

Delaware's Special Education Partnership for the Amicable  
Resolution of Conflict (SPARC) Program

## End-of-the-Year Report for 2019–2020

July 10, 2020

***Presented to the***

Delaware Department of Education

***Written by***

Jessica Velez, Policy Specialist

Kathy Murphy, Policy Scientist

Danielle Metcalfe, Conflict Resolution Practitioner

*Conflict Resolution Program*

***Prepared by***

Institute for Public Administration

Biden School of Public Policy & Administration

College of Arts & Sciences

University of Delaware

**[www.ipa.udel.edu](http://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 End-of-the-Year Report for 2019–2020*. 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 and advocates.

Part of IPA's mission is to assist state agencies to better meet the needs of constituents through best practices and democratic practices. The Conflict Resolution Program (CRP) is a unique resource dedicated to building statewide capacity for collaboration through facilitation, mediation, and training services. The 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 workgroup, and Maria 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

---

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>SPARC Overview</b> .....	<b>6</b>
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
<b>SPARC Inquiries</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>SPARC Mediation Cases</b> .....	<b>10</b>
Overview of Mediation Cases .....	10
Local Education Agencies (LEA) .....	11
Reported Issues .....	11
Mediations .....	12
Due Process Cases .....	13
State Complaint Cases .....	13
Non-Affiliated Request Cases .....	14
<b>IDEA Part B Dispute Resolution</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>SPARC Mediation Caseload Over Time</b> .....	<b>16</b>
LEA Involvement Over Time .....	17
<b>SPARC Mediation Evaluation</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>SPARC Facilitated IEP Meetings</b> .....	<b>19</b>
Facilitated IEP Meetings .....	19
Reported Issues .....	19
Facilitated IEP Meetings Over Time .....	19
Facilitated IEP Meeting Feedback .....	20
<b>Professional Development Workshops</b> .....	<b>22</b>
Educator Workshops .....	22
Advocate Webinar .....	22
<b>Program Development, Outreach and Marketing</b> .....	<b>23</b>
SPARC/DDOE Meetings .....	23

Marketing.....23

**Appendix A.....24**

**Appendix B.....26**

## 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, 2019 through June 30, 2020 by the Special Education Partnership for the Amicable Resolution of Conflict (SPARC) program. Funded by the Delaware Department of Education (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, 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 encourages positive relationships between schools and families. SPARC professional development workshops provide educators and advocates with communication, collaboration, and dispute resolution skills that are essential for team members working together to create an appropriate individualized education program (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, as well as more general program data to evaluate its effectiveness.



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 2019-2020 reporting year, there were 29 inquiries about SPARC services. SPARC staff listened to the caller's concerns and goals and provided the relevant information about SPARC or a related agency such as DDOE or PIC. Some of these inquiries requested SPARC assistance, but many did not follow-up after receiving information.

In 2019–2020, SPARC processed 27 cases that filed formal complaints or requests for mediation with the DDOE. SPARC staff conducted 5 mediations, of which 80 percent resulted in an agreement. To help inform program improvement, a post-mediation questionnaire is provided to all mediation participants asking about their experiences before, during, and after the mediation. All eight respondents reported they were *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with the overall services they received through SPARC.

During this reporting year, SPARC received six requests to facilitate an IEP meeting. In the end, SPARC staff facilitated four IEP meeting, as the other two meetings were cancelled. 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. SPARC did not receive enough responses to analyze the feedback.

Finally, SPARC delivered two full-day professional development workshops to educators focused on skills needed to effectively lead IEP meetings and one webinar to parent advocates about SPARC services. In addition, this year SPARC staff have improved outreach strategies that include translating marketing materials into Haitian Creole, updating the SPARC webpages, and attending county and charter special education directors' meetings to explain the program's services.

# 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 federal mandates in Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) that require states provide mediation for special education disputes. SPARC was created prior to 1997 when these mandates were imposed. 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 placement, services, evaluation or classification. 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 eye-to-eye. 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 resolution 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. Mediation is an alternative to costly, time-consuming legal proceedings that can damage relationships and deny parents and educators a voice in the outcome of their disputes. Agreements reached in mediation are made by the parties in the room and are legally binding.

