

Delaware's Special Education Partnership for the Amicable
Resolution of Conflict (SPARC) Mediation Program
and Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meeting Facilitation
End-of-the-Year Report for 2021–2022
July 8, 2022

Presented to the

Delaware Department of Education

Written by

Kathy Murphy, Policy Scientist

Danielle Vota, Conflict Resolution Practitioner

Joy Jordan, Assistant Policy Scientist

Valdese West, Assistant Policy Scientist

Conflict Resolution Program

Prepared by

Institute for Public Administration

Biden School of Public Policy & Administration

University of Delaware

www.ipa.udel.edu

serving the public good, shaping tomorrow's leaders

Preface

As the Director of the Institute for Public Administration (IPA) at the University of Delaware, I am pleased to provide this report, *Delaware's Special Education Partnership for the Amicable Resolution of Conflict (SPARC) Mediation Program and Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meeting Facilitation End-of-the-Year Report for 2021–2022*. IPA is proud to support the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) in its compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) regulations. We are pleased to work with DDOE to offer statewide special education mediation and IEP meeting facilitation services, along with professional development workshops for educators.

Part of IPA's mission is to assist state agencies to better meet the needs of constituents through best practices and democratic activities. The Conflict Resolution Program (CRP) is a unique resource dedicated to building statewide capacity for collaboration through facilitation, mediation, and training services. CRP has been helping families and educators find amicable resolutions to special education disputes for more than twenty years. We are extremely proud to have CRP as part of the IPA team to serve the public good through dispute resolution and mediation in our public schools.

We would like to thank the Delaware Department of Education's Exceptional Children Resources Workgroup for the privilege of coordinating the SPARC program, specifically Mary Ann Mieczkowski, Director of the Exceptional Children Resources, and Maria N. Locuniak, Education Associate. This report provides an overview of SPARC since its inception and takes an in-depth look at the cases received over the past year, as well as the professional development workshops, program development, outreach, and marketing conducted.

Jerome R. Lewis, Ph.D.
Director, Institute for Public Administration

Contents

Preface	1
Executive Summary	4
SPARC Overview	6
Background.....	6
Purpose.....	6
Special Education Mediation	6
IEP Meeting Facilitation	6
Professional Development	6
Staff.....	7
Mediator Qualifications	7
Program Procedures	7
Special Education Mediation	7
IEP Meeting Facilitation	8
Report Summary.....	8
SPARC Inquiries	9
SPARC Mediation Cases	10
Overview of Mediation Cases	10
Local Education Agencies.....	11
Reported Issues.....	11
Mediations	12
Due Process Cases	12
State Complaint Cases.....	13
Non-Affiliated Mediation Request Cases	14
IDEA Part B Dispute Resolution	15
SPARC Mediation Caseload Over Time	16
LEA Involvement Over Time	17
SPARC Mediation Evaluation	18
SPARC Facilitated IEP Meetings	19
Facilitated IEP Meetings	19
Reported Issues.....	19
Facilitated IEP Meetings Over Time.....	20
Facilitated IEP Meeting Feedback.....	21
Professional Development	23
Educator Workshops.....	23
LRP’s National Institute on Legal Issues of Educating Individuals with Disabilities Conference	23
Program Development, Outreach, and Marketing	24
SPARC/DDOE Meetings.....	24

	3
Marketing.....	24
Appendix A.....	25
Appendix B.....	27

Executive Summary

The Conflict Resolution Program (CRP), part of the University of Delaware's Institute for Public Administration, respectfully submits this report to the Delaware Department of Education's (DDOE) Exceptional Children Resources Workgroup. The following report provides an overview of the work conducted from July 1, 2021, through June 30, 2022, by the Special Education Partnership for the Amicable Resolution of Conflict (SPARC) program. Funded by DDOE, SPARC is an essential statewide program supporting parents and school personnel to work collaboratively to meet the unique educational needs of students with disabilities through three services: special education mediation, individualized education program (IEP) meeting facilitation, and professional development.

SPARC mediation and IEP facilitation bring together parents and educators in conversation to promote outcomes that benefit students, parents, schools, and districts alike and encourage positive relationships between schools and families. SPARC professional development workshops provide educators with communication, collaboration, and dispute resolution skills that are essential for team members working together to create an appropriate IEP.

This report provides an overview of work conducted this year including mediation, IEP facilitation, and professional development services. It includes detailed case information to assist DDOE with federally mandated reporting and more general program data to evaluate its effectiveness.

SPARC has served Delaware families, students and educators for over

26
years.

SPARC staff are on-call to respond to calls and emails from parents and educators who need assistance with a special-education-related conflict. During the 2021–2022 reporting year, SPARC processed 41 cases. These cases were offered mediation as a result of a party filing a state complaint, requesting a due process hearing, or making a request for mediation that was not affiliated with filing a state complaint or due process complaint. SPARC staff conducted 10 mediations, of which 60 percent resulted in an agreement. A post-mediation questionnaire is provided to all mediation participants asking about their experiences before, during, and after the mediation in order to inform program development. Nine out of ten respondents found participating in SPARC mediation to be a positive experience.

In addition, there were 19 inquiries made about SPARC services. SPARC staff listened to the callers' concerns and goals and provided the relevant information about SPARC services or made referrals to other organizations such as DDOE or the Parent Information Center of Delaware, Inc.

During this reporting year, SPARC received five requests to facilitate an IEP meeting. SPARC staff facilitated three IEP meetings. In order to understand the team members' experience with the facilitation process, an

IEP Meeting Facilitation Feedback Form is distributed to all participants at the end of the meeting. The majority of the survey's respondents indicated they would use SPARC facilitation services again.

