its power if you want to use that term. It's efficiency. It's effectiveness, okay? So with that, here are just some of the key foundational constructs that, as I talk about the what and the so-what, this begins to represent, as I look back on this field and my time in this field, really the key constructs that are shaping the direction that I think that we need to go as an organization and the direction that Norman, I and John Copenhaver are working on around the center at TAESE, okay? So the first, again, a quote from Peter Senge. Peter Senge, guru of learning organizations, wrote the classic book, "The Fifth Discipline." "In great teams, conflict becomes productive. The free flow of conflicting ideas is critical for creative thinking, for discovering new solutions that no one individual would have come to on his own." Many people say conflict is the context for innovation and creativity, and so as a system, if we're dealing with a system that finds conflict aversive and avoids conflict, then the question becomes, how do we shift that relationship? Because that's where new learning occurs, okay? And to the extent that we're working in a culture that values new learning, it would seem to me we might want to develop and nurture the context in which that new learning occurs, okay? So that's just, again, a key idea is that it's not about continuing to help people avoid and not truly engage conflict but really helping people to learn to be with conflict. I spent 8 years at the University of Washington teaching in a 2-year program called Excel which is a certificate program for special ed administrators, and one of the key constructs that I continue to focus on with incoming administrators is, you need to look at your relationship with conflict if you're going to survive in this profession and learning to be with conflict and learning to lead within conflict, and you can't lead work you're not doing yourself. And so as leaders, you need to look at your relationship to conflict if you're going to lead systems and lead people who are required to engage and navigate conflict. Again, just referencing this, Bernie Mayer, who spoke at a CADRE conference a couple of conferences back in Eugene, shared with us his model out of his book, "Staying With Conflict: A Strategic Approach to Ongoing Disputes", this idea of not looking at conflict as a singular construct but actually looking at it in a more nuanced way where he differentiated between low-impact conflict, latent conflict, transient, representative and stubborn conflict. And his model is that what's consistent across the the first five levels of conflict is that those levels of conflict are all fundamentally resolvable. In other words, given sufficient intervention, energy and resources, you can resolve the conflict. And then you get to the sixth phase of conflict, enduring conflict, and he says, "The difference here is that it's not resolvable, and it's not resolvable because the nature of the system or structure in which the conflict exists is in some ways designed to maintain the conflict," not in a malicious way. It's just the way it is. And in his presentation, again, to us at the CADRE Conference, he would be IDEA and special education in that context. And again, the fundamental challenge of IDEA is that we have to determine what fate is for a child. Now, if I'm a parent, how do I define fate for my child? Whatever I think he or she needs. If I'm an educator, how do I define fate for a student? Whatever is appropriate, whatever that means, okay, appropriate. We're still arguing with that definition. That creates a fundamental tension, okay? And so we need to create a system that we can help facilitate peoples' engagement in that context whereas the goal is not to resolve the conflict. The goal is to reach agreements around the iteration of the conflict that allows us to move

