

State of Delaware

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

2024–2025



December 2025

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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, 2024, through June 30, 2025, by the staff of 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 and encourage positive relationships between schools and families.

SPARC is a multifaceted direct-service program that provides the following: (1) The management and implementation of special education mediation services for families and local education agencies (LEAs) who want to resolve differences regarding the education of students with disabilities. (2) The management and delivery of Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team meeting facilitation services to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of IEP Team meetings. (3) Program administrative responsibilities including program evaluation and data collection; outreach and marketing; on-call support; professional development; and meetings with DDOE personnel.

This report provides an overview of work conducted this year. It includes detailed case information to assist DDOE with federally mandated reporting and more general program data to evaluate the effectiveness of the SPARC program.

SPARC has served Delaware families, students, and educators for nearly

30
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 2024–2025 reporting year, SPARC processed 73 cases. SPARC offered parties mediation after filing a state complaint, requesting a due process hearing, 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. Twenty-five out of 26 respondents said that they would utilize SPARC again.

In addition, there were 20 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, Parent Information Center of Delaware, Inc. (PIC), and/or Autism Delaware.

During this reporting year, SPARC received five requests to facilitate an IEP Team meeting. SPARC staff facilitated four IEP Team meetings. SPARC distributed an IEP Team Meeting Facilitation Feedback Form to all participants following the meeting to better understand the Team members’ experience with the facilitation process.

SPARC Overview

Background

Through a collaborative partnership, the Conflict Resolution Program (CRP) and the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE), created the Special Education Partnership for the Amicable Resolution of Conflict (SPARC) program in 1996. 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 for families and schools.

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, Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team meeting facilitation, and program administrative responsibilities. 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 service 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 participants reach in mediation 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 and 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.

Program Administrative Responsibilities

Outside of mediations and facilitations, SPARC staff actively conduct program administrative responsibilities including program evaluation and data collection; outreach and marketing; on-call support; professional development; and meetings with DDOE personnel.

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, SPARC staff support all parties to work together in the best interest of the student. SPARC staff are committed to providing confidential and impartial dispute resolution services to those in need. SPARC staff are experienced 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 specific 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 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 Feedback Form, 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 to 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 2024–2025 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.