Finally, SPARC conducted 12 hours of virtual trainings for 234 educators representing all three counties in Delaware. The trainings focused on conflict resolution, parent engagement, and crucial communication skills needed to effectively lead IEP meetings. Over 95 percent of participants agreed that the training content was relevant and was delivered by presenters that were both well prepared and knowledgeable about the topic.

SPARC Overview

Background

The Special Education Partnership for the Amicable Resolution of Conflict (SPARC) program was created in 1996 through a collaborative partnership between the Conflict Resolution Program and the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE). SPARC was established to provide special education dispute resolution services to all Delaware schools and families so disputes can be addressed in a timely and cost-efficient manner. This program fulfills the federal mandates in Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that require states to provide mediation for special education disputes. Currently, SPARC services support families and schools to work collaboratively to address the educational needs of exceptional students and are ideal for managing disputes related to the IDEA, such as a student's evaluation, educational classification, services, or placement. SPARC services are voluntary, confidential, and free of charge.

Purpose

SPARC is a three-prong statewide special-education dispute resolution program serving special education students, their families, and the educators that serve them. The three services offered through SPARC are special education mediation, IEP meeting facilitation, and professional development for educators. Mediation and IEP meeting facilitation are ideal for parents and educators who want to work together but do not always see each other's perspectives. SPARC services are designed to foster positive working relationships between parents and school personnel by promoting open and honest communication and empowering them to find a mutually agreeable solutions to their conflicts.

Special Education Mediation

The goal of SPARC's special education mediation is to provide families and schools in Delaware an appropriate way to solve disputes regarding a student's special education program. Mediation allows all parties to work together in a positive way by creating conditions for constructive dialogue and collaborative decision-making. Agreements reached in mediation are made by the parties in the room and are legally binding.

IEP Meeting Facilitation

The purpose of providing an IEP meeting facilitator is to help the IEP team address conflicts as they arise and help the team reach consensus on the student's educational program. IEP meeting facilitation can support an IEP team in addressing conflicts early and at the lowest level.

Professional Development

SPARC professional development is available to educators serving special education students and their families. These workshops provide valuable tools and techniques aimed at increasing the participants' knowledge and skills to communicate effectively and make decisions collaboratively and in the best interest of a student.

Since 1996, SPARC has served over

1,000

Delaware families of special education students.

Staff

SPARC is administered through CRP's team of experienced staff who specialize in special education dispute resolution. SPARC staff adhere to the highest standards of ethics, professional competence, and personal integrity. As neutral third parties, they support all sides to work together in the best interest of the student. They are committed to providing confidential and impartial dispute resolution services to those in need. SPARC staff are trained facilitators, mediators, and trainers who complete ongoing professional development annually.

Mediator Qualifications

SPARC maintains a list of special education mediators and their qualifications. SPARC mediators are required to meet a set of minimal qualifications and participate in ongoing professional development that advances their knowledge and skills.

All SPARC mediators must:

1. Complete a basic mediation training from a qualified organization.
2. Successfully serve as an apprentice co-mediator in at least four special education mediations with another SPARC mediator.
3. Successfully serve as the lead mediator, with another SPARC mediator, in at least two special education mediations.
4. Demonstrate a basic understanding of special education terminology, practices, and procedures.
5. Demonstrate a basic understanding of state and federal laws related to special education.
6. Demonstrate effective facilitative mediation techniques, impartiality, and professionalism.
7. Adhere to the Model Standards of Conduct for Mediators (2005) adopted/approved by the American Arbitration Association, American Bar Association, and the Association for Conflict Resolution.
8. Participate in at least twelve hours of professional development related to special education and/or dispute resolution on an annual basis.
9. Not hold primary employment with a local or state education agency.

Program Procedures

The SPARC program serves schools, districts, and families from across the state by responding to requests for information about SPARC services and by reaching out to parties who are already in conflict. SPARC staff provide parties with information about mediation and facilitation services and answer questions about these services. SPARC staff do not give advice, suggestions, or recommendations for how to proceed. If a parent or educator wishes to pursue either service, then SPARC staff will ask them to complete a request form and follow the appropriate procedures.

Special Education Mediation

Mediation cases originate as a result of a due process complaint or a state complaint that is filed with DDOE or through a request for mediation that is not affiliated with either type of formal complaint. Once SPARC receives a mediation case, a mediator reaches out to the parties involved to discuss their concerns and explain the mediation process. If both parties wish to participate in mediation, the mediator coordinates the mediation date, time, location, attendee list, and issues to be discussed. During mediation, the mediator guides

the participants through a process that promotes dialogue, understanding, and consensus. If the parties resolve their differences, the resolutions reached are documented in a legally binding agreement that must be implemented by all parties. If parties do not resolve their differences, nothing is documented by the mediator. The parties are free to seek other forms of resolution. Once mediation has concluded, participants are asked to complete a SPARC Mediation Participant Questionnaire, which allows participants to rate various aspects of the SPARC program from initial contact through the conclusion of the mediation.

IEP Meeting Facilitation

Unlike mediation cases, facilitated IEP meetings are only initiated when a parent, guardian, school personnel, or district personnel contacts SPARC to request a facilitator. SPARC staff listen to the first party's concerns and explain the role of a facilitator in an IEP meeting. Then, staff reach out to the second party to do the same. If both sides agree to have a facilitator attend the meeting, staff create an agenda for the meeting that includes date, time, location, and issues or concerns to be discussed. During the IEP team meeting, the facilitator guides the participants through the meeting agenda while promoting dialogue, understanding, and consensus. If the team is able to work together and resolve their differences, the meeting may conclude with a signed IEP. If the team does not resolve their differences, they are free to seek other forms of dispute resolution. Upon conclusion of the meeting, members are asked to complete an IEP Meeting Feedback form to rate various aspects of the program.