forward in an effective way, okay? Just as an aside which I found was very humorous, some of you may not, but the other example he gave for enduring conflict, he said, "People often think about the Middle East. They often think of Northern Ireland," but the example he gave was marriage, and when he shared that, some of us laughed, but I've been married 44 years. There are things about which my wife and I will never agree, and that's okay. How do we navigate that? But I think it's a good example of that. The other kind of article that I read a number of years ago that actually a building principal gave me, it was an article entitled "Relationships Within the Schoolhouse" by Roland Barth. If you're not familiar with Barth, he was an educator for many years. He started the Principal Preparation Program at Harvard, a principal teacher. And in this article, he starts the article with this quote which I absolutely love. He says, "One incontrovertible finding emerges from my career spent working in and around schools. The nature of the relationship among adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else." Now, if you step back and think about that, that is a profound statement because what it's saying is, our relationships as adults, teachers, administrators, classified, certificated, related service providers, family members, community agencies, that the quality of our relationship as we come together to serve children, not just the decisions we make but the quality of the relationship correlates to student learning. And since he wrote this article, there is a significant research base out there which correlates evidence of trust and respect within systems, particularly systems serving children, to outcomes for those children. So all of a sudden, as I began looking at myself as a conflict engagement professional and working in this context, being fundamentally an educator, that is my background. And when I left education, I thought, was I leaving education, and to what extent was the work that I was doing in ADR improving student performance? This statement connected it for me. This isn't about us getting better as adults. It's about us getting along better, pardon me, in service of children, again, a profound statement that I think is at the heart of what we as conflict engagement professionals have to offer the system and to fundamentally impact student learning, okay? So again, that's just one of those pieces along the journey that has significantly influenced for me my thinking about where we're going and, again, that idea of the so-what. Another reference many of you may be familiar with, this comes from a book called "The Third Side." It was published by Bill Ury, again, of "Getting To Yes" fame and, again, a good friend of CADRE, actually has spoken multiple times at CADRE conferences, has a deep compassion for the work that we're doing around children of special needs. But in the book "The Third Side," he introduced this notion that in every culture, in every context as it relates to conflict, there is this notion of the third side. So if Norm and I are having a conflict in the context of the CADRE community, I would be maybe side one. Norm would be side two, and who is side three? It's all the rest of you because the notion is that our conflict is in many ways having an impact on the larger community. We're not just bystanders. I mean, we often are bystanders, but our behaviors in many cases can be toxic for the community. And then looking at even more primitive tribes, for example, he actually spent time with the bushmen of the Kalahari, and if you remember the movie "The Gods Must Be Crazy" with the Coke bottle, that's the context, but he said, "They have this notion of the third side, that if there is a conflict between members of the tribe, the tribe stops, literally stops what it's doing and comes around those in conflict to facilitate the resolution of the conflict or the fixing of the conflict," okay? And so the third side is fundamentally those people in the community who are often seen as elders in some cases, in some communities, seen as wise

advisors, seen as people that you go to when you have a problem, when you have a challenge that you seek out. And so the idea is if those people exist within the community as a system, we can continue to build our ADR system as it's designed by IDEA, that in most parts operates at a distance from the conflict. My system runs at a state level. Many of yours do. If you're in California, it may run a little closer through the SELPA system, but it's a distant system. So how do we begin to build local capacity? I had an opportunity early in my career to work with the Department of the Navy to implement a system for dealing with EEOC discrimination cases with the goal of avoiding the traditional investigatory process which is very time-consuming, very costly for EEOC investigations. And so they were trying to create an alternative ADR track that managers, union reps could enter that particular process and avoid the timeliness and the time and cost of an investigation. And as we were designing this system, we designed this multi-tiered system which I'm going to reference later because it's still the foundation of where we're going right now, of training early union stewards and frontline supervisors and how to intervene early in workplace conflict with significant success. And then the goal was to begin building more systemic capacity. So we were working. It was the HR department, and the HR department actually developed a certification for conflict resolution specialists within HR for the Navy as resources for involving conflict. But I remember in those conversations, everybody said, "We need more Franks." And the context of this conversation was that the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, and you can understand, it's a shipyard. It's a very large system, very tough workplace in a lot of cases. They said, "We're designing this system. We need more Franks." And finally, I said, "Who the heck is Frank?" Well, Frank turns out to be an engineer who works out in the shipyard who is highly trusted and respected by everybody in this system. And when you had a problem, you went to Frank because Frank was a great listener. He was a great problem-solver. He was sort of the early conflict coach if you wanted to call him that. That was Frank's role in the system, okay? And so this idea of upgrading our ADR system to this conflict engagement system is about continuing to develop and strengthen what we will call our tier-three resource which is people like myself. We're professional mediators who are contracting to provide the services in many cases to our states to people at the LEA level, at the building level, who can be informal facilitators of IEP meetings, who can be informal facilitators of manifestation determination meetings, okay, who can come long-side others in the system and say, "Let's think about how you're going to prepare for that meeting that's going to be a challenging meeting," okay? So the idea of the third side, again, is taking what we've learned as a profession and spreading it out in the system and building capacity within the system. So I've been talking. Let me just step back and check. Are there any comments, questions in the chat that I need to respond to before I continue on?

>> Nope. There isn't.