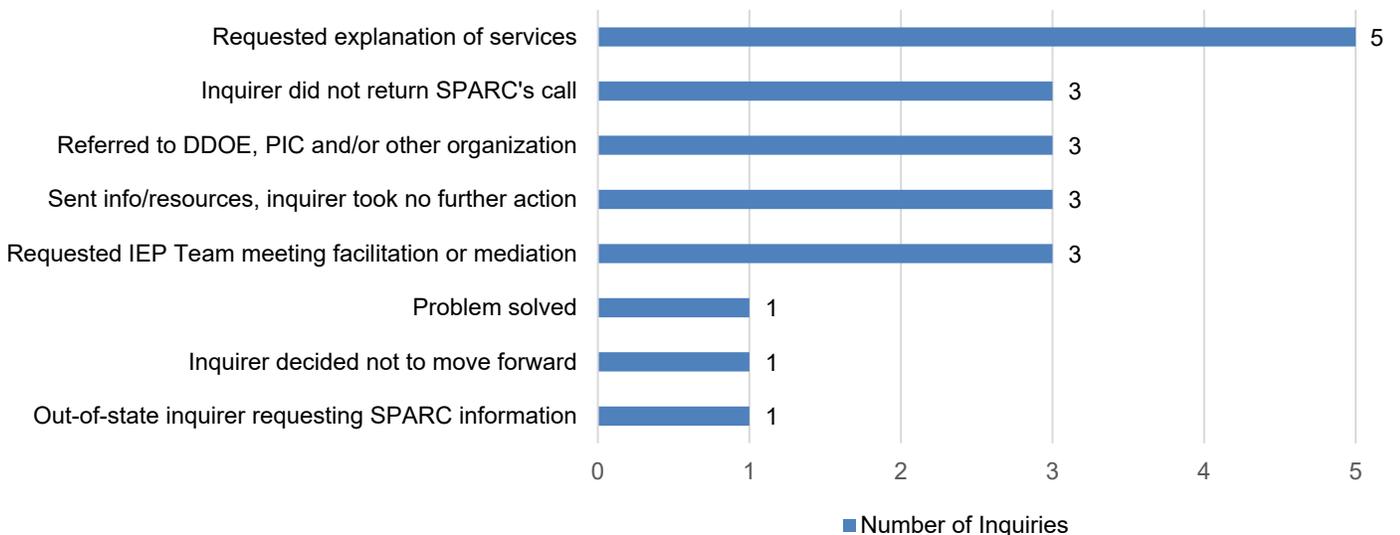
SPARC Inquiries

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, SPARC 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. SPARC 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, 2024, and June 30, 2025, SPARC received 20 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 requested an explanation of SPARC services (5); inquirer requests IEP Team meeting facilitation or mediation services (3); inquirer was provided information/resources and took no further action (3); inquirer referred to DDOE or PIC (3); inquirer did not return SPARC’s call (3); inquirer out of state requesting SPARC information (1); inquirer decided not to move forward (1); and inquirer said problem was solved or being solved (1). The results of the 20 inquiries are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. 2024–2025 Inquiry Outcomes by Type



SPARC Mediation Cases

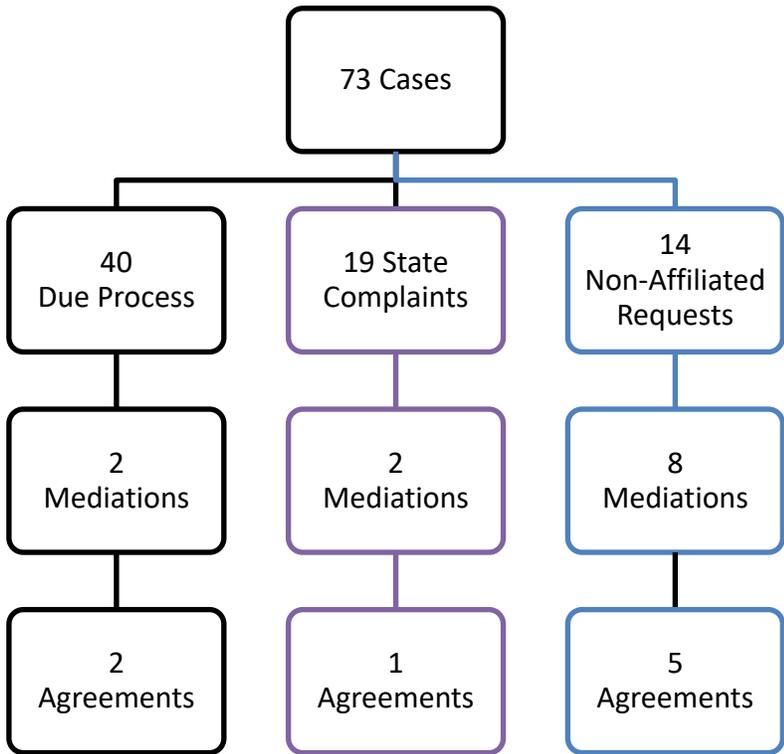
Overview of Mediation Cases

During the reporting year from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025, SPARC staff processed 73 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 2024–2025 reporting year, 12 of the 73 cases that were processed by SPARC participated in mediation. The following chart displays the overall distribution of SPARC cases by type, mediations held, and agreements reached. SPARC processed five Adult and Prison Education Resources (APER) work group cases. Since the report’s primary focus is cases affiliated with local education agencies (LEAs), APER cases are not always included in the figures and tables found throughout this report.

Figure 2. 2024–2025 Mediation Cases by Type



Note: Figure 2 counts every mediation case that was received by the SPARC program. In some instances, cases were later combined due to the circumstances. Table 7 (Figure F) provides consolidated figures.

Local Education Agencies

SPARC received 73 cases this year. Sixty-one involved school districts, eight involved charter schools, and five involved REDACTED. The districts with the most cases were REDACTED (12), REDACTED (8) 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. 2024–2025 SPARC Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	61	8	4
REDACTED	6	0	0
REDACTED	8	1	1
REDACTED	5	0	0
REDACTED	6	0	0
REDACTED	7	2	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	12	3	2
REDACTED	5	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	4	2	1
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	4	0	0
Charter School	8	4	4
REDACTED	3	1	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	1	1
REDACTED	2	2	2
Grand Total	69*	12	8

*Note: One case involved two districts; therefore, the grand total is shown as 69 because the case is counted for both participating districts. Table A does not include the five REDACTED (REDACTED) cases because it is not a LEA.