Report Summary

The following report discusses the cases processed by SPARC for the 2021–2022 reporting year broken down by the type of case, the districts and charter schools involved, the number of mediations conducted, agreements reached, and IEP meetings facilitated. This report also outlines additional work completed to meet contract requirements, such as professional development, program development, outreach, and marketing.

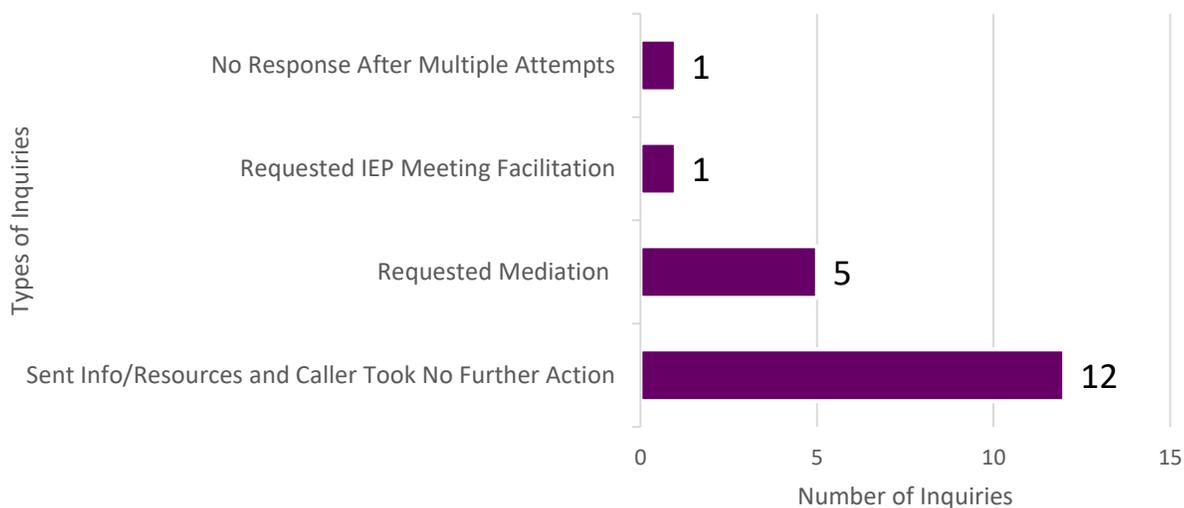
SPARC Inquiries

SPARC staff are on call to respond to inquiries from families and educators about utilizing SPARC services. These inquiries may occur via telephone, Zoom, or email. SPARC staff listen to the inquirer to understand the current conflict and concerns. Staff educate the inquirer about SPARC services and the role of a neutral facilitator or mediator and allow the inquirer to decide how they wish to proceed. SPARC is built on empowerment and self-determination, so it is crucial that participants make their own decisions about how they wish to move forward. SPARC staff do not give advice, suggestions, or recommendations.

While addressing inquiries, staff may also provide inquirers with resources and referrals to other services. For example, staff may refer a parent to a school-level contact, such as a classroom teacher, school administrator, or district special education director to address the conflict at the lowest level possible. Staff may also refer a parent to a different organization such as the DDOE's Exceptional Children Resources Workgroup, the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE), the Parent Information Center of Delaware, Inc. (PIC), or another advocacy group.

Between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, SPARC received 19 calls or emails from parents and educators inquiring about SPARC services. SPARC staff listened to the inquirers concerns and goals and provided the relevant information. SPARC records the outcome of an inquiry in one of the following categories: inquirer requests IEP facilitation services (1); inquirer requests mediation services (5); inquirer was provided information/resources and took no further action (12); inquirer was unable to be reached after multiple attempts (1). The results of the 19 inquiries are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. 2021–2022 Inquiry Outcomes by Type