>> Okay. Thank you. So as I've been going along here, I've been identifying sort of key concepts that have significantly, again, informed my thinking and our thinking as we're going forward in this field. Another key resource for me or a key influence for me is a book called "Leadership Without Easy Answers" by Ronald Heifetz. This was shared with me by a colleague back east, and if you're not familiar with Heifetz, he's probably my favorite thinker on the concept of leadership. He teaches leadership at the Kennedy School of Government. He, by training, is a psychiatrist. He, by interest, is a world-class cellist. He's one of those what I call really smart guys, sort of a Renaissance man. But in the book, he really begins to connect for me this idea of leadership and conflict, okay? And in the book, he defines leadership this way. He says, "First of all, if we'll thinking about the notion of leadership, let's recognize that we often think of people in leadership as people with authority." And while that's true, they're not the same, okay? He defines authority this way. Authority is conferred power to perform a service. I grant you authority over some dimension of my life with the idea that you're going to exercise that authority in some way that benefits me. I work in the Part C system in our state which means I work with what are called family resources coordinators in that system. Those family resources coordinators are often the first link between families who have been identified as having children with special needs and accessing resources available to the community. And I tell them, "You guys operate with authority because families give you the authority to help them navigate a system called Part C of IDEA that they have absolutely no knowledge of, and it's pretty complex, and you exercise that authority in service of the family," so it's this relationship of reciprocity, okay? And so at some point, as a mediator, I have been the authority to manage a process, not make a decision, but to manage a process, okay? And to the extent that I manage that process in a way that is serving the clients, I continue in that role. If in some ways I begin to show bias, lose my neutrality, then I may be removed as a mediator. They will take that authority away from me. He then defines leadership this way. He said, "The role of the leader is to mobilize people to tackle tough problems." That's what leaders do. Leaders mobilize people to tackle a tough problem. It isn't that leaders have the solution, and some people operate with this definition of leadership. "I have the solution to the problem. You need to follow me." I believe that the role of the leader is to say, "I believe there is a solution to that problem, and if we come together and leverage our individual capacities, we're going to come up with the solution of that," so my vision is not of the solution. My vision is, there is a solution that can be achieved in this collective way, and what I bring is the ability to bring us together to engage in that way, okay? So that's the first part of his definition. I like that definition. The other critical piece of his work that I think significantly influences our work is his distinction between the types of work that groups engage in and that leaders lead. He differentiates between what he calls technical work and adaptive work. Technical work is where you're solving a technical problem. A technical problem is a problem for which existing knowledge and learning is available to solve the problem. So in other words, technical problems already to some extent have a solution. The work of the group is to find the solution, or in some cases, there are multiple solutions, so find the multiple solutions and pick the one that works for us. So the only learning for the group is to access what already exists out there as best practice, as evidence-based methodologies, whatever. Okay? Adaptive work, on the other hand, has two challenges. One, the problem or the challenge we're facing, we can't agree on, and we don't fully understand, or we really can't get our hands and sort of arms around it. This is what the problem is, okay? Now, so the first work is to come together and say, what is it that we're facing as a challenge,