### IEP Meeting Facilitation

The goal of facilitating IEP meetings is to support IEP teams to address conflicts as they arise and help teams reach consensus on a student's educational program. IEP meeting facilitation can help IEP teams address conflicts early and at the lowest level to mitigate the need to file formal complaints.

### Professional Development

SPARC professional development is available to educators, administrators and advocates serving special education students and their families. These workshops provide valuable tools and techniques aimed at

*Since 1996, SPARC has served over*

**1,000**

*Delaware families of special education students.*

increasing the participant’s knowledge and skills to communicate effectively and collaboratively make decisions that are 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 in all three areas.

### 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 (4) special education mediations with another SPARC mediator.
3. Successfully serve as the lead mediator, with another SPARC mediator, in at least two (2) 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 (12) 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 school, districts, and families from across the state by responding to requests for information about our services and by reaching out to parties who are already in conflict. SPARC staff provide parties with information about mediation and facilitation, answer questions about these services, and listen to understand the conflict and concerns. 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, as well as 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 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, as appropriate. 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**

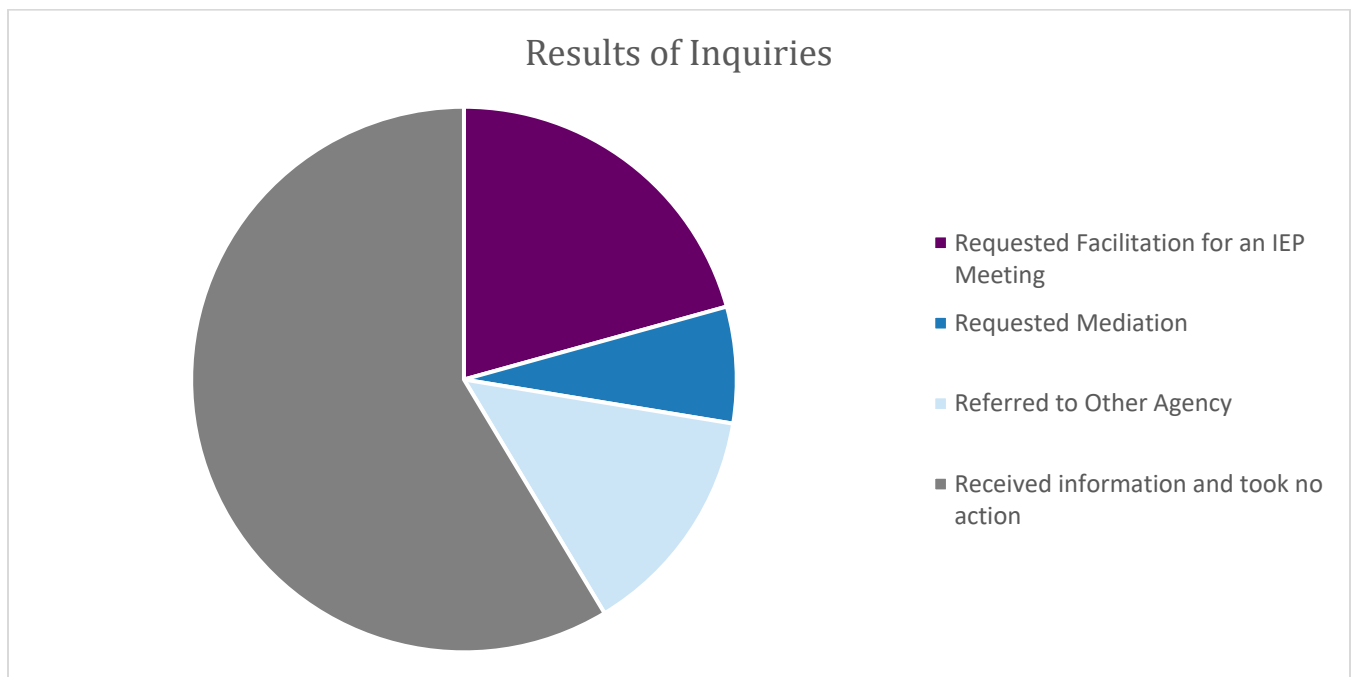
The following report discusses the cases processed by SPARC for the 2019–2020 reporting year broken down by the type of case, the districts and charter schools involved, the number of mediations conducted, agreements reached, and IEP meetings facilitated. This report also outlines additional work completed 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 or email. SPARC staff listen to the caller to understand the current conflict and concerns. Staff educate the caller about SPARC services and the role of a neutral facilitator or mediator and allow the caller 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 callers with resources and referrals to other services, as appropriate. For example, staff may refer the 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 the parent to a different agency such as the Parent Information Center of Delaware, Inc. (PIC), DDOE’s Exceptional Children Resources work group, or a related advocacy group. Additionally, staff offer other special-education resources, such as those from the DDOE and the Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE).