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” (21). Table B illustrates the primary issues reported.

Table B. 2024–2025 SPARC Cases by Primary Issue

Primary Issue Reported	Cases
A. Evaluation for Special Education Services	10
B. Eligibility for Special Education Services	3
C. Student Educational Program (e.g., academic, functional, and life skills) as Set Forth in the IEP	21
D. Educational Placement	16
E. Discipline (including suspension or expulsion)	4
F. Procedural Safeguards (prior written notice)	4
G. Related Services (OT, PT, SLP, transportation)	1
H. Tuition Reimbursement (e.g., private school)	1
I. Other Includes:	13
Request for school records (3)	
Compensatory education (1)	
District wants parent to sign FBA (1)	
Breach of federal and state confidentiality (1)	
Request for safety plan (1)	
Alleged physical, sexual, and mental abuse (4)	
Exclusion from extracurricular activity (1)	
Bullying (1)	
Grand Total	73

Mediations

This year, SPARC mediated 12 cases: eight with school districts and four with charter schools. The most common issues mediated were the student educational program as set forth in the IEP and educational placement.

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 2 hours with individual sessions ranging from 45 minutes to 210 minutes. 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 40 due process cases, five of which were REDACTED cases. The most frequently cited issues in due process cases were educational placement (8) and evaluation for special education services (7). Two due process complaint cases participated in mediation, and two reached agreements.

This year there were 32 cases associated with a school district and three associated with a charter school. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table C below.

Table C. 2024–2025 Due Process Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	32	1	1
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	5	0	0
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	3	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	4	1	1
REDACTED	4	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	4	0	0
Charter School	3	1	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	1	1
Grand Total	35	2	2

Note: Table C does not include the five REDACTED cases because it is not an LEA. Table C includes an amended case, and two cases processed individually and then combined and processed as one case.

State Complaint Cases

During this reporting year, SPARC processed 19 state complaint cases: 17 state complaint cases associated with school districts, and two associated with charter schools. The most frequently cited issue in state complaint cases was student educational program as set forth in the IEP (9). Two state complaint cases went to mediation, and one reached an agreement. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table D.

Table D. 2024–2025 State Complaint Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	17	2	1
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	4	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
REDACTED	5	1	0
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	1	1
Charter School	2	0	0
REDACTED	2	0	0
Grand Total	19	2	1

Note: Table D includes one state complaint processed individually and as a corrective action case.

Non-Affiliated Mediation Request Cases

During this reporting year, SPARC processed 14 non-affiliated request (NAR) cases. Twelve were associated with school districts and three with charter schools. The most frequently cited issue in NAR cases was educational placement (4). Eight cases participated in mediation, and five reached an agreement. The distribution of these cases is illustrated in Table E below.

Table E. 2024–2025 Non-Affiliated Requests Cases by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Cases	Mediations	Agreements
School District	12	5	2
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	3	1	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	2	1	0
REDACTED	3	2	1
REDACTED	1	0	0
REDACTED	1	1	0
Charter School	3	3	3
REDACTED	1	1	1
REDACTED	1	1	1
REDACTED	1	1	1
Grand Total	15*	8	5

*Note: In Table E, two districts participated in one case. Therefore, the grand total of cases is shown as 15 because the case is counted for both participating districts.

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, 2024, and June 30, 2025.

