

State of Delaware

**Delaware's Special Education Partnership
for the Amicable Resolution of Conflict
(SPARC) Mediation Program and
Individualized Education Program (IEP)
Meeting Facilitation**

2022–2023



February 2024

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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, 2022, through June 30, 2023, 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 **27** 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 2022–2023 reporting year, SPARC processed 47 cases, 11 of which went to mediation resulting in 22 mediation sessions. Parties were offered mediation after filing a state complaint, filing a due process complaint, or making a direct request for mediation. A post-mediation questionnaire is provided to all mediation participants asking about their experiences before, during, and after the mediation to inform program development. Fourteen out of fifteen respondents found participating in SPARC mediation to be a positive experience.

In addition, there were 24 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 17 requests to facilitate an IEP team meeting. SPARC staff facilitated 15 IEP team meetings. An IEP Team Meeting Facilitation Feedback Form was distributed to all participants following the meeting in order to understand the team members’ experience with the facilitation process. The majority of respondents indicated they would use SPARC facilitation services again.

Lastly, SPARC staff created six asynchronous workshops for educators designed to strengthen relationships with parents. The video workshop series teaches IEP team meeting best practices that include interpersonal communication skills, collaborative problem-solving, culture competence, and the

importance of diversity. The goal of these workshops was to provide educators with strategies, skills, and tools to communicate effectively, manage conflict, and work collaboratively with parents prior to and during IEP team meetings. Each workshop contained a narrated video, handouts that encouraged reflection and action planning, and pre- and post-tests. The six workshops were upload to Schoology where educators can register and participate in the courses. DDOE and SPARC collaborated on a flyer to market the workshops to educators in Delaware.

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. 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 team meeting facilitation, and professional development for educators. Mediation and IEP team meeting facilitation are ideal services 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 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 Team Meeting Facilitation

The purpose of providing an IEP team meeting facilitator is to help the IEP team address conflicts as they arise, as well as aid the team in reaching consensus on the student’s educational program. IEP team 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

Since 1996, SPARC has served over

1,000

Delaware families of special education students.

participants' knowledge and skills to communicate effectively and make decisions collaboratively and in the best interest of a student.

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 from a due process complaint or a state complaint that is filed with DDOE or through a direct 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 Team Meeting Facilitation

Unlike mediation cases, facilitated IEP team meetings are only initiated when a parent, 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 team meeting. Then, staff reach out to the second party and do the same. If both parties 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 can 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 Team Meeting Feedback form to rate various aspects of the program and their experience.

Report Summary

The following report discusses the cases processed by SPARC during the 2022–2023 reporting year. The data are reported by the type of case, the districts and charter schools involved, the number of mediations conducted, agreements reached, and IEP team meetings facilitated. This report also outlines additional work completed to meet contract requirements, such as professional development, program development, outreach, and marketing.