SPARC Mediation Cases

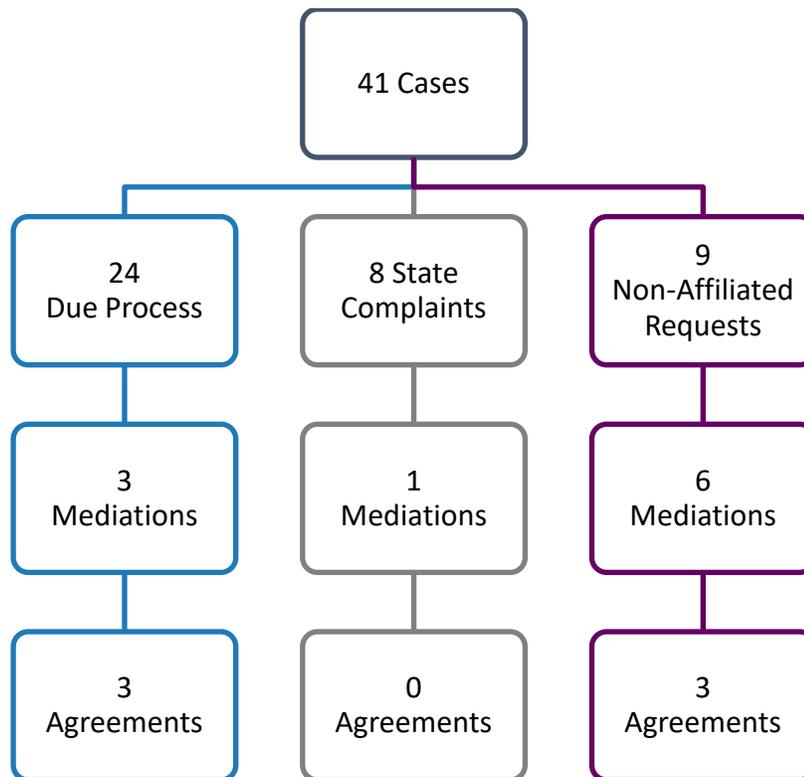
Overview of Mediation Cases

During the reporting year from July 1, 2021, to June 30, 2022, SPARC staff processed 41 cases. Each SPARC case is assigned a case number and is categorized by both reporting year and case type for federal and state reporting purposes. The case type differentiates the origin of each case and is categorized as either due process (DP), state complaint (SC), or non-affiliated request (NAR).

Due process cases refer to cases that are initiated as a result of a due process complaint filed with DDOE, and state complaint cases refer to cases that are initiated as a result of a state complaint filed with DDOE. Non-affiliated request cases are a result of a request for mediation that is not affiliated with either type of formal complaint.

During the 2021–2022 reporting year, 10 of the 41 cases that were processed by SPARC participated in mediation. Sixty percent of the mediated cases resulted in an agreement (10 cases mediated and 6 resulted in agreement). The following chart displays the overall distribution of SPARC cases by type, mediations performed, and agreements reached.

Figure 2. 2021–2022 Mediation Cases by Type



Local Education Agencies

SPARC received 41 mediation cases this year. Thirty involved school districts, nine involved charter schools, and three involved the REDACTED. The districts with the most cases were REDACTED (4) and REDACTED (3). Table A provides a list of the school districts, charter schools, and other local education agencies (LEAs) associated with this year's cases, the number of mediations performed, and the number of agreements reached.

Table A. 2021–2022 SPARC Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	30	8	6
REDACTED	2	1	1
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	4	0	0
REDACTED	4	4	3
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	2	2
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	3	1	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
Charter School	9	2	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	1	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	2	1	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
Grand Total	39	10	7

**Note: Table A does not include the REDACTED because it is not an LEA. REDACTED and REDACTED were both named on the same case (SC 22-08). This data skews the total.*

Reported Issues

The main concern expressed within each case is classified into one of nine possible categories to identify trends. While most cases include multiple issues, one primary issue was recorded. During this reporting year, the most frequently cited issue was “student education program as set for in the IEP” (20). Table B illustrates the primary issues reported.

Table B. 2021–2022 SPARC Cases by Primary Issue

Primary Issue Reported	Cases
Educational Placement	3
Student Educational Program (e.g., academic, functional, and life skills) as Set Forth in the IEP	20
Eligibility for Special Education Services	0
Evaluation for Special Education Services	2
Discipline (including suspension or expulsion)	2
Related Services (e.g., transportation, speech therapy, counseling)	2
Procedural Safeguards (e.g., prior written notice, confidentiality)	0
Tuition Reimbursement (e.g., private school)	5
Other:	7
Bullying and Assault (3)	
Requesting Policy Change for COVID Restrictions (2)	
504B (1)	
Records Request (1)	
Filed in Error (1)	
Grand Total	41

Mediations

This year, SPARC mediated ten cases. The cases involved five school districts and two charter schools. Nine cases were requested by a parent and one by a parent’s attorney. The most common issues mediated were student educational placement (3) and student educational program as set forth in the IEP (3).

Mediation is a quick and efficient method for addressing differences. On average, mediations were scheduled within 30 days of the mediation request. The average length of a mediation was an hour and a half, with individual sessions ranging from one to two hours. The goal of mediation is to help parties discuss their differences in a safe, respectful environment. Although this report highlights the number of agreements reached through mediation, it is important to note that it is not the only measure of success. Some cases may not require a written agreement to document the progress made and some cases may require an IEP meeting to make changes agreed to in the mediation. In addition to reporting agreement rates, mediation participants are asked to provide feedback on the experience. Those results are provided at the end of this report.

Due Process Cases

During this reporting year, SPARC managed 24 due process cases. The most frequently cited issues in due process cases were “student education program as set for in the IEP” (10). Three due process complaint cases participated in mediation, and all reached an agreement.

This year there were 17 due process cases associated with a school district, six associated with a charter school, and one with the REDACTED. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table C below.

Table C. 2021–2022 Due Process Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	17	3	3
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	1	1	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	2	2
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
Charter School	6	0	0
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
Grand Total	23	3	3

**Note: Table C does not include the REDACTED because it is not an LEA. This skews the table from reflecting a total of 24 cases.*

State Complaint Cases

During this reporting year, SPARC processed eight state complaint cases. The most frequently cited issues in state complaint cases were “student education program as set for in the IEP” (6). One state complaint case participated in mediation and did not reach an agreement.

This year there were six state complaint cases associated with a school district, one associated with a charter school, and one associated with REDACTED. One school district case went to mediation and did not reach an agreement. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table D below.

