

>> Welcome to our Voices from the Field series, focusing on the state Department of Education and Parent Center partnership. I'm Melanie Reese, and the director of CADRE, and with me is Noella Bernal.

>> Hi, I'm Noella Bernal, associate director and internal evaluator of CADRE.

>> Thank you for joining us for another in our Voices from the Field series. CADRE has been long committed to promoting and fostering productive relationships between state agencies and parent centers, including work we've done with past intensive TA workgroups in the area. Additionally, we've held webinars to showcase promising partnership activities, posted presentations at our national symposia, and featured a selection of continuum practices on our website. Our commitment to fostering collaboration is shared by today's guests from the Colorado Department of Education and PEAK Parent Center. Colorado's partnership efforts came to our attention some time ago, and we wanted to invite them to explain how they've weaved collaboration with each other into the fabric of their two organizations. Today we have with us Mary Ann Fleury, alternative dispute resolution specialist from the Colorado Department of Education, and from the PEAK Parent Center, we're joined by their executive director, Michele Williers, and Ann Wilson, ADR Coordinator and RSA transition connector. Welcome to you all, and let's start with some introductions. Could you please tell us a little bit about you, your organization, and maybe a little bit about what brought you to this work? Let's start with Mary Ann.

>> Hi, as Melanie said, I'm Mary Ann Fleury, and I'm the alternative dispute resolution specialist with the Colorado Department of Education. I started this position in 2017 after the Department of Education created an alternative dispute resolution advisory board, previously called early dispute resolution. And we needed somebody to go out, because there was a lot of conflict that was steering parents towards state complaints, causing a lot of contention in the schools. And ultimately, we know that students suffer when people on their teams do not get along. And so, right after I created a proposal to hire facilitators, it was approved the very next day. I was new to the Colorado Department of Education, and I didn't realize how fast things could go through. That's not the case for everything else. However, it showed the passion and the commitment by the Colorado Department of Education to this work, to the prevention of disputes in special education, and to the collaboration and communication between parents and school teams. So, for me personally, I started in the field in 1981 as a teacher, and so I'm not going to go all the way back to there, but just I'll tell you I was a general education teacher for a few years, moved into special education, had my own children throughout those years, four children, became a parent of a child in special education, a twice-exceptional child, and started, then started a non-profit group and was an advocate for about eight years while teaching part time, and then later went back full time into teaching. My last stint in a school district was as a director of special education for seven years in the state of Colorado. This position brought me full circle back to my passion in my career, and that is about the communication and the collaboration, and the connection between parents and educators, as I saw from sitting on all sides of the table how important that was. So, those are my experiences, and I really found that the relationships are critical in this work, first and foremost, above looking at all of the legal processes and procedures. And I think that through our alternative dispute resolution work, we have been able to not only collaborate with PEAK, but also bring all educators in the state to an awareness level that this is really critical. And the work is preventative, and when you focus on the relationships, that's when everything falls into place. So, that's my passion in this work, and I hope that comes through today. And I'm going to turn it over to you, Melanie, to introduce PEAK.

>> Thank you so much, Mary Ann. So, Michele and Ann?

>> So, greetings, everyone. My name is Michele Williers. I am the proud executive director of PEAK parent center. I started out my career early on right out college with the juvenile justice system. And very passionate around youth development. I was initially going to go to law school, but decided that I wanted to work for a few years, and really got a love for families, youth, and figuring out honestly the future of our world, and investing in the youth being our future. Did that for eight years and then moved over to more of a prevention side of thing, to the Big Brothers/Big Sisters Network, where I spent 22 years of my life really focusing on mentoring and relationships, back to Mary Ann's point of the power of relationships, and figuring out how we really took two virtual strangers, put them together, worked with an entire family, and built strong relationships so we had a strong child and family unit that builds them into competent, confident, and caring adults. During all that time in my career, I became a proud parent of an amazing miracle child, young man. My son Beck was born at 23 weeks gestation. He was an identical twin. We sadly lost his brother at birth. But he's now a young man who's 18, and is fully included in his high school here in Colorado. So, what brought me to PEAK with my career, I was in New Jersey at the Big Brothers/Big Sisters branch for 12 years, where I actually started that branch up in 2008. But after 12 years of my life, and I was very happy there, PEAK was my calling. It enabled me to align my personal and professional career, and have the passionate love for still serving youth, but doing something that I've lived and walked, and now continued on fighting for advocacy, inclusion for life parents, and for parents