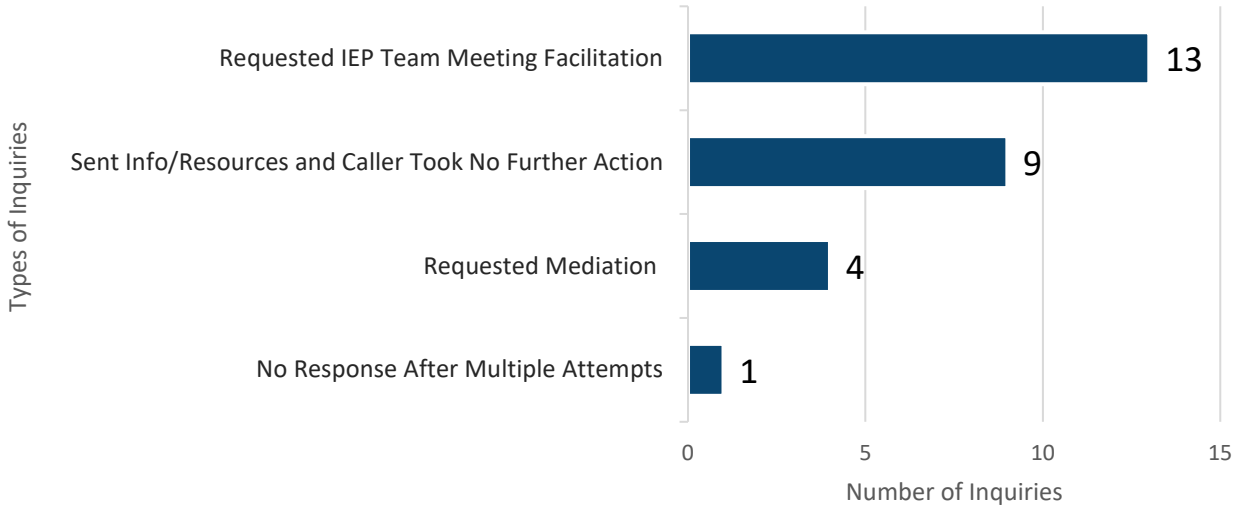
SPARC Inquiries

SPARC staff are on call to respond to inquiries from families and educators about utilizing SPARC services. These inquiries may occur via telephone, video conference, 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, 2022, and June 30, 2023, SPARC received 27 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 team meeting facilitation services (13); inquirer requests mediation services (4); inquirer was provided information/resources and took no further action (9); inquirer was unable to be reached after multiple attempts (1). The results of the 27 inquiries are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. 2022–2023 Inquiry Outcomes by Type



SPARC Mediation Cases

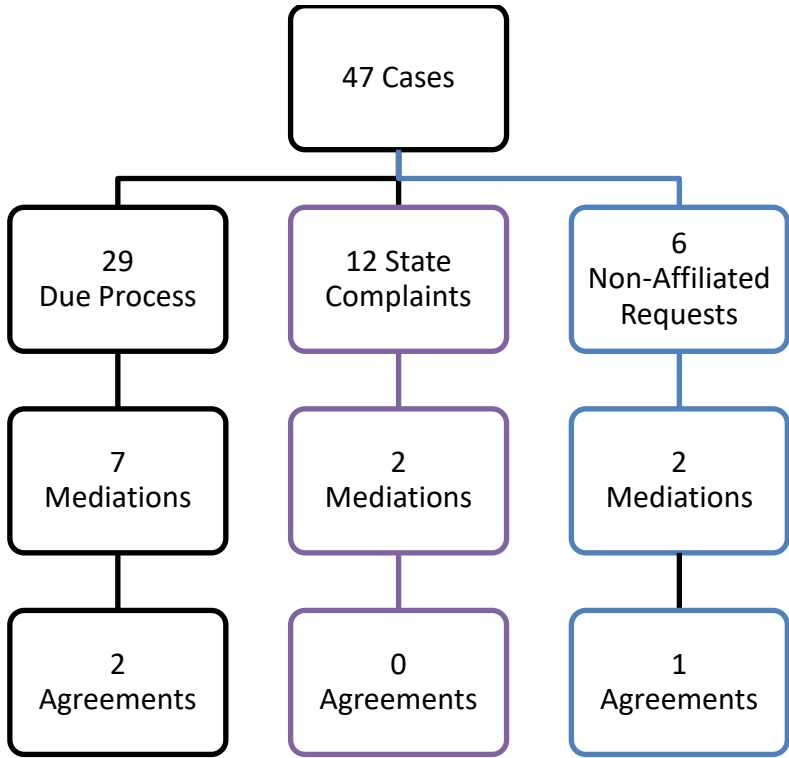
Overview of Mediation Cases

During the reporting year from July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023, SPARC staff processed 47 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 after a due process complaint is filed with DDOE, and state complaint cases refer to cases that are initiated after a state complaint is filed with DDOE. Non-affiliated request cases are a result of a direct request for mediation that is not affiliated with either type of formal complaint.

During the 2022–2023 reporting year, 11 of the 47 cases that were processed by SPARC participated in mediation. Of the 11 cases that went to mediation, SPARC staff conducted 22 mediation sessions. The following chart displays the overall distribution of SPARC cases by type, mediations performed, and agreements reached. SPARC mediated six Adult and Prison Education Resources (APER) work group cases. These cases are not included in the figures and tables throughout this report, which focus on cases affiliated with local education agencies.

Figure 2. 2022–2023 Mediation Cases* by Type



* Note: Figure 2 contains a due-process amended case and a state complaint corrective action case.