Between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020, SPARC received 29 call or emails from parents and educators inquiring about SPARC services. SPARC staff listened to the caller’s concerns and goals and provided the relevant information. SPARC records the outcome of an inquiry in one of the following categories: caller requests IEP facilitation services; caller requests mediation services; caller is referred to another agency for help (DDOE, PIC, etc.); caller was provided information and took no action. The results of the 29 inquiries are listed below.



## SPARC Mediation Cases

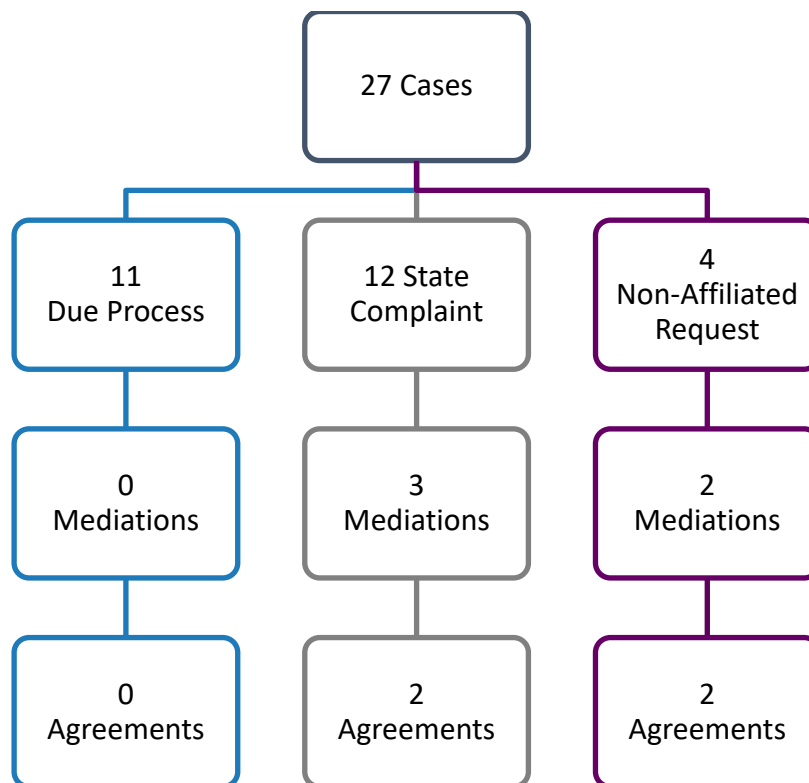
### Overview of Mediation Cases

During the reporting year from July 1, 2019, to June 30, 2020, SPARC staff processed 27 cases, plus one case that carried over from the 2018–2019 reporting year. 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 2019–2020 reporting year, 5 of the 27 cases that were processed by SPARC participated in mediation. Eighty percent of the mediated cases resulted in an agreement (5 cases mediated and 4 resulted in agreement). The following chart displays the overall distribution of SPARC cases by type, mediations performed, and agreements reached.