as a problem, as a hurdle or barrier to going forward? Now, once we get some collective shared understanding of that, we don't have this thing like light bulbs go off, to go, "Oh, I know what we need to do now." What typically happens is, we'll go, "Okay, we know what the problem is. I don't know what to do." I don't know either. I don't think there's any quote "off-the-shelf" solutions to that particular challenge. That's called adaptive work. Adaptive work requires new learning, new thinking, not just new knowledge, in some cases, new interpretation of our core beliefs and values related to that. That's adaptive work. Now, why is this important to me in this context? Special education is fundamentally adaptive work. A child being referred for special education services is an adaptive challenge. He or she is not learning. I don't know why. Let's figure it out. Okay. And then when we figure out what it is, that maybe he or she is seeing evidence of a learning disability or cognitive impairment or health impairment or orthopedic issue, we're going, okay. We don't just go to a shelf and pull off a solution. We have to create what's called, what? Specially designed instruction. That's adaptive work. Now, here is where this resonates for me. Having worked in special ed for 40-plus years, we have treated much of special education as a technical challenge, okay? And people come and say, "The law says, the research says this." The research informs us, but it doesn't always have the answers. I tell people when I started, which will date me, as an IEP when I started was three pages long on NCR paper. If you don't know what NCR paper is, find someone who's older than you, and they'll tell you. Okay. I had a friend of mine who did IEPs before 94-142, and I said, "What did an IEP look like back then?" And she held up a tablet, a blank sheet of paper, and said "That's what an IEP was." An IEP now, I just did an IEP facilitation 2 days ago. It was 40 pages long. Now, the shift from three pages to 40 pages does not reflect a lot of adaptive work on my part. It's mostly technical compliance. Now, I want to be really clear. Being technically compliant is important. I don't happen to think that it's why we do the work that we do. I was in a meeting once with a bunch of educators, and I was asking a teacher I was sitting next to, "What is your district's assessment? How does your district determine what makes a good IEP?" And his response was, "It needs to be legally defensible." That answer is a problem for me. The IDEA did not create an IEP team to create a legally defensible document as its primary objective. The IDEA created an IEP team to come together to do creative, innovative work around the unique learning challenges of a student. And to the extent that most of our energy in conversations goes into the technical compliance factor, we're not having in many cases the fundamental conversations that we need to have, those deep, hard, what Heifetz calls type-three conversations where we don't know what the problem is. We don't know what the solution is, and we're committed to taking action to address that. Who knows how to have those conversations? We do as dispute resolution professionals and conflict engagement professionals, as people working in this field. And I think that we have the potential within the work of ADR to not just support ADR as is required under IDEA, but we have the capacity, I think, and I'm still holding out hope for this, to begin to change the culture, to change the culture and bring back the core values of collaboration that many of us experienced in the '70s with the rollout of 94-142 and the collaborative process there. So again, as we're looking at going forward, as we're looking at designing systems in which we have an input, our ADR systems, this idea of again moving from a dispute resolution operating system to this conflict engagement operating system that invites us to build capacity to do the adaptive work that is essential at the heart of special education, which is essential at the heart of truly implementing the hope of IDEA, the hope of 9142. Okay. The last piece I will go forward with is this idea of change, and again, that was another piece as I look back at the



what of the last 30 years in this field. It was the whole idea of change, and I remember that my first introduction to this working in the context of conflict engagement really was not in special education, but it was really in general education. I spent about 10 years working with school districts who were implementing shared leadership teams within their buildings, okay? And so we would go in, and we would create these two day retreats for the leadership team to come together. These have gone through different names over the years. Different states, different LEAs have done this differently, but it really was this idea of, how do we create a forum at the local district level for shared decision-making around issues in that particular building? And in some cases, these come out of collective bargaining agreements. In other cases, they just come out of the philosophy of that particular district, and after working with one district after a number of years and doing this training, one of the principals came up to me and said, "Do you do anything on change?" And I go, "Well, I really haven't spent much time talking about change." She goes, "Well, most of the conflict that we're experiencing in our building as a leadership team has to do with change." And so I go, "Okay," being sort of interested, and we dive into the literature. And one of the first books that I came across was a book called "Managing Transitions: Making The Most of Change" that again became significantly influential for me, again, thinking about this idea of conflict engagement dispute resolution. Since then, I've done a much deeper dive. One of the other key books you might want to read is a book called "Immunity to Change" by Keagan and Lahey. If you haven't read it, I highly recommend it, very, very well-thought-out way of thinking about supporting both individuals and groups as you're navigating change. So the bridges identified in their book is this idea of change, and they say change and transition are not the same thing. So again, the title of the book is "Managing Transitions: Making The Most of Change," but those two words are not the same. We often use them synonymously, but they're not the same. Change is situational. Change is typically encountered in the context of some change in your situation, okay? We're reorganizing the department, okay? That's a change. We are implementing new policies and procedures. That's a change. We're going to sell the house and downsize and buy a condo so we can go visit the grandkids. That's a change, okay? So change is situational. There's a change in your situation that may be externally driven. It could be internally driven. In some cases, we're dealing with change that comes from the system of the organization. It comes from on high if you want to use that term, but there's also changes. I have a brother-in-law who sold his business to go back to get his PhD. That was a significant change. No one told him he had to do that. He wanted to do it, and he did it, okay? Transition, on the other hand, is the psychological process that people go through to deal with change. So when change occurs, the first question the person who is experiencing the change typically asks is, "What is this change going to mean for me?" And typically, what Keagan and Lahey will say in their book is that the emotion that change most often triggers is anxiety because the change is pushing me outside of my comfort zone. And why do we have comfort zone? Because we like them. They keep us comfortable. They're predictable. They're reliable. We know how they work. And so when someone comes along and say, "I'm going to disrupt your comfort zone," I perceive you as a threat because I've taken a long time to create my comfort zone. I like it, okay? So that's where this idea of conflict and change comes into play. We work in a system where change is constant. We work with people who are experiencing the constancy of that change, both the families we deal with and the systems and the colleagues with whom we work. And there is a lot of conflict that is occurring as a result of that. And how we navigate that conflict, going back to what I said