Local Education Agencies

SPARC received 47 cases this year. Thirty-three involved school districts, eight involved charter schools, and six involved REDACTED. The districts with the most cases were REDACTED (10) and REDACTED (7). Table A provides a list of the school districts and charter schools associated with this year’s cases, the number of mediations performed, and the number of agreements reached.

*Table A. 2022–2023 SPARC Cases by Local Education Agency**

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	33	6	5
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED †	7	1	2
REDACTED	1	1	0
REDACTED	10	4	3
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	4	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED (Pending)	1	0	0
Charter School	8	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	3	0	0
Grand Total	41	6	5

**Note: Table A does not include the six REDACTED (REDACTED) cases because they are not an LEA.*

†REDACTED shows one case with two partial mediation agreements. These data skew 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 forth in the IEP” (16). Table B illustrates the primary issues reported.

Table B. 2022–2023 SPARC Cases by Primary Issue

Primary Issue Reported	Cases
Educational Placement	6
Student Educational Program (e.g., academic, functional, and life skills) as Set Forth in the IEP	16
Eligibility for Special Education Services	1
Evaluation for Special Education Services	9
Discipline (including suspension or expulsion)	4
Related Services (e.g., transportation, speech therapy, counseling)	1
Procedural Safeguards (e.g., prior written notice, confidentiality)	0
Tuition Reimbursement (e.g., private school)	4
Other:	6
Bullying and Assault (3)	
Compensative Education (1)	
Corrective Action (1)	
Meeting Cancelled without Parent Notice (1)	
Grand Total	47

Mediations

This year, SPARC mediated 11 cases: six with APER and five with school districts. Four school districts were involved in mediations. Two cases were requested by a parent and two by the school. The most common issues mediated were student evaluation for special education and student educational program as set forth in the IEP.

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 three hours and thirty minutes, with individual sessions ranging from one to three 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 team 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 29 due process cases, six of which were REDACTED cases. The most frequently cited issues in due process cases were “student education program as set forth in the IEP” (10). Seven due process complaint cases participated in mediation, and one reached two partial agreements.

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

*Table C. 2022–2023 Due Process Cases by Local Education Agency**

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	16	1	2
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED (2 partial agreements)	4	1	2
REDACTED	5	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED (pending)	1	0	0
Charter School	7	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
Grand Total	23	1	2

**Note: Table C does not include the six REDACTED cases because it is not an LEA.*

State Complaint Cases

During this reporting year, SPARC processed 12 state complaint cases: 11 state complaint cases associated with a school district and one associated with a charter school. There were no REDACTED - related state complaint cases. The most frequently cited issues in state complaint cases were “student educational program as set forth in IEP” (5). Three state complaint cases went to mediation and did not reach an agreement. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table D below.

Table D. 2022–2023 State Complaint Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	11	3	0
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	4	3	0
REDACTED (1 pending)	2	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
Charter School	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
Grand Total	12	3	0

Non-Affiliated Mediation Request Cases

During this reporting year, SPARC processed six non-affiliated request (NAR) cases. All six were associated with school districts. The most frequently cited issue in NAR cases was “educational placement” (3). Two cases participated in mediation, and one reached an agreement. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table E below.

Table E. 2022–2023 Non-Affiliated Requests Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	6	2	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	1	0
REDACTED	1	1	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
Grand Total	6	2	1

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, 2022, and June 30, 2023.

