



News Release

Contact: Martin Ackley, Director of Public and Governmental Affairs, 517 241-4395
Bill DiSessa, Spokesperson, 517 335-6649

NEW MEDIATION ASSISTANCE HOT LINE TO PROVIDE IMPROVED RESOLUTION TO SPECIAL EDUCATION DISPUTES

December 15, 2017

LANSING – The Michigan Special Education Mediation Program (MSEMP) has a new toll-free, statewide phone number: 833-KIDS1ST or 833-543-7178.

The new number will connect callers to a new Intake Coordinator at the Michigan Department of Education. MSEMP's new intake coordinator will conduct intake on requests for mediation, or facilitated special education meetings, and provide information about the dispute resolution options available to the Michigan special education community.

1-833-KIDS1ST will replace the MSEMP's previous number, 1-800-8RESOLVE, which routed callers to their local Community Dispute Resolution Program Center. Now, callers requesting assistance are directed to MDE's new Intake Coordinator, Laura Zangara.

Zangara brings 20 years of experience with Chicago Public Schools as a special education attorney and hearing officer. She worked with all stakeholders in special education, including parents, to encourage problem-solving before hearings and investigations became necessary. Zangara is a trained mediator and supports the mediation and facilitation processes.

The Community Dispute Resolution Program Centers will continue to provide local mediation and facilitation services with MSEMP-approved mediators and facilitators. They also will provide presentations about the MSEMP program and workshops in collaborative communication and conflict resolution skills for special education meetings.

The new 1-833-KIDS1ST number represents a statewide effort to improve services undertaken by the MSEMP program and the Michigan Department of Education's Office of Special Education. Focusing intake in the MSEMP's Lansing office will help the program provide timely and consistent dispute resolution information to all callers.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that state and local education agencies make mediation available as a dispute resolution option. Mediation differs from the complaint options under the IDEA. It focuses on generating solutions to the issues in dispute. A parent and school representatives, for example, might disagree over services for a student with a motor skills problem. They meet with a neutral mediator who aids communication between them. If they agree on a solution, they sign a written, binding agreement that is enforceable in court.

Mediation under the IDEA is voluntary. Neither a school nor a parent can compel the other to mediate. If they both agree to mediate, no one has the authority to prevent them from doing so. Requesting a facilitator for an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or resolution meeting operates the same way.

Mediation is designed for parents and school personnel to express their views and negotiate solutions to benefit students with disabilities. Lawyers and advocates for either side may participate in mediation sessions. They are most effective in supporting roles, helping the parties collaboratively identify ways to meet student needs.

Launched in 1997, the MSEMP program has an average mediation agreement rate of nearly 80 percent.

###