around the world, really pushing for advocacy and a voice within, to build strong self-advocism through young people. So, I'm really proud to be here, proud of the collaboration working with Colorado Department of Education. Really just talking through things as we emerge as a world and society, and with so many different things. No one anticipated the pandemic, right? We all had to pivot and shift, especially in educational systems. But to have thought partners and strong relationships, and people in your corner. And I'm a firm believer in something that I say, love what you do and love who you do it with. And I couldn't be more proud to be on this journey. I was telling our board last night, I made it to my year anniversary here at PEAK, and get ready to celebrate. We just celebrated our former executive director, who was with-- our founder, she was here for 36 years. I had big shoes to fill. But to be part of something that is so important in people's lives, and doing what I call "God's work" and servant leadership, I couldn't think of a better job. So, thank you for having me here today.

>> Thank you for joining us. And Ann?

>> I'm Ann Wilson, and I'm on the staff of PEAK Parent Center. I kind of divide my time between projects focusing on transition to adulthood as well as the ADR project, and I lead most of our ADR efforts at PEAK. I came to work at PEAK as the parent of a student who was receiving services under an IEP, and my experiences, as well as the experiences that I was hearing about from other parents. And so I thought it was an opportunity to kind of expand my view, with my experiences in special education, as well as I'm really passionate about transition and going out into the world and the community. I don't have a background in education like Mary Ann, other than having been a student for many years, as a parent. But, and so I came in specifically through the parent channel. I don't have that education background. But I do have a background in law. But I work in corporate and securities law. I've drafted many contracts, and I know from that experience that, you know, your contract is there, but you don't really want to have to go rely on your contract. You really hope that people will do what they're supposed to, and it's really the relationship that are what make those transactions successful. So, I think that brings a different one. So, sort of having a law degree, I have found along the years that I've been less focused on the IEP than most parents that don't have an experience in law, which might not be what you expect. But I have always sort of focused on the relationships, and I know the IEP's there and it's important. But working together and communicating throughout the year has really been what's important. So, that's what brings me to this work. And thank you for having us. I, too, am excited to be here, and to meet with you all. And I love the resources that CADRE provides, and we use them a lot when we're providing trainings on this topic.

>> Yeah.

>> Thank you for that, and thank you all so much for being here. We are extraordinarily grateful for your generosity, and your knowledge, and your time. And I'll turn it over to Noella.

>> Thanks, Melanie. We'd like to hear from your perspective as the Colorado Parents Center, and as the Colorado Department of Ed, what do you value about your working relationship with each other? Let's start with PEAK.

>> I really value the opportunity to work with the Colorado Department of Education. And I worked with the Department of Education on the ADR project, and I'm also on some statewide committees that are housed in the Department of Education, so I have the opportunity to work with a handful of people there. And I just value that opportunity to learn from them, from what they're seeing from the educator side, as well as they also receive parent calls, too. So, I enjoy learning from what they're experiencing, and bringing out experiences together to have that broader perspective. And I just think that by working together, we have a more complete picture of what's going on in the state. We do have the challenges, being a local control state, so we also have to work with the districts as well to get the complete picture. And then Michele can add on the higher level.

>> I would say, really keeping it [INAUDIBLE] but I think ties and connects to so many things is the human connection element. I think when, many times, you are dealing with systems, whatever department you are dealing with, you are dealing with systems, a lot of process. And one of the things that I've come to value in the relationship that we've had with the Colorado Department of Education at PEAK has been the value in the human connection and the people. And again, I think it does tie to that relationship piece, but that human connection, we're connected to each other. To hear each other's needs, wants, value systems, and figuring out how we can put those into practice to better serve our families, our school districts, and our community. And I think that that starts at the top, and then will trickle down into, obviously, the local districts, where we also need to, you know, really, we're establishing those relationships and those connectors. So, I think that is one of the things that, once you have that, everything else can fall into place.

>> Mary Ann?