Table D. 2021–2022 State Complaint Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	6	1	0
REDACT	1	0	0
REDACT	2	0	0
REDACT	1	1	0
REDACT	1	0	0
REDACT	1	0	0
Charter School	1	0	0
REDACT	1	0	0
Grand Total	7	1	0

**Note: REDACTED and REDACTED were both named on the same case (SC 22-08). This skews the table from reflecting a total of six cases.*

*** Note: Table D does not include the REDACTED because it is not a LEA. This skews the table from reflecting a total of 9 cases.*

Non-Affiliated Mediation Request Cases

During this reporting year, SPARC processed 9 non-affiliated request (NAR) cases. The most frequently cited issue in NAR cases was “student education program as set forth in the IEP” (4). Six cases participated in mediation and three reached an agreement.

This year, seven NAR cases were associated with a school district and two with a charter school. Four school district cases went to mediation, and two reached an agreement. Two charter schools went to mediation and one reached an agreement. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table E below.

Table E. 2021–2022 Non-Affiliated Requests Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	7	4	2
REDACTED	2	1	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	2	1
REDACTED	1	1	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
Charter	2	2	1
REDACTED	1	1	1
REDACTED	1	1	0
Grand Total	9	6	3

IDEA Part B Dispute Resolution

Table F. is presented for DDOE in accordance with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) reporting requirements for Table 7 reporting. This table only includes cases filed between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022.

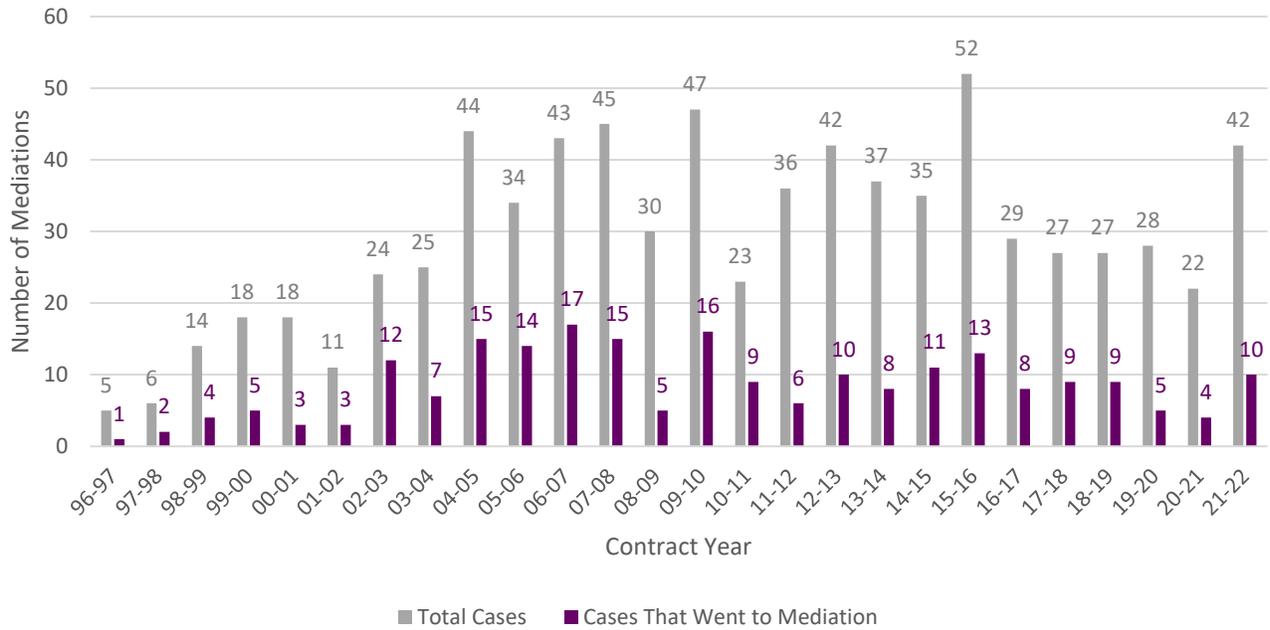
Table F. 2021–2022 IDEA Part B Data Collections

SECTION A: Written, Signed Complaints	
(1) Total number of written, signed complaints filed	8
SECTION B: Mediation Requests	
(2) Total number of mediation requests received through all dispute resolution processes	17
(2.1) Mediations held	10
(a) Mediations held related to due process complaints	3
(i) Mediation agreements related to due process complaints	3
(b) Mediations held not related to due process complaints	7
(i) Mediation agreements not related to due process complaints	3
(2.2) Mediations pending	1
(2.3) Mediations withdrawn or not held	6
SECTION C: Due Process Complaints	
(3) Total number of due process complaints filed	24

SPARC Mediation Caseload Over Time

Between 1996 and 2022, SPARC processed over 750 cases and performed over 200 mediations. Seventy-six percent of these mediations resulted in an agreement. Over the past ten reporting years, SPARC has processed an average of 34 cases per year ranging from 22 to 52 cases per year. The total number of NAR, SC, and DP cases processed each year since 1996 is illustrated in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Mediation Cases and Mediations Conducted Since 1996



LEA Involvement Over Time

Historically, SPARC has processed the most cases in New Castle County school districts compared to the other two counties. This is likely due to the large number of schools in New Castle County. SPARC has processed the most cases from Christina School District (132) and has performed the most mediations with Christina School District (44). A full list of districts and case information is provided in Table G below.