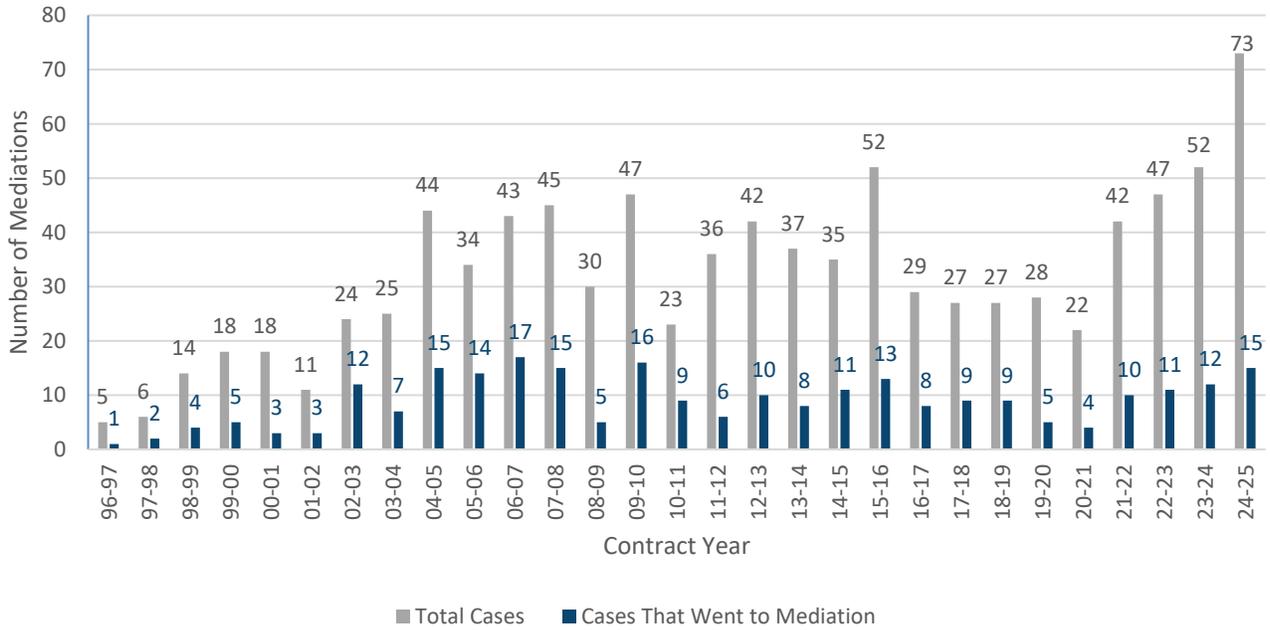
Table F. 2024–2025 IDEA Part B Data Collections

SECTION A: Written, Signed Complaints	
(1) Total number of written, signed complaints filed	18
SECTION B: Mediation Requests	
(2) Total number of mediation requests received through all dispute resolution processes	29
(2.1) Mediations held	12
(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	9
(i) Mediation agreements not related to due process complaints	6
(2.2) Mediations pending	5
(2.3) Mediations withdrawn or not held	12
SECTION C: Due Process Complaints	
(3) Total number of due process complaints filed	37

SPARC Mediation Caseload Over Time

Between 1996 and 2025, SPARC processed over 900 cases and performed 259 mediations. Over the past ten reporting years, SPARC has processed an average of 40 cases per year ranging from 22 to 73 cases per year. The total number of NAR, SC, and DP cases processed each year beginning with 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 (169) and has performed the most mediations with Christina School District (50). A full list of districts and case information is provided in Table G below.

Table G. 1996–2025 SPARC Cases by County, School District, and Charter

County and Districts	Cases	Mediations	Mediation Rate
New Castle	537	148	28%
Appoquinimink	90	17	19%
Brandywine	92	23	25%
Christina	169	50	30%
Colonial	63	11	18%
NCC Vo-Tech	11	2	18%
Red Clay Consolidated	112	45	40%
Sussex	144	44	31%
Cape Henlopen	48	16	33%
Delmar	8	2	25%
Indian River	39	13	33%
Laurel	23	6	23%
Seaford	20	5	25%
Sussex County Vo-Tech	6	2	33%
Kent	109	22	20%
Caesar Rodney	39	16	41%
Capital	37	1	25%
Lake Forest	27	5	19%
Polytech	3	0	0%
Bridge Counties	45	12	27%
Milford	10	3	30%
Smyrna	30	8	27%
Woodbridge	5	1	20%
Charter Schools¹	105	21	20%
Total²	940	247	26%

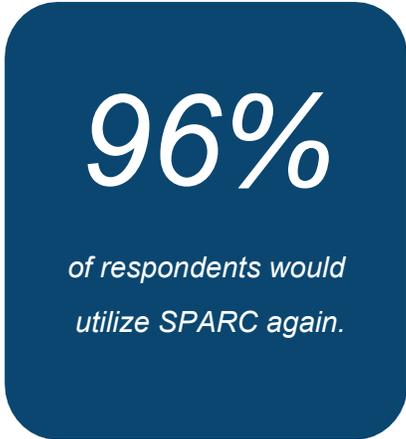
1. Charter School collection began in 2002.