*Figure 1. 2019–2020 Mediation Cases by Type*



## Local Education Agencies (LEA)

SPARC received 27 mediation cases this year. Twenty-two involved school districts and 5 involved charter schools. The two districts with the most cases were REDACTED (6) and REDACTED (3). All school district cases that participated in mediation reached an agreement. One charter school case went to mediation but did not reach an agreement. 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. 2019-2020 SPARC Cases by LEA*

<b>LEA</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>Mediations</b>	<b>Agreements</b>
<b>School District</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Charter School</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Other</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>

## Reported Issues

The main concern expressed within each case is classified into one of nine possible issue categories, in order to identify any trends. While most cases include multiple issues, one primary issue was recorded. During this reporting year, the two most frequently cited issues were *educational placement* (10) and *other* (10). Table C illustrates the primary issues reported.

*Table B. 2019–2020 SPARC Cases by Primary Issue*

<b>Primary Issue Expressed</b>	<b>Cases</b>
Educational Placement	10
Student Educational Program (e.g., academic, functional, and life skills) as Set Forth in the IEP	2
Eligibility for Special Education Services	2
Evaluation for Special Education Services	1
Discipline (including suspension or expulsion)	1
Related Services (e.g., transportation, speech therapy, counseling)	1
Procedural Safeguards (e.g., prior written notice, confidentiality)	0
Tuition Reimbursement (e.g., private school)	0
Other:	10
Bullying (2)	
Not providing services according to IEP (6)	
Injury at school (1)	
Enrollment (1)	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>27</b>

## Mediations

This year, SPARC mediated five cases involving three school districts and one charter school. All five cases were requested by a parent or parent attorney. Overall, 34 participants attended a SPARC mediation this year. The most common issue mediated was student educational placement (3).

Mediation is a quick and efficient method for addressing differences when compared to lengthy legal proceedings. On average, mediations were scheduled within 30 days of the mediation request. The average length of a mediation was two and a half hours, with individual sessions ranging from two to four hours. All agreements were reached in one mediation session.

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 10 due process cases. The most frequently cited issues in due process cases were *Evaluation for Educational Placement* (7), *Special Education Services* (1), *Discipline* (1), *Related Services* (1), and *Eligibility for Special Education Services* (1). None of the due process complaint cases participated in mediation.

This year there were seven due processes cases associated with a school district and four associated with a charter school. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table D below.

*Table C. 2019–2020 Due Process Cases by LEA*

<b>LEA</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>Mediations</b>	<b>Agreements</b>
<b>School District</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Charter School</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

## State Complaint Cases

During this reporting year, SPARC processed twelve state complaint cases. The most frequently cited issues in state complaint cases were *Not Providing Services According to IEP* (6), *Educational Placement* (2), and *Student Education Program as Set in the IEP* (1). Three state complaint case participated in mediation and two reached an agreement.

This year there were eleven state complaint cases associated with a school district and one associated with a charter school. Two school district cases and one charter school case went to mediation. Both school district cases reached an agreement. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table E below.

*Table D. 2019–2020 State Complaint Cases by LEA*

<b>LEA</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>Mediations</b>	<b>Agreements</b>
<b>School District</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Charter School</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Other</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>

## Non-Affiliated Request Cases

During this reporting year, SPARC processed four non-affiliated request (NAR) cases. The most frequently cited issues in NAR cases was *educational placement* (2). Two cases participated in mediation and both reached an agreement.

This year all four NAR cases were associated with a school district. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table F below.

*Table E. 2019–2020 Non-Affiliated Requests Cases by LEA*

<b>LEA</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>Mediations</b>	<b>Agreements</b>
<b>School District</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>

## IDEA Part B Dispute Resolution

Table G. is presented for DDOE in accordance with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) reporting requirements. This table only includes cases filed between July 1, 2019, and June 30, 2020.