>> All right, so from the Department of Ed side, I feel that it's really critical to connect with PEAK and to collaborate with PEAK, and to build that relationship as we have done, because it keeps us grounded in what is important for families in the state. When we are in the schools, and we're focusing on educating, and we're connecting with other educators and administrators, we have to work really hard at our family-school community partnering activities, and it's

kind of an afterthought in a lot of situations, because we're so focused on what happens during the day in the school that then we have to work extra to do that, rather than have it be second nature. And I think our relationship with PEAK is really a model for the school districts out there to automatically embed parents and families into what you're doing, so that you do address the needs of the families. And we all know that when needs of families are met, needs of students are met. And again, it is that collaboration and that relationship that really benefits all. One of the things that we did in our curriculum is we added a parent input to the IEP form, because many parents were calling CDE saying that they felt that they were not given the opportunity to meaningfully engage in their IEP meetings. And so, in our discussions with PEAK, and what do parents need? And PEAK takes those parent calls on a regular basis, and then shares with us information as to what parents are saying. And then we can tweak what we do with staff and the districts to support that engagement and that connection with families. So, I think that is really critical. Back to that parent input form, parents have now reported that that has helped them so much meaningfully engage in their IEP meetings, because they have a report to share about their student as well. It's not that they are in the meeting, listening to everybody else's reports, and just kind of passively accepting everything that's being said, but they're able to express their concerns, their feelings, the strength of their child in a way as everybody else does. And so that's an example of one of the things that stem from our relationship with PEAK, and the information we learn. One of the other things that we recently started was a coffee chat between our statewide facilitators and the parent advisors at PEAK. And we're going to meet quarterly so that we can hear this information. And we may need to meet more often if there are some things that we need to work through as to how to address the concerns out there. Especially this year. Not really coming out of the pandemic, we're still in it. But with all that's going on, you know, there are so many confusions around terms, and home schooling, and home [INAUDIBLE] and what do I get with this and that? So, our conversations are really important, even more so now than ever. But that's the value in working with PEAK, and I so appreciate both of the ladies in this meeting.

>> Thanks, Mary Ann. It sounds like there's a real open door to hear information and seek feedback and clarification, and get a different perspective from families and parents. We appreciate that. Melanie.

>> All right, thank you. Have-- you addressed a little bit some of the structures or mechanisms that are formal and informal in agencies that you have set up to work together. Mary Ann, you talked a little bit about the formal structure of the advisory board, and the more informal coffee chat, and opportunities to collaborate there. Michele and Ann, could you talk a little bit about what structures or mechanisms that you see that you have in place, of agencies to work together and communicate back and forth?

>> I'll start, and then Ann can also fill in. I think one of the things when I first got to PEAK that I found extraordinary was access to Faye, who is, you know, part of the [INAUDIBLE] team at the Colorado Department of Education, but she oversees a lot of different units and different things. She's a very busy woman, but an amazing woman. And to have that kind of access is not something anyone can take for granted. And when we first met, and it was more of the introduction meeting, you know, getting to know her, I had asked for a monthly calendar with her, but also with the director at that level. And we had an awesome meet and greet meeting. And that became a staple, then, the fourth Friday of every month. And yes, there are times that we absolutely all get so super busy in our roles that we have to cancel or postpone the meeting. But it's a staple on the calendar, it's a recurring. Mary Ann also joins those meetings as well. And I just think to have that ability, and, you know, instead of trying to, like-- it's more of a proactive, also, approach, right? Instead of, like, something's happened, and now we're all in reactive mode, and now we have to get on calendars, and we have to figure out scheduling, which we know is never fun in this business, especially with people in those roles, as opposed to saying, absolutely, this is a staple on the calendar, and it is set up with a regular occurring. I think that ability to have access at that level. The other thing I'm most proud of has been the recent Colorado Department of Education was awarded the federal grant through [INAUDIBLE]. And PEAK had not been, there was one point several years ago, from my understanding, that we were part of the grant. Maybe, Mary Ann, you may remember it. It was like 15 or something years ago. And we've been trying as an organization to get back into that. We had a call early on, and the grant was in the writing proposal stages. And they were just awarded another five years. And PEAK, everything, when I sit in those meetings at the table, and there's a lot of university folks and research folks, and as we all know, the grant requirements are. But PEAK is the parent center at the table, providing that resource. And actually, what we say, filling that gap, right, between the parents and then the education units, which as Mary Ann was highlighting, is so important. So, we're proud of that, and that is actually hot off the press, a recent grant. We've done some webinars. We also are now going to be on the Teacher Academy site, having our [INAUDIBLE] about PEAK. So, new teachers coming in, both gen ed and special education, will have that as a resource. There's quizzes for that. Mary Ann, I know you're familiar with that whole website and portal. But I'm proud to say that PEAK is part of it now as a resource. And a lot of the topics that we cover in our parent trainings and our parent webinars kind of been embedded in that about PEAK, so then it really just spreads the word more in the community. And then the last thing I'll say, and then I'm going to segue