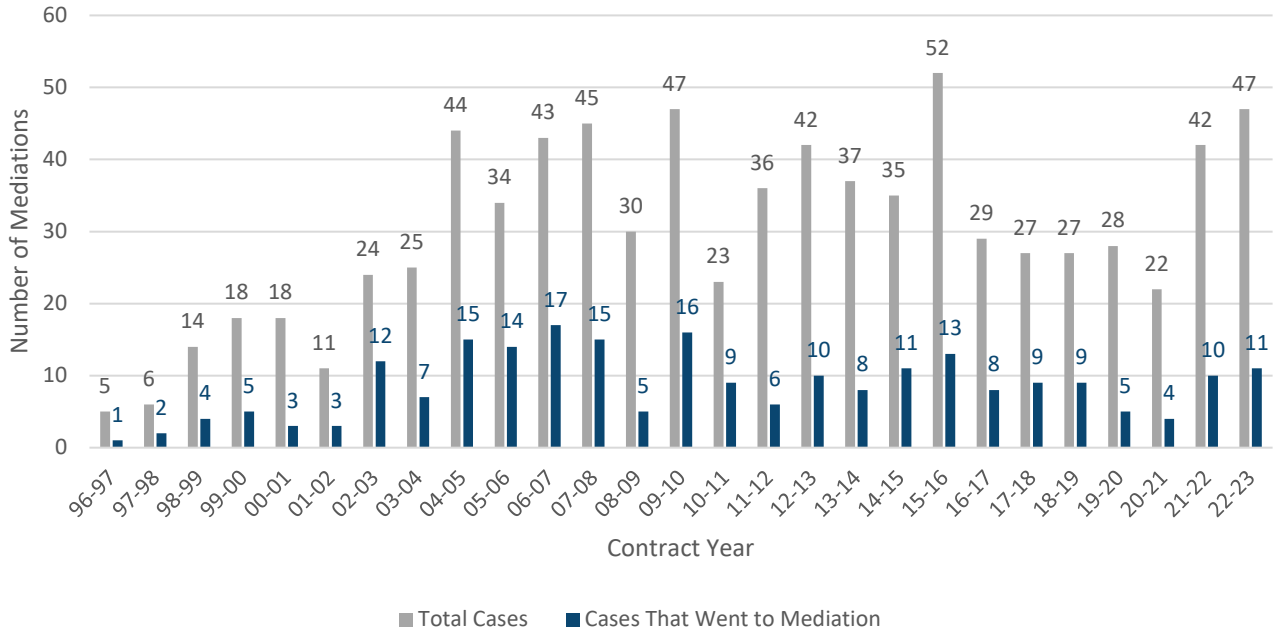
Table F. 2022–2023 IDEA Part B Data Collections

SECTION A: Written, Signed Complaints	
(1) Total number of written, signed complaints filed	11
SECTION B: Mediation Requests	
(2) Total number of mediation requests received through all dispute resolution processes	21
(2.1) Mediations held	9
(a) Mediations held related to due process complaints	6
(i) Mediation agreements related to due process complaints	1
(b) Mediations held not related to due process complaints	3
(i) Mediation agreements not related to due process complaints	1
(2.2) Mediations pending	2
(2.3) Mediations withdrawn or not held	10
SECTION C: Due Process Complaints	
(3) Total number of due process complaints filed*	28

SPARC Mediation Caseload Over Time

Between 1996 and 2023, SPARC processed over 800 cases and performed 230 mediations. Over the past ten reporting years, SPARC has processed an average of 35 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 (142) and has performed the most mediations with Christina School District (47). A full list of districts and case information is provided in Table G below.

Table G. 1996–2023 SPARC Cases by County, School District, and Charter

County and Districts	Cases	Mediations	Mediation Rate
New Castle	455	133	29%
Appoquinimink	62	12	19%
Brandywine	84	22	26%
Christina	142	47	33%
Colonial	56	11	20%
NCC Vo-Tech	11	2	18%
Red Clay Consolidated	100	39	39%
Sussex	118	35	30%
Cape Henlopen	43	16	37%
Delmar	8	2	25%
Indian River	26	8	31%
Laurel	19	4	21%
Seaford	16	3	19%
Sussex County Vo-Tech	6	2	33%
Kent	86	22	26%
Caesar Rodney	38	16	42%
Capital	25	1	4%
Lake Forest	20	5	25%
Polytech	3	0	0%
Bridge Counties	38	12	32%
Milford	9	3	33%
Smyrna	24	8	33%
Woodbridge	5	1	20%
Charter Schools¹	81	13	16%
Total²	778	215	28%

1. Charter School collection began 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 APER cases and the Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families.

SPARC Mediation Evaluation

SPARC solicits feedback from all mediation participants in order to maintain the highest program standards and understand the experiences of those utilizing SPARC services. 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 on paper or online.

During the 2022–2023 reporting year, SPARC received 15 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. Fourteen out of fifteen 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.

Full details of the 2022–2023 Summary of Mediation Evaluation Results can be found in Appendix A.