*Table G. 2019–2020 IDEA Part B Data Collections*

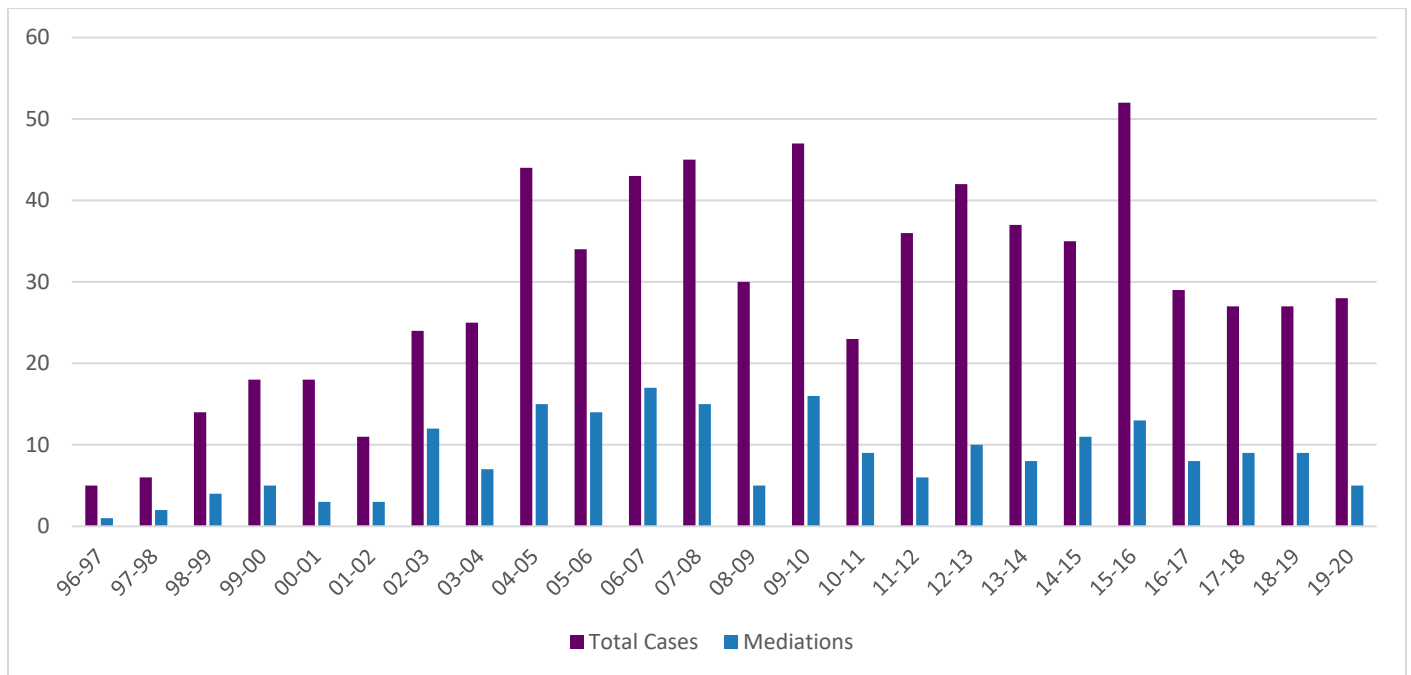
<b>SECTION A: Written, Signed Complaints</b>	
(1) Total number of written, signed complaints filed	12
<b>SECTION B: Mediation Requests</b>	
(2) Total number of mediation requests received through all dispute resolution processes	14
(2.1) Mediations held	5
(a) Mediations held related to due process complaints	0
(i) Mediation agreements related to due process complaints	0
(b) Mediations held not related to due process complaints	5
(i) Mediation agreements not related to due process complaints	4
(2.2) Mediations pending	0
(2.3) Mediations withdrawn or not held	9
<b>SECTION C: Due Process Complaints</b>	
(3) Total number of due process complaints filed	11
<b>SECTION D: Expedited Due Process Complaints (Related to Disciplinary Decision)</b>	
(4) Total number of expedited due process complaints filed	1



## SPARC Mediation Caseload Over Time

Between 1996 and 2020, SPARC processed over 700 cases and performed over 200 mediations. Seventy-eight 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 23 to 52 cases per year. The number of cases processed each year since 1996 is illustrated in Figure 3 below. This chart does not include mediations performed or agreements reached for any cases that carried over from a previous reporting year.

*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 (123) and has performed the most mediations with Red Clay Consolidated School District (28) and Christina School District (38). A full list of districts and case information is provided in Table H below.