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 cases with the Department of Services for Children, Youth & Their Families.

SPARC Mediation Feedback

SPARC solicits feedback from all mediation participants 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 feedback form also offers a space for respondents to provide more detailed comments associated with their ratings or comment on topics not directly addressed. Participants complete the feedback form online.

During the 2024–2025 reporting year, SPARC received 26 responses. Based on the responses, SPARC staff received high ratings for their communication with parties, the mediation process, and the outcomes. The majority of 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. An overwhelming majority felt that the mediator facilitated an inclusive environment where all parties felt welcome. One hundred percent of those surveyed said the mediator thoroughly explained the role and responsibilities of both the mediator and the participants relative to the mediation process. Ninety-six percent would utilize SPARC again.



Full details of the 2024–2025 Summary of Mediation Feedback Form Results can be found in Appendix A.

SPARC Facilitated IEP Team Meetings

Facilitated IEP Team Meetings

This year, there were five requests for SPARC IEP Team meeting facilitation: four associated with school districts and one associated with a charter school. Four of these requests resulted in a facilitated IEP Team meeting. The average amount of time spent on an IEP Team meeting per case was 2 hours and 7 minutes, with a range of 75 minutes to 120 minutes. Table H below displays the facilitated IEP Team meetings by local education agency.

Table H. 2024–2025 Facilitated IEP Team Meetings by Local Education Agency

Local Education Agency	Meetings
School District	4
REDACTED	1
Charter School	1
REDACTED	1
Grand Total	5

Reported Issues

SPARC categorized the primary issue(s) for each inquiry to identify trends. The most cited issues for facilitated IEP Team meetings were concerns about the student education program as set forth in the IEP followed by educational placement. Table I summarizes the primary issues reported for this year.

Table I. 2024–2025 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	3
Educational Placement	1
Other	1
Grand Total	5

Facilitated IEP Team Meetings Over Time

Between 2000 and 2025, SPARC has facilitated 267 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.

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 (47). A full list of districts and charter schools, and the number of facilitated IEP Team-meeting cases in each LEA is provided in Table J below.

Table J. 2000–2025 Facilitated IEP Team Meetings by County, School District, and Charter

County and Districts	Facilitated IEP Team Meetings
New Castle	129
Appoquinimink	22
Brandywine	15
Christina	47
Colonial	23
Red Clay Consolidated	25
Sussex	59
Cape Henlopen	27
Delmar	3
Indian River	20
Laurel	2
Seaford	3
Sussex County Vo-Tech	4
Kent	36
Caesar Rodney	18

County and Districts	Facilitated IEP Team Meetings
Capital	6
Lake Forest	11
Polytech	2
Bridge Counties	22
Milford	15
Smyrna	7
Charter Schools	31
Grand Total	277

Facilitated IEP Team Meeting Feedback

An IEP Team Meeting Facilitation Feedback Form is distributed to participants after the meeting to help understand the Team members' experiences with the facilitation process. Team members are asked to complete the form 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.

Professional Development for Mediators

SPARC mediators are required to participate in twelve hours of professional development, annually, in mediation and/or special education law. Below is a list of professional development activities for the 2024–2025 project year.

Mediating in a Polarized Context

Kathy Murphy attended a webinar on Mediating in a Polarize Context, presented by The Greater Philadelphia Chapter of the Association for Conflict Resolution. This dynamic one-hour workshop was designed for mediators navigating today's most entrenched conflicts.

Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR) Virtual Conference

Kathy Murphy attended ACR's 25th Anniversary Virtual Conference, which brought together professionals, scholars, and changemakers to inform and inspire conflict resolution practitioners. Kathy attended the following sessions: Planting Seeds of Peace: Empowering Future Generations Through Conflict Resolution Education; Navigating Uncertainty; Coaching Leaders & Teams; Making the Collective More Effective: Building Successful Collaboratives; and Political Conflicts, Dialogue and the Evolution of Democracy: What Mediators Can Do.

Building Bridges to Conflict Competence, Mediation Training Institute (MTI)

This one-hour webinar was an MTI Conflict Resolution Conference session. Joy Jordan attend the training on using data and case studies to develop competent, constructive conflict management. This session was presented by Mary Lou O'Kennedy, a professional mediator and master trainer.