Table G. 1996–2022 SPARC Cases by County, School District, and Charter

County and Districts	SPARC Cases	Mediations Performed	Rate of Mediations Performed
New Castle	436	130	30%
Appoquinimink	61	12	20%
Brandywine	83	22	27%
Christina	132	44	33%
Colonial	53	11	21%
NCC Vo-Tech	11	2	18%
Red Clay Consolidated	96	39	41%
Sussex	115	34	30%
Cape Henlopen	42	15	36%
Delmar	8	2	25%
Indian River	26	8	31%
Laurel	18	4	22%
Seaford	16	3	19%
Sussex Technical	5	2	40%
Kent	77	21	27%
Caesar Rodney	31	15	48%
Capital	25	1	4%
Lake Forest	18	5	28%
Polytech	3	0	0%
Bridge Counties	36	12	33%
Milford	9	3	33%
Smyrna	22	8	36%
Woodbridge	5	1	20%
Charter Schools¹	73	13	18%
Total²	737	210	28%

¹ Charter School data started being collected in 2002.

² This table only includes cases that involve a district or charter school. Therefore, this table does not match the cumulative data, which includes Adult and Prison Education Resources Group cases and the Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families.

SPARC Mediation Evaluation

In order to maintain the highest program standards and understand the experiences of those utilizing SPARC services, feedback is solicited from all mediation participants. Participants can provide feedback by completing a SPARC Mediation Feedback form. Mediation participants are asked to rate their satisfaction with the pre-mediation intake process, the mediators, the mediation process, and the outcome of the mediation. The evaluation also offers a space for respondents to provide more detailed comments associated with their ratings or comment on topics not directly addressed. Participants can complete a feedback form in-person, digitally or online.

During the 2021–2022 reporting year, SPARC received 10 evaluations. Based on the evaluation responses, SPARC received high ratings for their communication with parties before and during the mediation, the mediation process, and the outcomes of the mediation. Mediation participants were satisfied or very satisfied with nearly all aspects of their experience with the SPARC program including the time, attention, and communication they received from the SPARC staff. All respondents reported that the mediator promoted listening and understanding and was fair and unbiased during mediation. Nine out of ten respondents felt that the mediator heard and understood their goals and concerns. Finally, nine out of ten respondents would consider utilizing or recommending the use of SPARC services in the future.

Respondents gave the following feedback in the additional comments sections:

“The mediator was terrific. Her time and the services of SPARC [sic] are most appreciated.”

“SPARC was wonderful, my frustration still lies with the school district.”

“The mediator was supportive and impartial. She ensured that all parties had space and time to express themselves in a respectful way. She helped to guide the conversation to ensure that all concerns were discussed, which ultimately allowed our parties to come to an agreement and empathize with each other. We would absolutely recommend the service and if ever necessary, we would not hesitate to use it again in the future.”

“I didn’t know what to expect but the mediation allowed us to take our time and explain our concerns without pressure. Having an advocate present from PIC really gave school an understanding of a parent position that advocates for their child. Having a second voice brought balance, which removed frustration, and open the door for compassion to come into the meeting. The mediator asked very good questions as well, overall was pleased with outcome and will await change to be integrated into school plan for my daughter.”

90%

of respondents would utilize SPARC again and/or recommend mediation to others.

Full details of the 2021–2022 Summary of Mediation Evaluation Results can be found in Appendix A.

SPARC Facilitated IEP Meetings

Facilitated IEP Meetings

This year, there were five requests for SPARC IEP meeting facilitation. Three of these requests resulted in a facilitated IEP meeting. One of the charter school cases required more than one meeting. The average amount of time spent on an IEP meeting per case was 3 hours, with a range of 1–5.5 hours. Table H below displays the facilitated IEP meetings broken down by local education agency.

Table H. 2021–2022 Facilitated IEP Meetings by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Meetings
School District	3
REDACTED	2
REDACTED	1
Charter School	2
REDACTED	1
REDACTED	1
Grand Total	5

Reported Issues

The primary issue(s) for each inquiry were categorized to help identify trends. The most cited issue for facilitated IEP meetings was concerns about “student education program as set forth in the IEP” (4). Table I summarizes the primary issues reported for this year.

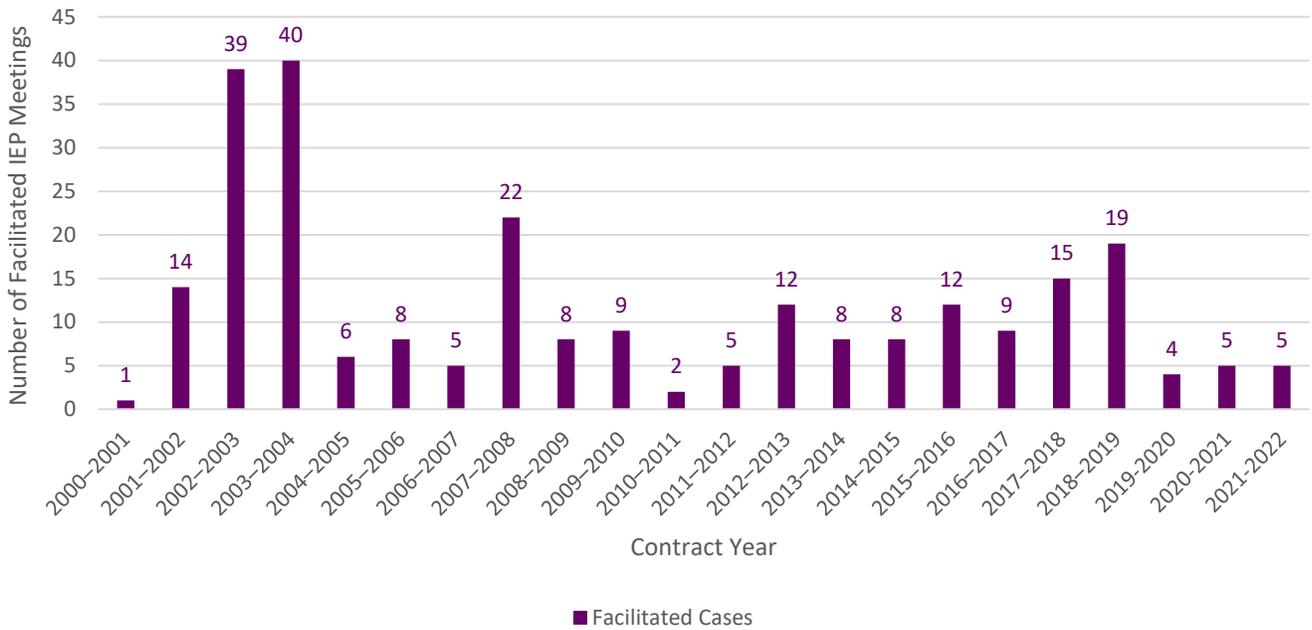
Table I. 2021–2022 Facilitated IEP Meetings by Primary Issue