*Table F. 1996–2020 SPARC Cases by County and School District*

<b>County and Districts</b>	<b>SPARC Cases</b>	<b>Mediations Performed</b>	<b>Rate of Mediations Performed</b>
<b>New Castle</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>30%</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Sussex</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>32%</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Kent</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>33%</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Bridge Counties</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>36%</b>
REDACTED			
<b>Total<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>600</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>31%</b>

<sup>1</sup> Data in this table does not include cases not involved with a district, and therefore does not match the cumulative data.

## SPARC Mediation Evaluation

---

Feedback is solicited from all mediation participants, regardless of their role, in order to maintain the highest program standards and understand the experiences of those utilizing SPARC services. 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 to their ratings or comment on topics not directly addressed.

During the 2019–2020 reporting year, SPARC received 8 completed evaluations from a possible 34 mediation participants. Based on the evaluation responses, SPARC received high ratings in all areas. The majority of respondents were satisfied with SPARC staff and services. Mediation participants were satisfied or very satisfied with nearly all aspects of their experience with the SPARC program. All respondents reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the communication, time, and attention they received from SPARC staff prior to mediation. All respondents reported that the mediator promoted listening and understanding and was fair and unbiased during the mediation. Three-fourths of respondents felt that the mediation had a positive influence on their relationship and communication with the other party. Six out of eight respondents felt mediation was an overall positive experience. Finally, all respondents would utilize or recommend the use of SPARC services in the future.

Respondents gave the following feedback in the additional comments sections:

- *Thank you!!*
- *Thanks for your help!*
- *SPARC Team was very professional.*
- *Thank you so much. It was a very positive and productive meeting!*

Full details of the 2019-2020 Summary of Mediation Evaluation Results can be found in Appendix A.



# SPARC Facilitated IEP Meetings

## Facilitated IEP Meetings

This year, six of the 29 inquiries requested a SPARC facilitator for an IEP meeting. Four of these requests resulted in a facilitated IEP meeting. The other two meetings were cancelled. SPARC facilitated the most IEP meetings in the REDACTED school district (3). Table 1 below displays the facilitated IEP meetings broken down by LEA.

*Table G. 2019–2020 Facilitated IEP Meetings by LEA*

<b>LEA</b>	<b>Meetings</b>
<b>School District</b>	<b>3</b>
REDACTED	
<b>Charter School</b>	<b>1</b>
REDACTED	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4</b>

## Reported Issues

The primary issue(s) for each inquiry were categorized to help identify trends. The most commonly cited issue for facilitated IEP meetings was concerns about the implementation of the IEP (3). Table J summarizes the primary issues cited for this year.

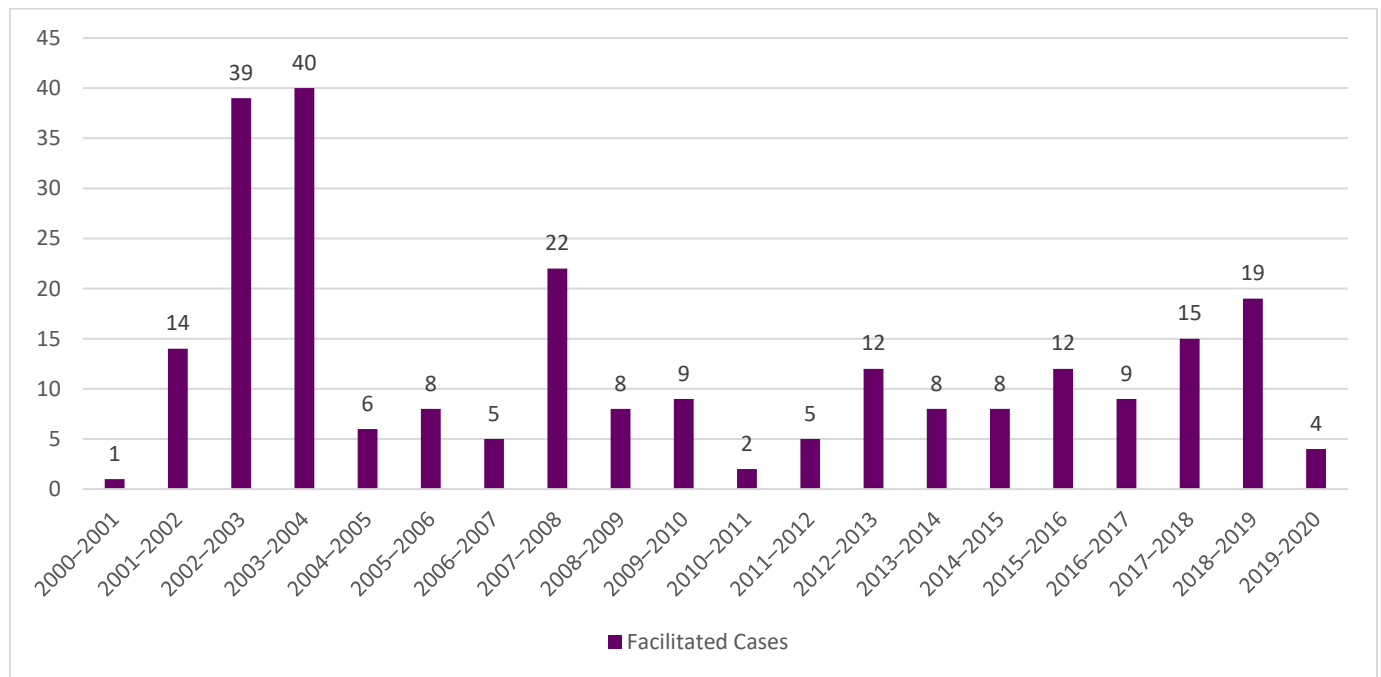
*Table H. 2019–2020 Facilitated IEP Meetings by Primary Issue*