Managing Conflict Styles and Triggers in Coaching Engagements, MTI

Delivered by Dr. Holly Thompson, Senior Faculty and Executive Coach, this webinar was a Mediation Training Institute (MTI) Conflict Resolution conference session. Joy Jordan attend this one-hour session on experiencing your clients conflict styles and how to manage conversations when you are triggered.

The Five Disciplines for Team Cohesion, MTI

Kathy Murphy and Joy Jordan attended this webinar during the MTI Conflict Resolution Conference. This was a one-hour webinar presented by Brenda Hopper and designed to help leaders and teams communicate with clarity, engage with purpose, and work together more effectively.

Better Conversations, Smarter Solutions: Using Technology in Workplace Mediation

Kathy Murphy and Joy Jordan attended this one-hour webinar that explored how technology can support mediators in producing greater and measurable results.

Reframing the Art of the Deal: The Neuroscience of Both-Gain Mediation, MTI

Kathy Murphy and Joy Jordan attended this one-hour webinar by Dr. Debra Dupree, an expert on the neuroscience behind mindset, explores how mediators can move beyond coercion and compromise to create transformative ‘both-gain’ outcomes—where all parties walk away with dignity, clarity, and forward momentum.

Supporting Interpreters at IEP Meetings: Improving Family Participation, CADRE

Sarah Marshall attended this one-hour webinar hosted by CADRE. Presenters from the PACER Center in Minnesota and the Massachusetts Department of Education discussed their interpreter support programs, resources, and training opportunities. Resources included the Checklist for School Staff: Working Effectively with an Interpreter in a Special Education Meeting to Support Parent Participation.

Building Capacity at the Local Level with Teams from Arizona and Colorado, CADRE

Joy Jordan and Sarah Marshall attended this one-hour webinar hosted by CADRE. Dispute resolution program managers from the two states shared current practices to build IEP Team meeting facilitation skills at the local level.

LRP’s National Institute on Legal Issues of Educating Individuals with Disabilities in Phoenix, Arizona

Sarah Marshall attended a variety of sessions including a review of the year’s impactful judicial and administrative decisions in special education; an in-depth exploration of the present levels of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAFP) section of the IEP; the requirements and components of prior written noted (PWN); how educators can respond to aggressive methods in a balance, but assertive manner to ensure compliance with IDEA requirements; and the key procedural requirements and differences between state complaints and due process hearings.

Breaking Down Bullying, ACR

Sarah Marshall attended the ACR webinar titled “Breaking Down Bullying: Empowering Tools to Address ‘Bully’ Behaviors” with Bryan Hanson and Dan Berstein. The speakers introduced a “Bullying Breakdown” template designed to help conflict resolvers analyze the behaviors and boundaries for all stakeholders involved in bullying complaints.

Accessible Emails Webinar

Joy Jordan attend this virtual session, designed by the University of Delaware, on best practices for creating accessible emails. The course followed inclusive design principles which ensure that individuals with disabilities or individuals using assistive technology can read, understand and interact with a sender’s email. This was a one-hour training.

Disability Awareness Etiquette Webinar

Joy Jordan attended this one-hour training, developed by the University of Delaware, on using respectful behavior and “people first” language when interacting with individuals with disabilities.

Building Trust, Breaking Blame, and Healing Shame: Conflict Coaching Conversations for Constructive Futures, CADRE

Kathy Murphy attended this 1.5-hour webinar that focused on conflict coaching conversations anyone can use in any conversation to avoid mistrust, blame, and shame.

Professional Development for Panel Members, Investigators, Mediators, and LEAs

Joy Jordan completed the training presented virtually by Perry A. Zirkel, JD, Ph.D. This 3-hour training focused on recent national updates to case law under IDEA.

Recapping Significant 2024 IDEA Legal Decisions, CADRE

Sarah Marshall attended the CADRE webinar presented virtually by Art Cernosia. The 1.5-hour session focused on the implications of new federal policy and judicial decisions.

Part 1: Building a Foundational Comparative Understanding of IDEA and Section 504

Kathy Murphy and Joy Jordan attended Dr. Perry Zirkel's virtual two-hour webinar.

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.