90%

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

SPARC Facilitated IEP Team Meetings

Facilitated IEP Team Meetings

This year, there were eighteen requests for SPARC IEP team meeting facilitation. Fourteen of these requests resulted in a facilitated IEP team meeting. Five cases required more than one meeting. The average amount of time spent on an IEP team meeting per case was 1 hour and 40 minutes, with a range of 30 minutes to 4 hours and 30 minutes. Table H below displays the facilitated IEP team meetings by local education agency.

Table H. 2022–2023 Facilitated IEP Team Meetings by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Meetings
School District	11
REDACTED	2
REDACTED	1
REDACTED	2
REDACTED	2
REDACTED	1
REDACTED	1
REDACTED	1
REDACTED	1
Charter School	2
REDACTED	1
REDACTED	1
Grand Total	13

Note: One REDACTED facilitation is not included in the count.

Reported Issues

The primary issue(s) for each inquiry were categorized to identify trends. The most cited issue for facilitated IEP team meetings was concerns about “student education program as set forth in the IEP” (11). Table I summarizes the primary issues reported for this year.

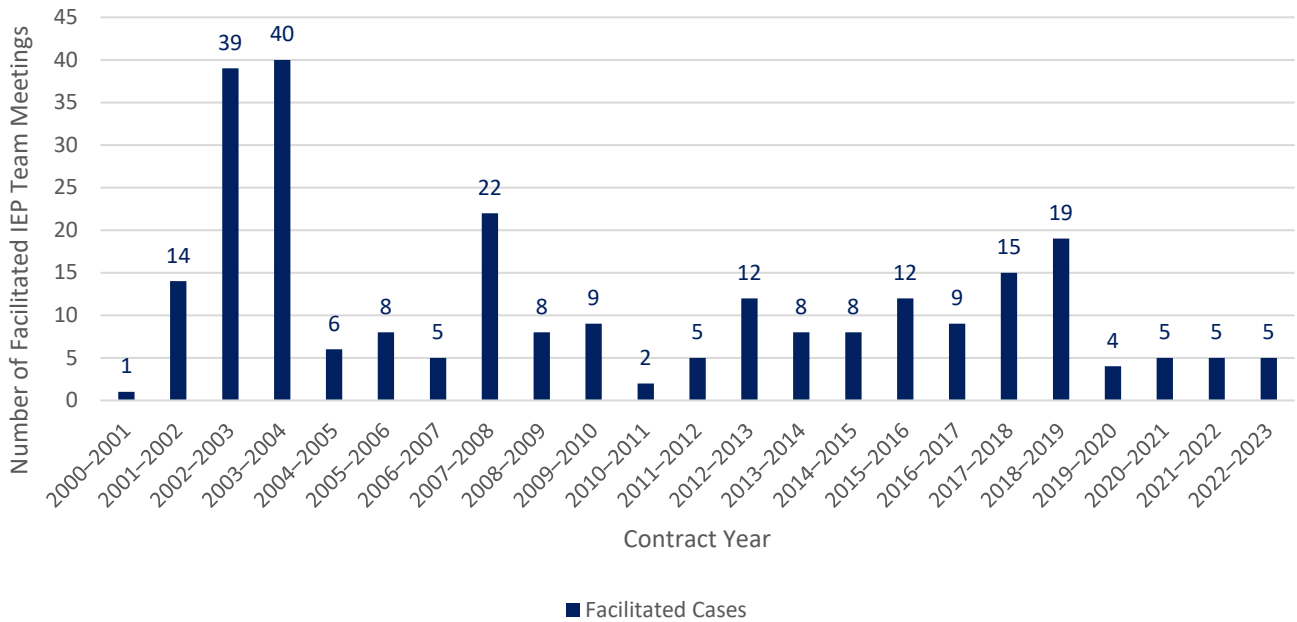
Table I. 2022–2023 Facilitated IEP Team Meetings by Primary Issue

Primary Issue Reported	Cases
Student Educational Program (e.g., academic, functional, and life skills) as Set Forth in the IEP	11
Other	3
Grand Total	14

Facilitated IEP Team Meetings Over Time

Between 2000 and 2023, SPARC has facilitated 271 IEP team meetings. Over the past ten reporting years, SPARC has facilitated an average of nine IEP team 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 Team Meetings Since 2000