<b>Primary Issue Expressed</b>	<b>Cases</b>
Educational Placement	1
Student Educational Program (e.g., academic, functional, and life skills) as Set Forth in the IEP	1
Other:	2
Concerns about Implementation of IEP	
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>4</b>

## Facilitated IEP Meetings Over Time

Between 2000 and 2020, SPARC has facilitated 248 IEP meetings. Over the past ten reporting years, SPARC has facilitated an average of 10 IEP meetings per year ranging from 2 to 19 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 Christina School District (43). A full list of districts and number of facilitated IEP meetings cases in each district is provided in Table K below.

Table I. 2000–2020 IEP Facilitated IEP Meetings by County and School District

County and Districts	Facilitated IEP Meetings
<b>New Castle</b>	<b>118</b>
REDACTED	
<b>Sussex</b>	<b>52</b>
REDACTED	
<b>Kent</b>	<b>33</b>
REDACTED	
<b>Bridge Counties</b>	<b>20</b>
REDACTED	
<b>Total</b>	<b>223</b>

## 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 to mail the form back to the SPARC using the prepaid envelope.

The Feedback Form was also made available online. One feedback form was completed and returned for this reporting year. The Feedback Form asks participants about their experience before, during, and after the IEP- meeting facilitation. SPARC received an insufficient number of returned feedback forms to conduct an analysis for this report. The IEP Meeting Feedback Form can be found in Appendix B.

## Professional Development Workshops

---

SPARC staff conducted two professional development workshops and one informational webinar during the 2019-20 reporting year. CRP was responsible for creating marketing material, tracking attendance, creating and distributing workshop materials, administering post-workshop evaluations, and providing each participant with a certificate of completion. SPARC also provided DDOE with a summary of post-workshop evaluations, attendance lists, and all workshop materials.

### Educator Workshops

SPARC staff conducted two, day-long workshops entitled *Leading Effective Individualized Education Program (IEP) Meetings*. The workshop blended best practices in effective meetings and dispute resolution into existing IEP team meeting format(s) to create a practical, adult-focused course. Participants learned through lecture, discussion, demonstration, interactive activities, and role-play. Participants were provided strategies, skills and tools for holding effective IEP team meetings that support all members to work efficiently and effectively in the best interest of the student. Topics included:

- Facilitator tools and techniques
- How to manage difficult people/dynamics
- Tools for building consensus
- Pre-meeting preparation considerations
- Roles and responsibilities of IEP team members
- How to positively engage parents

The workshops were held on October 11, 2019 and November 26, 2019 in Camden, Delaware and provided 55 educators with six hours of continuing education. Feedback from the training evaluation surveys revealed that participants valued the hands-on practice during the training, as well as the opportunity to hear and share ideas and experiences with other educators.