Equity Summit

Joy Jordan and Kathy Murphy presented at the Delaware Department of Education’s Annual Professional Development Day for school staff, administrators, teachers, community leaders, and parents on September 10, 2024. The presentation focused on how SPARC mediators and facilitators, working with educators, continuously foster equity in their process by acknowledging and developing cultural competency and communication skills. The workshop was conducted three times to a total audience of 600 people.

“SPARCing” Conversations Training

Joy Jordan and Sarah Marshall provided the Delaware Department of Education due process panel members and state complaint investigators with a two-hour training on the practical conflict resolution strategies they use in “SPARCing” meaningful conversations between educators and families. Workshop participants practiced conflict resolution skills such as active listening, self-awareness, and managing expectations.

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.

SPARC and DDOE staff met periodically throughout the year to discuss data collection for SPARC, Table 7, and the new Trends Report.

SPARC staff attended DDOE Leadership meetings, throughout the 2024–2025 fiscal year, to share information and handouts on the SPARC program.

Data Collection for IDEA Part B Dispute Resolution Survey (Table 7)

SPARC staff collect information regarding all cases, mediations and facilitations conducted, and inquiries received. SPARC and DDOE staff met periodically throughout the year to discuss data collection for SPARC, Table 7 submission to the U.S. Department of Education, and the new Trends Report. SPARC staff also met with DDOE staff members periodically to review the information being tracked and assess the effectiveness of the tracking sheet. CRP will continue to collaborate with DDOE to ensure valid and reliable data collection and reporting.

Marketing

SPARC staff continued to maintain and update the SPARC webpages housed on the University of Delaware’s website. We also reprinted the SPARC brochure in English and Spanish. SPARC staff distributed brochures to parents and educators during in-person mediation sessions and facilitated IEP meetings. We also distributed the brochures at the DDOE Leadership meeting. SPARC staff updated the flyer for the Schoology training videos to include new PMDs course numbers.

Video Training Series

During the 2022–2023 contract year, 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 uploaded to Schoology where educators can register and participate in the courses throughout the year. DDOE and SPARC collaborated on a flyer to market the workshops to educators in Delaware. The courses and participation data are displayed in Table K.

Table K. 2024–2025 Video Participation Data

Course	Registered for Course	Completed Course	Completed Pre-Test	Pre-Test Average Score	Completed Post-Test	Post-Test Average Score
1. Effective Conflict Management Strategies (PDMS# 31708)	220	179	188	2.48/5 49.68%	179	3.13/5 62.66%
2. Communication Skills for Managing Conflict (PDMS# 31709)	220	182	163	2.72/5 54.35%	163	2.89/5 57.79%
3. Planning and Leading Effective IEP Team Meetings (PDMS# 31710)	220	186	131	2.83/5 56.5%	112	3.07/5 61.30%
4. The Role of an IEP Team Meeting Facilitator (PDMS# 31711)	220	186	92	2.74/5 54.78%	92	3.56/5 71.14%
5. Cultural Competency and Diversity (PDMS# 31712)	220	175	118	3.53/5 70.51%	138	4.2/5 84.00%
6. Building Consensus in IEP Team Meetings (PDMS# 31713)	142	114	117	3.68/5 73.5%	114	4.03/5 80.53%

Figure 5. Training Flyer



Video Training Series

Tips for Effective IEP Team Meetings

Attend these pre-recorded workshops in Schoology to earn PDMS credit. Participate individually or with a team. In 30-minutes or less, learn skills for engaging parents, families, and school staff in the IEP team meeting process.

1 Effective Conflict Management Strategies

- Perspectives and sources of conflict
- Five styles for dealing with conflict

Register for PDMS Course 31708 Section 86334.

2 Communication Skills for Managing Conflict

- Active listening
- Assertive speaking
- Managing emotions

Register for PDMS Course 31709 Section 86335.

3 Planning and Leading Effective IEP Team Meetings

- Engaging team members in meeting roles
- Best practices for running meetings

Register for PDMS Course 31710 Section 86336.

4 The Role of an IEP Team Meeting Facilitator

- Fostering engagement and collaboration
- Dealing with difficult dynamics

Register for PDMS Course 31711 Section 86337.

5 Cultural Competency and Diversity

- How cultural beliefs and attitudes impact parent and IEP team interactions
- Recognizing the 5 stages of cultural competence

Register for PDMS Course 31712 Section 86338.