to Ann to talk a little bit more about it, and I feel very blessed that Mary Ann has been so supportive of this, but we were trying to identify, on top of the webinars and the wonderful trainings we're doing, how do we reach more parents? Parents are busy. Sometimes they can't sit through a two-hour. So, we are now investing in our PEAK website, and creating a page for the authentic dispute resolution web page, where there's going to be a last of fast facts, FAQ pop-up stuff. Ann described that, that was kind of honestly her vision, and working with Mary Ann, and Mary Ann being such a blessing to say, go for it, right? Many people would be like, you can't do that. Mary Ann has been the thought partner in it, part of the process, and a believer in what we want to do to really make sure we're reaching the whole state as much as we can, and having access to resources that sometimes webinars, you know, people just can't make. So, I'll segue that to Ann to kind of fill in some of the gaps and information from her perspective.

>> Okay, thanks. And then just thinking about structures and mechanisms, I think, as I mentioned, I think the Department of Education does have a commitment to having PEAK at the table, and multiple committees to represent the parent training information center. For example, our state special education advisory committee does that, is a role that is filled, and so I currently sit on that. And so I think just that commitment to making sure that PEAK has a seat at this committees doesn't always happen. So, the structure for our ADR project, we have a contract. And so our contract, that provides structure, because it outlines what we're going to do. And one of the items that is in the contract is consultation. And so that allows us to meet regularly, and communicate regularly. Sometimes I'm like, I talk to Mary Ann, or communicate with Mary Ann more than sometimes I do with some people on the teaching. So, we do have a very collaborative relationship. We're in communication a lot, and the contract is designed so that, to make that possible. And along those lines, we also at PEAK, in the spirit of collaboration, contract with someone who is a member of our local art chapter, who's been with the project from the beginning. And she provides a lot of insight, too. And so we both kind of came together, thinking that we should have a more real-time resource for parents, because it's hard for them to attend webinars and things like that. And so we're really excited about that project, and working on it right now. And so that's exciting. And I think that's another piece, is that we're able to bring in this contractor, who brings in additional perspective of what's going on with families and in the state. And the way Mary Ann designed this is it's not that we just come to the ADR board meetings, we're co-facilitating the meetings with her, and so she looks at us as sort of equals there. And that, I think that's really valuable too.

>> Yeah, I could add a little bit around the contract. I think the contract, while, you know, it's official and legal, it ensures that we do collaborate, and that we continue the work together. And so that's why I think it's really important, along with co-facilitating the board meetings. We co-train. We provide trainings on improving IEP teams, the skills for resolving conflict training, and then also facilitator training. We have co-facilitated those. And it's really important for the people who attend, who mostly are from school districts. We encourage parents to attend, but often because of timing, they can't attend. And so, we have in our contract that people provide webinars as well for parents, and for educators. Anybody can attend. And so that's available. But in terms of the co-training that we do together, it sends a message. And we talk about the connection between parents, families, and school districts. And that is embedded in our curriculum. And then when we co-train with PEAK, it sends a message to the districts as well. And they learn more about PEAK. Many districts, rural districts, are not as familiar with PEAK does, even though they represent the whole state. Then they come to a training, and then they are aware of, this is a resource that I could bring in for the families in my district. So, we want to make sure that, you know, everybody on an IEP team is, you know, in every corner of the state, has appropriate facilitation and conflict resolution skills in order to come to consensus for the benefits of the child. The other thing that we've done, and this is part of our collaboration and consultation is starting the coffee chats. So, as I mentioned, we started the information with the parent advisors, the connection between facilitators and parent advisors. Then we also started a parent coffee chat, so parents could come and learn some information and ask questions. We also have office hours through the Department of Ed that PEAK will join in the office hours sometimes, and the facilitators man those every week. And anybody can attend to get information and consultation, coaching. So, we are just really, whenever we get together, there is another idea, like hey, you know? Maybe we should do this. And our contract allows for that. We have broadened the contract so that, you know, we have the capability to think outside the box, because we know, you know, one size does not fit all, right? And as we talk today, and other states listen, they may say, hey, that's really great. And they may say, well, that won't work for our state. And that's okay. Everybody has to do what they feel is best for their stakeholders, and the students in their state. But we hope that our collaborative efforts will spark some other states to jump in and do something similar as well. So, that's all I'll say right now. I know that PEAK, you're going to mention your inclusion conference, right, that we very much participate in?