earlier, will have an impact on our effectiveness as a system, on our primary objective of meeting the needs of kids, okay? So again, [Indistinct] well, where does this conflict piece come in? It's the context for a lot of conflict in the work that we do. And the role of leaders in one, being able to be with what I would say as an old behaviorist, the very predictable behavior that shows up in this, to be able to be with it, but not just be with it, to lead people as they navigate it, okay? So the point is unless we really address and acknowledge the transition piece, that dimension, we are not going to achieve change which means we'll often see what we call first-order change. We'll often see cursory change. We'll often see what I often call the facade of a change, a lot of window dressing, but we won't see deep change within people in the system in which they work, okay? So again, when we're talking about change, "We're often saying we're making this change so as to achieve something else." And for leaders who work in systems who announce change, they will often announce the change and then announce the reason for the change, which is great. That's fine. But they have to recognize in making that announcement, you've triggered a transition process in everybody who has heard that announcement. And they're going, "Okay. What does it mean? How is this going to affect me?" Okay? Now in education, what a lot of us will do is, we'll just put our heads down and say, "This too shall pass," okay? It's going to go away. They don't really mean it, and unfortunately, that is sometimes the case. But it starts a transition process that, again, for those of us I think who are working in the conflict engagement field in helping people navigate conversations that are related to change, it's helpful to recognize these elements of the conversation. The first phase is letting go, and to the extent that change is, in many cases, perceived as a loss, one of the jobs is to help people with that perception, to deal with those perceived losses, and again, I say perceived losses, experienced losses. Bridges will say that in a letting go process, you'll see all the evidence of grieving process. What does that include? Denial, argumentation, negotiation, those kinds of things, okay? But part of the job is to help people let go. The families that we are working with are engaged in this process. When I work with my Part C colleagues in the birth-to-three system, I say, "You are working with families who are in the process of letting go." They're letting go of a vision they had for their child, for their family, for themselves as parents, when it was what life was going to look like. And in some cases, they're having to let go of that and in some cases having to let go of that in a significant way. And you're going to see the behavior that relates to that. Now, what we know is that some people have no problem letting go. They embrace change. Some people are fairly competent with change, and again, in some change processes, there are people who I like to refer to as the, "Hell no, I won't go" folks. You cannot make me change. And I think one of the biggest challenges of leaders is dealing with that population, people saying, "I'm not going to change." And then the question is, is that a choice? That creates a significant conflict in how we navigate that in a system that requires this constant ability to change. The second phase of the transition process is once you've let go, you enter what he calls the neutral zone, and the best way I can describe the neutral zone is, the neutral zone is, okay, we're no longer doing what we used to be doing. We don't know yet what we need to be doing. We have no idea what we're doing. We don't know. The fundamental work of the neutral zone is adaptive work. Again, so as conflict engagement professionals who work with groups of people in many cases, we're facilitating adaptive work. An IEP team is doing the adaptive work of the neutral zone. We're reflecting on the last year. What did we learn? We're anticipating and designing for the coming year. What are we going to implement? Do we know with certainty that we need to implement? No, but based on our best thinking and best learning, we need to encounter that. That's