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

Table J. 2000–2023 Facilitated IEP Team Meetings by County, School District, and Charter

County and Districts	Facilitated IEP Team Meetings
New Castle	126
Appoquinimink	20
Brandywine	15
Christina	44
Colonial	23
NCC Vo-Tech	0
Red Clay Consolidated	24
Sussex	59
Cape Henlopen	27
Delmar	3
Indian River	20
Laurel	2
Seaford	3
Sussex County Vo-Tech	4
Kent	36
Caesar Rodney	18
Capital	6
Lake Forest	10
Polytech	2
Bridge Counties	22
Milford	15
Smyrna	7
Woodbridge	0
Charter Schools	29
Grand Total	272

Facilitated IEP Team Meeting Feedback

An IEP Team Meeting Facilitation Feedback Form is distributed to all participants at the end of the meeting in an effort to understand the team members’ experiences with the facilitation process. Team members are asked to complete the form in-person or online. The Feedback Form asks participants about their experience before, during, and after the IEP team meeting facilitation. The IEP Team Meeting Feedback Facilitation Form can be found in Appendix B.

During the 2022–2023 reporting year, SPARC received responses from seventeen IEP team meeting participants. Respondents did not answer every question on the survey. Based on the evaluation responses, SPARC received high ratings. Fourteen out of fourteen respondents reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the communication, time, and attention they receive from SPARC staff prior to the IEP team meeting. All respondents reported that the facilitator was fair and unbiased. Respondents felt that the facilitator heard and understood their goals and concerns. Finally, fourteen out of fifteen respondents would consider utilizing or recommending the use of SPARC services in the future.

Professional Development for Mediators

Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) 9th National Symposium

SPARC mediators are required to participate in six hours of instruction, annually, in mediation and/or special education law. SPARC staff members Kathy Murphy, Joy Jordan, and Valdese West attended CADRE's 2022 Symposium on Dispute Resolution in Special Education, *Planting Seeds: Growing an Inclusive & Informed Community*, which took place on October 25–29, 2022, in Colorado in order to meet this requirement. SPARC mediators participated in workshops covering topics such as advanced mediation skills, providing equal access to justice in mediation, how IEP team meeting facilitation can prevent disputes, a collaborative project between an SEA and LEA, and a Q&A on U. S. Supreme Court case decision *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*.

Kathy Murphy and Joy Jordan presented a workshop titled *From Conflict to Collaboration: Essential Conflict Management Skills*. This workshop taught participants the five conflict management styles and how to select the appropriate style for any conflict. It also taught methods for using the collaboration styles to help IEP teams achieve consensus through a four-step collaborative problem-solving process.

Professional Development for Panel Members, Investigators, and Mediators/Facilitators

Kathy Murphy, Joy Jordan, and Valdese West participated in six hours of professional development delivered virtually by Perry Zirkel on October 5 and 6, 2022.

CADRE IDEA Legal Update

Joy Jordan attended a CADRE IDEA Legal Update presented virtually by Art Cernosia, Esquire. Valdese West attended an SEA Dispute Resolution/DMS 2.0 Learning Community workshop.

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. They also meet with members of the Exceptional Children Resources Workgroup to assess the SPARC project and discuss concerns and new ideas.

Educator Workshops

At the request of DDOE, SPARC staff created six asynchronous workshops for educators designed to strengthen relationships with parents by teaching IEP team meeting best practices that included interpersonal communication skills, collaborative problem-solving, culture competence and the importance of diversity. The goal of these workshops was to provide educators with strategies, skills, and tools to communicate effectively, manage conflict, and work collaboratively with parents prior to and during IEP team meetings. Each workshop contained a narrated presentation, handouts that encouraged reflection and action planning, and pre- and post-tests. The six workshops were recorded on Zoom, downloaded as an MP4 file, and uploaded to the DDOE Schoology account. DDOE and SPARC collaborated on a flyer that markets the workshops to educators in Delaware. Below is a list of the six workshops developed by SPARC along with a brief description and corresponding supplemental materials.