### Advocate Webinar

SPARC partnered with the Parent Information Center of Delaware, Inc. (PIC) to conduct a half-day webinar with parent consultants. SPARC staff explained the differences between mediation and facilitation services, the process for requesting these services, and the role of a parent consultant in the process. SPARC staff also answered a variety of questions from PIC staff and learned about their processes and responsibilities as parent consultants in order to work together more effectively in the future.

## Program Development, Outreach and Marketing

---

Each year, SPARC staff reached 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 via distributing printed materials, sharing website links, and 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, the meeting took place on Friday, February 7, 2020 at the University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware.

SPARC staff also participated in a planning meeting with DDOE and PIC. This meeting helped the three groups to share information, provide updates on services and concerns, and to plan for better coordination in serving Delaware families and special education students. This meeting took place on February 21, 2020 at PIC's office in Wilmington, Delaware.

### Virtual Programming

In response to the health and safety concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic, SPARC adapted its mediation and IEP meeting facilitation services to be delivered virtually. SPARC staff developed new operating procedures for conducting virtual mediation over Zoom according to best practices in the field. This includes utilizing new technology such as Zoom and DocuSign to deliver services virtually, creating informational documents about virtual mediation for participants, and adjusting Zoom meeting settings and updating the Confidentiality pledge to ensure the meetings remain private and confidential. In addition, SPARC researched and adapted best practices for facilitating virtual meetings to the IEP meeting process. These best practices were utilized by facilitators and documented in shareable resources for parents and educators to use on their own. All of the new mediation and facilitation resources were added to the SPARC website.

### Marketing

Various improvements were made to SPARC's marketing materials with the help of the Exceptional Children Resources workgroup. During the past year, SPARC staff:

- Updated SPARC's web pages that are housed on the University of Delaware's website.
- Updated our brochure that encompasses mediation and IEP meeting facilitation services.
- Translated and printed the brochure in Haitian Creole.
- Created new resources for leading and participating in virtual IEP meetings and posted them to the SPARC website.



# Appendix A

---

## 2019–2020 Mediation Evaluation Results

Responses = 8

### 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	1	7	0
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>No Response</i>

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

0	0	0	1	7	0
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>No Response</i>

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

0	0	0	1	7	0
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>No Response</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	1	7
<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	1	3	5
<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	1	7
<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.

<b>1</b>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>
<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.

<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>
<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.

<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<b>2</b>	<b>6</b>
<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.

<b>2</b>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>
<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.

<b>1</b>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>
<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.

<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<i>0</i>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>
<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.

<i>No - 0</i>	<i>Maybe - 0</i>	<i>Yes - 8</i>
---------------	------------------	----------------

**Additional comments or suggestions.**

- *Thank you!! ☺*
- *Thanks for your help!*
- *SPARC Team was very professional.*
- *Thank you so much. It was a very positive and productive meeting!*

I participated in this mediation as a representative of:

1 Parent/Student Concerns                      7 District/Agency Concerns

# Appendix B

## 2019–2020 Facilitated IEP Meeting Feedback Form

### Pre-Meeting Communication with CRP Staff

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

*Not at all                      A Little                      Somewhat                      Satisfied                      Very Satisfied*

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

*Not at all                      A Little                      Somewhat                      Satisfied                      Very Satisfied*

**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?**

*Not at all                      A Little                      Somewhat                      Satisfied                      Very Satisfied*

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

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.**

*Not at all      A Little      Somewhat      True      Very True*

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

*Not at all      A Little      Somewhat      True      Very True*

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

*Not at all      A Little      Somewhat      True      Very True*

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

*No                      Maybe                      Yes*

**Additional comments or suggestions:**

**I participated in this meeting as a representative of:**

\_\_\_\_\_ Parent/Student Concerns      \_\_\_\_\_ District/School Concerns

**Meeting Date:** \_\_\_\_\_