

## Q and A Statewide AEA Mediation Process

### Question #1. What does having a statewide AEA Mediation system mean?

AEA mediation is a statewide mediation and conflict resolution process available through each of Iowa's 9 intermediate agencies (area education agencies). Each AEA has a designated person (or persons) known as the AEA Mediation Coordinator. The major goal of the AEA mediation is to have an option available to help resolve differences at the earliest possible time. Another goal is to have individuals receive mediation training so that individuals will enhance their skills to address differences and meaningfully resolve conflicts in a collaborative manner.

### Question #2. What type of circumstances may involve the use of an AEA Mediator?

The conflict or concerns may involve general education, Section 504, special education, Early ACCESS, or any school-related issue. The conflict may be between educators and parents, educators and educators, or any other employee hired by the district or AEA.

There are several reasons a Mediator may be involved:

- To explore the dispute resolution options, including *AEA mediation*, due to a conflict.
- To act as an IEP Facilitator at an *IEP meeting* if there is potential for an adversarial meeting;
- To facilitate a "resolution meeting" to resolve issues following a parent filing of a due process hearing notice to the district and AEA; or
- To assist at *any other type of meeting* to serve as a facilitator when conflict may be anticipated.
- Other

### Question #3. How does someone request a Mediator?

Step One. Contact the designated AEA Mediation Coordinator.

Step Two. Inform the Coordinator reason this is desired (from Question #2 above).

Step Three. The Coordinator will determine whether the request can be approved and act accordingly. Use of mediation will be at the discretion of the parties involved.

### Question #4. What if the AEA does not have a Mediator available?

If the AEA Mediation Coordinator does not have a Mediator available or the Coordinator believes the conflict is of a magnitude greater than the AEA is willing to attempt to resolve, the Coordinator should contact the Iowa Department of Education Consultant assigned to State Mediators for assistance. The State of Iowa has agreed to use its state mediators when the Coordinator seeks assistance from the State.

**Question #5. Other than the trainings that are available to assist with mediation skills are there other technical assistance opportunities to help the AEA Mediators refine and enhance their skills?**

Yes, the Iowa Department will provide mentoring and coaching for the AEA Mediators for any of the four reasons listed above in the answer to Question #2. For more information contact the Iowa Department of Education Consultant assigned to State Mediators at the Iowa Department of Education.

**Question #6. What type of training have the AEA Mediators received?**

This cadre is made up of people who have successfully completed both Introductory and Advanced Mediation training.

**Question #7. What happens if a party considering using mediation does not perceive the AEA mediator can be impartial?**

The party should indicate to the AEA Coordinator that he/she would participate in the process if the Mediator was not from the resident AEA. The coordinator could contact an AEA that is willing to participate in an exchange system or the Coordinator could contact the Iowa Department of Education Consultant assigned to State Mediators for consideration of a state level mediator. In addition, the coordinator could also review other mediation options that could be used if the issue involves special education.

**Question #8: How are costs handled for exchange programs, using AEA mediation?**

The service is exchanged without cost, although the agency using the service may reimburse the sending AEA expenses such as mileage, meals, and motel. When the State mediators are used, the State will cover the costs.

**Question #9: How do people know the process is available?**

Each AEA is responsible for promoting and disseminating information about AEA mediation, such as disseminating brochures or including the information on district and AEA website. The State is also instrumental in promoting its use.

**Question #10: Since mediation is used by the entire AEA and is not just for special education issues, how do other AEA divisions promote it?**

Each AEA Special Education Director has spoken before his/her administrative group. Someone from the AEA may also want to speak at one of the AEA monthly superintendent meetings. Other ways to promote this service could include: (1) through school counselor contacts, (2) through AEA newsletters and publications (3) through information specialists at the AEA and (4) at the principal meetings.

**Question #11: What training is available statewide for resolving conflict?**

- **RESPECT in the IEP Process:** Recognizing Everyone's Strengths by Peacebuilding, Empathizing, Communicating and Trust building. The goals of the course are to teach IEP team members how to honor and resolve differences that arise among families and educators and how to think and act like facilitators/coaches in IEP meetings even though that may not be their formal role. (4 days spread over 9 - 12 weeks to allow participants to practice new skills and concepts between training sessions).
- **Introductory Mediation** (4 days)
- **Advanced Mediation** (4 days)
- **Refresher courses** for those who have completed any of the above (typically, one day)