where new learning occurs. That's where we need to slow down and in many cases in our context resist the technical solutions, the low-hanging fruit people want to grab onto and say, "We need to slow down and do some deeper work here." As a facilitator of an IEP team, I recognize I'm facilitating an IEP process. So what's the application here? In some cases, this facilitator using this sort of equestrian metaphor, I got my hands on the reins. I'm trying to get the team to slow down a little bit and often slow when they don't want to slow down because they don't have time to slow down. I'm saying, "You've got to spend a little time slowing down to do the work that you're truly doing." So my job as the facilitator is recognizing I'm facilitating a neutral-zone conversation, and I'm facilitating the adaptive work of the team. What's the question that I'm going to ask that will facilitate that kind of work? So again, you're beginning to see sort of the intersection of this sort of range of literature and experience out there where it begins to speak to the role that we bring in this particular work. New beginnings would be, okay, we've learned what we need to do. We're now implementing what we agreed to implement. So in this case, new beginnings in an IEP meeting is, we've signed and we're implementing the IEP which starts a whole new process of learning. I tell people, the IEP meeting is not the same thing as the IEP process. The IEP meeting is a meeting in space and time as a definite beginning, middle and end. The IEP process is 365 days long. It's when we implement that document, and we learn from the implementation, and in some cases, we tweak it as a result of that, okay? So I'm going to stop there before I shift to what I'm going to call the so-what. Let me just check my time here. Yup. I think I'm doing good here. Thank you. Are there any questions, comments on what I shared so far? Okay. So it's a brief sort of journey, on a journey for me of 30 years in looking at what are the highlights of the learning on that journey, the what has that done? So the so-what for me really goes back to, okay, if we're going to begin building this conflict engagement system as opposed to a dispute resolution resource, what does that look like? And part of the thinking for me was when I started back in the '90s in our state, my contracts had two components to it. One was design and implement a mediation system for dispute resolution and two, teach people how to engage conflict more effectively. Those were the two strands. They continue to be the two strands. Early, we taught a series of 3-day classes which collectively was 9 days of professional development, a 3-day class on negotiation, a 3-day class on mediation, the combination of the negotiation and mediation class was a basic 40-hour mediation training and then a 3-day class on facilitating group process. And what we learned from that is those 9 days of trading really moved people from awareness to peoples' changes in behavior. To this day, I'll have people come up to me and say, "I remember those classes you used to teach. I still use that stuff." I love to hear that. Well, because of changes in all kinds of notions, our ability to teach 3-day classes faded and were replaced with the ability to only do 1-day seminars. And so for 7 or 8 years, we taught a whole host of 1-day seminars on conflict engagement, different ways, teaming, collaboration, difficult conversations, all kinds of things. And what we found is, people liked the class, but it wasn't creating the individual collective capacity that we were thinking about. So as a state, we began talking about, how do you begin to create a more robust, deeply embedded conflict engagement system? And people sort of looked at me with blank stares, like, "System, what are you talking about?" And then, I had a sort of epiphany moment. I said, "Well, it would be like an MTSS framework." Now, why did I use MTSS? Well, most of you are familiar with MTSS. It's a framework that educators get, and we have an MTSS model for doing structural intervention. We have MTSS frameworks for behavior and social-emotional development. I said, "Well, think about it as an MTSS