Effective Conflict Management Strategies

This workshop provides detailed descriptions of the five styles we all use to manage interpersonal conflict and explains how to achieve a desired outcome by selecting the appropriate style. Resources include a Conflict Management Styles Worksheet, a Values and Perceptions Handout, and the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Questionnaire (with directions) and an Interpretative Report.

Communication Skills for Managing Conflict

Conflict can create strong emotions that make it difficult to communicate clearly and respectfully. This workshop shows how to manage emotions and improve communication skills when parents and educators do not see eye-to-eye. Resources include an Active Listening Practice Worksheet and an Assertive Speaking Worksheet.

Planning and Leading Effective IEP Team Meetings

This workshop provides an overview of best practices for IEP team meetings and explains how to plan, implement, and participate in an effective meeting. Resources include Sample IEP Team Meeting Agendas and a Group Norms Handouts.

The Role of an IEP Team Meeting Facilitator

This workshop explains how a facilitator can help parents and educators work collaboratively in an IEP team meeting and manage difficult meeting dynamics. Resources include a Facilitation Techniques Handout.

Cultural Competency and Diversity

This workshop helps participants recognize the role that culture and beliefs and attitudes about diversity play in parent and IEP team interactions. Participants will gain strategies and tools to increase awareness around cultural competency and diversity as it relates to parents and team members. Resources include a Dimensions of Diversity Culture Wheel and an Identity Wheel.

Building Consensus in IEP Team Meetings

This workshop provides an overview of collaborative problem-solving techniques that can be used in IEP team meetings to promote consensus. This workshop will introduce methods to actively engage all team members in building consensus with the best interest of the student in mind. Resources include an Open- Ended Questions handout and a Reframing the Problem handout.

SPARC/DDOE Meetings

SPARC staff met 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 February 21, 2023.

SPARC and DDOE staff met periodically throughout the year to discuss data.

SPARC staff attended a DDOE Leadership meeting on September 14, 2022, and again on March 8, 2023, to discuss SPARC services and the professional development workshops being created for Schoology.

Marketing

SPARC staff continue to maintain and update the SPARC webpages housed on the University of Delaware's website. During this contract year, SPARC staff completed the following marketing-related initiatives.

SPARC staff attended a lunch meeting on February 6, 2023, to discuss SPARC services with the Down Syndrome Association of Delaware and led a virtual presentation for their members on February 20, 2023.

SPARC staff were interviewed by the LRP Publication, *Special Ed Connection*, on December 7, 2022. The article focused on conflict resolution styles and strategies to use in IEP team meetings to preserve the relationship between a district and parents.

SPARC, DDOE, and the Parent Information Center (PIC) collaborated on a handout for parents that described the roles of the mediator and the parent before and during a mediation. The SPARC webpage was updated on January 19, 2023, to include the new parent handout.

On December 7, 2022, SPARC staff met with the Executive Director of A Better Chance for our Children to discuss SPARC services. SPARC staff met with representatives from the Epilepsy Foundation on December 6, 2022, to promote SPARC services.

Appendix A: 2022–2023 Mediation Evaluation Results

Responses = 15

**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	1	8	6
<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	0	7	8
<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	3	11
<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	1	2	11
<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	4	9
<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.

6	1	2	3	2
<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.

0	0	0	0	4	10
<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	8	6
<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.

The mediator was amazing as always. She was extremely patient throughout the process.

I participated in this mediation as a representative of:

7 Parent/Student Concerns 7 District/Agency Concerns 1 No Answer

Appendix B: 2022–2023 Facilitated IEP Meeting Feedback Form

Responses = 17

**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	0	0	14
<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	0	0	14
<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?

1	0	3	2	9
<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.	1	1	1	7	5
Promoted listening and understanding among team members.	0	1	2	6	6
Was fair and unbiased throughout the meeting.	0	0	1	4	10
Heard and understood my concerns.	0	0	2	6	7
Helped clarify and prioritize all concerns.	1	0	2	5	7
Kept the group focused and kept the meeting moving forward.	1	1	2	5	6

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.

1	2	2	6	3
<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	3	5	4	1
<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.

1	2	0	5	6
<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	2	12
<i>No</i>	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>Yes</i>

Additional comments or suggestions:

(None)

I participated in this meeting as a representative of:

(4) Parent/Student Concerns **(10)** District/School Concerns