Primary Issue Reported	Cases
Student Educational Program (e.g., academic, functional, and life skills) as Set Forth in the IEP	4
Educational Placement	1
Grand Total	5

Facilitated IEP Meetings Over Time

Between 2000 and 2022, SPARC has facilitated 256 IEP meetings. Over the past ten reporting years, SPARC has facilitated an average of ten IEP meetings per year ranging from four to nineteen meetings per year. The number of meetings each year since 2000 is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Facilitated IEP Meetings Since 2000



Historically, SPARC has facilitated the most IEP meetings in New Castle County school districts, likely due to the large number of schools in this county. SPARC has facilitated the most IEP meetings with REDACTED (44). A full list of districts and charter schools, and the number of facilitated IEP-meeting cases in each district is provided in Table J below.

Table J. 2000–2022 IEP Facilitated IEP Meetings by County, School District, and Charter

County and Districts	Facilitated IEP Meetings
New Castle	122
Appoquinimink	18
Brandywine	14
Christina	44
Colonial	23
NCC Vo-Tech	0
Red Clay Consolidated	23
Sussex	54
Cape Henlopen	23
Delmar	3
Indian River	20
Laurel	2
Seaford	2
Sussex Technical	4
Kent	33
Caesar Rodney	16
Capital	6
Lake Forest	9
Polytech	2
Bridge Counties	21
Milford	14
Smyrna	7
Woodbridge	0
Charter Schools	26
Grand Total	256

Facilitated IEP Meeting Feedback

In order to understand the team members' experiences with the facilitation process, an IEP Meeting Facilitation Feedback Form is distributed to all participants at the end of the meeting. Team members are asked to complete the form in-person or digitally. The Feedback Form was also made available online. Four feedback forms were completed and returned for this reporting year. The Feedback Form asks participants about their experience before, during, and after the IEP meeting facilitation. The IEP Meeting Feedback Facilitation Form can be found in Appendix B.

During the 2021–2022 reporting year, SPARC received responses from four IEP meeting participants. Based on the evaluation responses, SPARC received high ratings. Three out of four respondents reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the communication, time, and attention they received from SPARC staff prior to the IEP meeting. All respondents reported that the facilitator promoted listening and understanding and was fair and unbiased during the IEP meeting. Respondents felt that the facilitation had a positive influence on their relationship and communication with the other party. All the respondents felt that the

facilitator heard and understood their goals and concerns. Finally, two out of three respondents would consider utilizing or recommending the use of SPARC services in the future.

Professional Development

Educator Workshops

At the request of DDOE, SPARC staff conducted six virtual workshops (totaling 12 hours) over Zoom for 234 educators representing all three counties in Delaware. The workshop topics included Parent Engagement, Conflict Management and Communication, and Leading Effective IEP Team Meetings. The trainings incorporated lecture, PowerPoint slides, interactive polls, and small group discussions. Attendees received continuing education units through DDOE. Feedback from the training evaluation surveys indicated that participants valued the opportunity to learn new skills and share their ideas and experiences with other educators. By providing this training, CRP has enhanced educators' skills and confidence in running more effective IEP meetings, engaging parents, and managing conflict. CRP was responsible for creating marketing material, tracking attendance, creating and distributing workshop materials, administering post-workshop evaluations, and providing DDOE with a summary of post-workshop evaluations, attendance lists, and all workshop materials.

LRP's National Institute on Legal Issues of Educating Individuals with Disabilities Conference

SPARC mediators are required to participate in six hours of instruction, annually, in mediation and/or special education law. In order to meet this requirement, SPARC staff members, Kathy Murphy and Joy Jordan, attended LRP's National Institute on Legal Issues of Educating Individuals with Disabilities Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, from April 24–26, 2022. LRP's National Institute is known as the leading source for best practices, compliance strategies, and case updates impacting special education programs. The nation's top legal experts come together to share their insights and guidance on dealing with the ever-changing landscape of special education law. The conference focuses on providing attendees with the most effective ways to serve students with disabilities while maintaining compliance with special education and disability laws.

Program Development, Outreach, and Marketing

Each year, SPARC staff reach out to stakeholders across the state to increase awareness of the program and ensure the program is meeting the needs of districts, charter schools, and families of special education students. Staff promote SPARC services by distributing printed materials, sharing website links, and having discussions with parents, educators, and relevant advocates.

SPARC/DDOE Meetings

SPARC staff meet with key members of the Exceptional Children Resources Workgroup to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of the SPARC program. These meetings promote an exchange of ideas and information around special education trends, best practices, policies, and laws. They also provide a forum for the continuous improvement of SPARC services and practices. During the reporting year, meetings took place virtually on December 21, 2021, and April 12, 2022.