6 Building Consensus in IEP Team Meetings

- Solving problems collaboratively
- Listening to understand
- Asking open-ended questions

Register for PDMS Course 31713 Section 86339.

Registration and Department of Education Contact:
 Maria N. Locuniak, Ph.D., NCSP
 302-735-4210 | maria.locuniak@doe.k12.de.us

Training Contact:
 UD Conflict Resolution Program
 sparc-info@udel.edu | www.ipa.udel.edu/crp

Housed in the Institute for Public Administration (IPA) at the University of Delaware, the Conflict Resolution Program (CRP) is a resource dedicated to supporting transformational and organizational change in nonprofit, public, government, and educational settings. The CRP team teaches and promotes effective communication, collaborative problem-solving, and conflict resolution.



Appendix A: 2024–2025 Mediation Feedback Form Results

Responses = 26

Note: Some respondents did not answer all the questions on the feedback form.

Pre-Mediation Communication with SPARC Staff

1. Prior to mediation, the SPARC staff member listened to your concerns and answered your questions about the mediation process. (n = 24)

0	0	0	5	19
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

2. The mediator thoroughly explained the role and responsibilities of both the mediator and the participants relative to the mediation process. (n = 26)

0	0	0	3	23
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

3. The mediator worked with all participants to schedule a mediation date, time, and location that satisfied all parties. (n = 25)

1	0	0	3	21
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

The Mediator and Mediation Process

4. The mediator promoted listening and understanding among the participants. (n = 26)

1	0	1	2	22
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

5. The mediator helped clarify and prioritize all concerns. (n = 26)

1	0	0	5	20
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

6. The mediator encouraged participants to offer their own solutions and to determine the outcome of the mediation. (n = 26)

1	0	2	4	19
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

7. The mediator was fair and unbiased throughout the mediation. (n = 26)

1	0	0	2	23
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

8. The mediator drafted an agreement that was written in the participants' own words. (n = 22)

1	0	0	3	18
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

9. The mediator facilitated an inclusive environment where all parties felt welcome. (n = 26)

1	0	0	3	22
<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. (n = 25)

3	0	2	5	15
<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A Little</i>	<i>Somewhat</i>	<i>True</i>	<i>Very True</i>

11. Based on this experience, would you utilize SPARC again? (n = 26)

1	25
<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>

12. How did you learn about SPARC mediation services? (n = 26)

13	2	6	2	1	2
<i>Other</i>	<i>SPARC Website</i>	<i>DOE Website</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Brochure</i>	<i>Word of Mouth</i>

Other Responses:

- Alternate to Due Process
- Director's Meeting
- Due Process
- Have been using
- I was asked to participate
- Parent complaint
- Parent requested mediation
- PBHS
- Referred by the DOE
- State Compliant option to resolve
- Through due process submission

Additional comments or suggestions.

Feedback from families, schools and school districts was very positive. Participants found SPARC and the mediation process very helpful. In addition, participants appreciated SPARC's neutral perspective, kindness, and professionalism.

Recommendations for improving the mediation process included expanding the scope of what mediation agreements will cover, and ensuring both parties are willing to compromise, listen and not interrupt.

Appendix B: 2024–2025 Facilitated IEP Meeting Feedback Form

Responses = 9

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?

1 0 0 2 6
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?

0 1 0 1 7
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?

1 0 0 2 6
Not at all A Little Somewhat True Very True

The Facilitator...	Not True	A Little	Some-What	True	Very True
Was helpful in the meeting.	1	0	0	3	5
Promoted listening and understanding among team members.	0	0	1	2	6
Was fair and unbiased throughout the meeting.	0	0	0	2	7
Heard and understood my concerns.	0	1	0	1	7
Helped clarify and prioritize all concerns.	1	0	0	2	6
Kept the group focused and kept the meeting moving forward.	1	0	0	3	5

Please circle the response that best represents your experience.

IEP Team Meeting Facilitation Outcome

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

1	0	0	5	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. (n = 8)

1	0	1	3	3
<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	0	0	2	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	0	8
<i>No</i>	<i>Maybe</i>	<i>Yes</i>

Additional comments or suggestions:

None

I participated in this meeting as a representative of:

(2) Parent/Student Concerns (7) District/School Concerns