framework," and all of a sudden, light bulbs went off, and I remember sharing this with my state superintendent on special education who was new to our state. And as soon as I mentioned MTSS, I sort of saw the lights go off in her eyes, and she goes, "Okay, I think this is making sense to me." So we have designed and are currently implementing both through the center that Norm no doubt will talk about at the end here a multi-tier system for conflict engagement that offers professional development and training at three tiers designed to build a robust, deeply embedded conflict engagement capacity within our systems. At tier one, we are teaching skills that are related to individuals' capacity for dealing with conflict. So if you're taking training at the tier-one level, it's really about, how do I become more effective in engaging my own personal and professional conflict? How do I become more effective in engaging difficult, challenging, crucial, whatever term you want to use conversations? And at tier one, we have a core course. It's a 2-day seminar. It's currently taught virtually in four half-day segments on engaging challenging conversations. How do I have challenging conversations with colleagues, with peers, with friends, with family, whatever? The other tier-one classes that I offer is, there's a class on building effective teams, okay, and how do I really build an effective team and sustain that? We also have a specific seminar on leading through conflict and change. It's a class designed for those with leadership responsibilities on understanding their role in leading others to engage conflict and to navigate change and the interplay between those two constructs. So those are tier-one offerings, okay? In our state, I'm offering those tier one training all across the state in a virtual format. When you get to tier two, we are actually focusing on ultimately, we want to train people to become, and I'm going to steal Bernie Mayer's term, conflict engagement specialists. Tier two is about building third-side capacity. Tier two is about looking, who within my system, who within our system, quote, are the people that others typically go to already to engage conflict, and who are the people who are in a role to begin to influence the engagement of conflict? As an old-school psychologist, I go, "Yeah, that's kind of one of my roles. I was often someone facilitating in meetings and things like that." So when you get to tier two, you're really saying, we're focusing on three roles right now that you would develop. One is a facilitator, and the difference that we're taking in that we're not focusing specifically on IEP meeting facilitation. And I will also say that I'm doing training right now with states on how to implement IEP meeting facilitation. In this particular model, I really want to try facilitators who feel confident stepping into a group context and adding value to the conversation through their role as a facilitator. The other second role is conflict coach. A conflict coach, I have a colleague in Colorado I think was reading something that she said, "A conflict coach is like mediation for one," okay? It's like brief therapy. How do I sit down and help an individual problem-solve strategically the engagement and navigation of a conflict? And then the third role is teacher, and we've developed a curriculum that is designed for you to go back to your system to begin teaching these skills to others in the system. So for example, you might be in a building saying, "I want to work with a group of paraeducators to develop their confidence in dealing with conflict in the workplace. I want to offer families training in collaboration and conflict," and so really trying to identify people in your system who ultimately will be your sustaining factor in that they're training people going forward. Tier three, in this particular model, is really focusing on enhancing developing the skills of what I call the professional cohort of conflict engagement folks. So tier-three training that I do is, I work across the country with different mediation cohorts at the state level who are doing special mediation. We've created communities of practice around enhancing our collective skills in navigating what is

becoming more and more complex conflict that we're doing here, but really saying we need this tier three resource which is often run, again, at the state level, in some cases at a regional level to build that capacity, okay? So the purpose of the Center for Special Leadership and Conflict Engagement is to be a resource to the clients that TAESE serves, which is, Norm, I'm guessing, what, about 35 or 40 states that are currently contracted ... one way or another?

>> Yeah, one way or another or most recently or currently, yeah.

>> Yeah, okay.

>> It just varies from year to year.

>> Yeah. So the center, we will be rolling out in 2022 a couple of offerings that we're working on right now with Norm and his staff, one focused on a leadership cohort from the special leadership side, and the other is to offer the tier-one and tier-two training of this MTSS framework so that you begin to get a sense of, what is the content? What is the scope of it to begin looking at what this might look like in your state? So I'm going to turn it back to Norm and just say if you want to add any final comments on that, again, we are in the early rollout of this. We've got the structure in place, and then I'll open it up for any questions because I think we've got about 5 minutes left.

>> Thanks, Greg. And the main thing is the concepts that Greg shared with us today have been proven to be well-received by leadership teams at all levels, the local level and state level. And as you all have various roles and responsibilities, I know there are school teams. There are parent representatives here. As a parent myself of a young man with autism and a school psychologist and a local education agency administrator, I sat mostly around all sides of the IEP table, and back in the day, if I had had some of these concepts at the forefront of my mind, whether I was as a parent or a provider or an educational leader, I would have been less afraid to engage in conflict that is inevitable in this work. So I love a lot of the comments in the chat around being flexible and adaptive, the concepts that Greg talked about. As far as next steps, if you have additional questions or want to reach out to us, I think, Greg, we can plop your website in there, and of course, the TAESE website in the chat box for future reference. We would love to continue these concepts and discussions with you and help you go about doing your work. When have you ever heard the notion of conflict engagement and dispute resolution and special education framed in something that's so familiar to us? And that is an MTSS framework. It's just a fascinating way to go about the work, and I think it is a very intelligent way to do it. So I appreciate Greg's leadership and partnership in this work.

>> Thank you, Norm. Thank you all for participating. Thanks again to CADRE for the amazing work you do bringing us together, and I say that with all sincerity. We appreciate you deeply. Again, if there are questions, reach out. You can reach me through the CADRE website. I'd love to chat with you about this. Thanks again and enjoy the rest of the conference.