Marketing

This year CRP we continued to make further improvements to CRP's website, virtual IEP meeting resources, and the delivery of CRP's virtual mediation and IEP meeting facilitation services. CRP also took the opportunity to promote SPARC and increase awareness of our services at the six educator workshops CRP delivered over Zoom.

On April 19, 2022, Kathy Murphy represented the SPARC program at the Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC) meeting. The virtual meeting was led by different committees. Topics included children, youth, and adult transition services, and more. Maria Locuniak and MaryAnn Mieczkowski presented the DDOE report which included data on Indicators 11 Child Find, 15 Resolution Sessions, and 16 Mediation, and Kathy Murphy provided information about SPARC mediation services.

On June 30, 2022, Kathy Murphy presented information about SPARC mediation services via a webinar hosted by the Parent Information Center (PIC) titled "Understanding Mediation in the Dispute Resolution Process." Maria Locuniak, from DDOE, and Meedra Surratte, Executive Director of PIC, also provided information during the webinar. Kathy Murphy explained what parents who are considering mediation should expect when contacting the SPARC program. She also explained what happens during mediation and answered questions from the audience.

Appendix A

2021–2022 Mediation Evaluation Results

Responses = 10

**Note: Some respondents did not answer all of the questions on the evaluation.*

Pre-Mediation Communication with SPARC Staff

1. How satisfied were you with staff's willingness to listen to your concerns and answer your questions about mediation?

0	0	0	2	8
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>

2. How satisfied were you with the time, attention, and information you received from staff prior to mediation?

0	0	1	2	7
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>

3. How satisfied were you with the coordination and communication of the mediation date, time, and location?

0	0	0	3	7
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>

The Mediator and Mediation Process

4. The mediator thoroughly explained the role and responsibilities of the mediator and the participants relative to the mediation process.

0	0	0	2	8
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

5. The process promoted listening and understanding among the participants.

0	0	0	2	8
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

6. The mediator was fair and unbiased throughout the mediation.

0	0	0	2	8
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

7. The mediator heard and understood my goals and concerns.

0	0	1	1	8
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

8. The mediator helped clarify and prioritize all concerns.

0	0	2	1	7
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

9. The participants, not the mediator, offered solutions and determined the outcome.

0	0	1	2	7
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

Mediation Outcomes

10. Mediation had a positive influence on my relationship and communication with the other party.

1	1	2	2	4
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

11. The mediator drafted an agreement that was written in the participants' own words.

1	0	0	0	6	3
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>	<i>N/A</i>

12. Overall, participating in mediation was a positive experience.

0	0	1	4	5
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

13. Based on this experience, I would utilize SPARC again and/or recommend mediation to others.

0	1	9
<i>No</i>	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>Yes</i>

Additional comments or suggestions.

“That mediator was terrific. Her time and the services of SPARC [sic] are most appreciated.”

“SPARC was wonderful, my frustration still lies with the school district.”

“The mediator was supportive and impartial. She ensured that all parties had space and time to express themselves in a respectful way. She helped to guide the conversation to ensure that all concerns were discussed, which ultimately allowed our parties to come to an agreement and empathize with each other. We would absolutely recommend the service and if ever necessary, we would not hesitate to use it again in the future.”

“I didn’t know what to expect but the mediation allowed us to take our time and explain our concerns without pressure. Having an advocate present from PIC really gave school an understanding of a parent position that advocates for their child. Having a second voice brought balance, which removed frustration, and open the door for compassion to come into the meeting. The mediator asked very good questions as well, overall was pleased with outcome and will await change to be integrated into school plan for my REDACTED.”

I participated in this mediation as a representative of:

2 Parent/Student Concerns 8 District/Agency Concerns 0 No Answer

Appendix B

2021–2022 Facilitated IEP Meeting Feedback Form

Responses = 4

**Note: Some respondents did not complete all of the questions on the feedback form.*

Pre-Meeting Communication with SPARC Staff

How satisfied were you with staff's willingness to listen to your concerns and answer your questions about a facilitated IEP meeting?

0	0	1	1	2
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>

How satisfied were you with the time, attention, and information you received from staff prior to the facilitated IEP meeting?

0	0	1	1	2
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>

Did you feel the creation of a meeting agenda assisted in outlining your concern(s) and helped the team be prepared to discuss the concerns you wanted to address?

0	0	0	3	1
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

The Facilitator...	Not True 1	A Little 2	Some-What 3	True 4	Very True 5
Was helpful in the meeting.	0	0	2	2	0
Promoted listening and understanding among team members.	0	1	1	2	0
Was fair and unbiased throughout the meeting.	0	0	0	2	2
Heard and understood my concerns.	0	0	1	1	2
Helped clarify and prioritize all concerns.	0	0	1	3	0
Kept the group focused and kept the meeting moving forward.	0	1	1	2	0

Please circle the response that best represents your experience.

IEP Meeting Facilitation Outcome

Having a facilitator in the meeting had a positive influence on my relationship and communication with the other team members.

0	0	3	0	0
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

The facilitator helped the team overcome challenges and won't be needed for future meetings.

1	2	0	0	0
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

Overall, participating in a facilitated IEP meeting was a positive experience.

0	0	2	1	0
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

Based on this experience, I would utilize SPARC again and/or recommend mediation to others.

1	0	2
<i>No</i>	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>Yes</i>

Additional comments or suggestions:
(None)

I participated in this meeting as a representative of:

(0) Parent/Student Concerns **(3)** District/School Concerns