>> [INAUDIBLE] This is why we're such great partners, [INAUDIBLE] going to say one more thing. So, you know, one of the things that [INAUDIBLE] really, I say it's our signature event, because it is. I mean, even though it's a conference, it is also an opportunity where we use it to have sponsorships and raise dollars. And one of the things we're

proud about is CDE last year was our title sponsor. So, you know, and it wasn't just okay, we're sending you a check. It was, we're investing in your keynote speaker, which is an inclusionist, and really will speak the walk, and really help and support our educators to attend, and our families in our districts to attend. So, they kind of supported it financially, but then also be part of helping us solidify the speaker, and be part of the content that they would want done. The other thing with the conference is utilized our friends at CDE from all different walks of experiences and expertise to be speakers at the conference. So, you know, we have keynote speakers, and then we have breakout sessions from various topics, from early education, early intervention, to, you know, IEP sessions, to equity. All different kind of topics, and we lean on our friends at CDE. I know, Mary Ann, you presented last year with Ann on the alternate dispute resolution pieces in different curriculum. So, we really lean on expertise to be partners at the conference and facilitators at the conference. And it's just such an important annual event that attracts people nationally and international. Last year, we had folks from Russia who attended, and people who have been working with the University, UCCF here, the University, on inclusive practices in their own countries. And really looking to us on how we fostered that environment, so they sent several delegates to the conference. So, more and more, it's a very important event.

>> Thank you for all of that information. So, it sounds like for PEAK, it's about access, and for both sides of the coin, it's about creating opportunities to grant that access and to share information so that you're operating with a full picture. And so, it's admirable, the work and the opportunities that you've taken to make this collaboration happen. Noella?

>> Thanks, Melanie. So, Mary Ann, we'd love to hear a little bit more about the ADR advisory board. You touched on that earlier on. Can you tell us just a little bit more about the history of the group, why it was started, and what its unique function is?

>> Sure. So, it started back in the end of 2014, I think October, prior to my time at CDE. But there are two key people that really sparked it at CDE, and that's Candace Hawkins, who you know, and then Tracy Gershwin, who really, they got together and they started talking about the need for facilitator skills in IEP meetings. And as a director, I attended one of their sessions at the inclusion conference years ago, and was very excited, and went up, I want to be one of the pilot districts. And, you know, so it was just a very exciting time where they brought this information in that, you know what? This is what could really make the difference in special education, and deal with conflict. Not just deal with conflict, but prevent the conflict. And I think that's the key piece right there, is that prevention piece. And so CDE said, you know, we really need to get a committee together of different stakeholders, people in the communities, directors, educators, advocates, parents, we need them to come together to talk about the needs. And what do we need to put in, like, into a curriculum? And so the ADR board, which was originally called the early dispute resolution advisory board. It's not a governing board, it's an advisory board, but it was EDR first. And the reason we shifted, when I came on board, there were lots of concerns around the word early dispute. Parents saying, we're not in dispute, why would we want a facilitator? And districts saying the same thing if a parent requested a facilitator. And so we thought long and hard, and I met with the board about that, and other stakeholders. And looking at other terms throughout the country, you know, the most widely known term is ADR, alternative dispute resolution. And that seemed to fit very well, because we are focused on alternatives to dispute resolution, not on exactly all of the dispute resolution options. And so we had a conversation about that and changed the name to ADR. So, back in 2014, a committee was formed, the board was formed. And they focused on a curriculum, and they brought a company called Pingora in to develop the curriculum with them. Pingora then provided trainings in the state on the curriculum. And that was pretty much the responsibility of the board, and to develop IEP facilitator skills, help people become IEP facilitators in their districts. At that time, we did not have state-wide facilitators. As I mentioned, that came on later after I interviewed the board, because they saw the need. So, then when I came on board, then we shifted, and we branched out a little bit more around other things that we needed to address. Because we had gotten the curriculum really set. We were training the curriculum. I was tweaking the curriculum according to needs, and through my collaboration with PEAK, what do we need to change? What's the feedback out there? And through all the trainings we developed, or initially we developed a survey, an evaluation survey that everybody who takes the training can complete, and then they get credit afterwards. They only get the credit for the training if they complete the survey, so that's how we got the feedback and the data. And through the evaluations, we were able to tweak the curriculum, add important things that were really needed out there. And this is an ongoing occurrence. So, it's not a one and done deal. It's not just a canned training. We do tweak it, and we tweak it according to the needs of either the organization or the districts that we are training and having conversations ahead of time. So, that's really when the board started. There was a rise in state complaints, which really spurred the initial development of the board. And then later, as we developed our relationship with Pingora to provide the curriculum, we branched away from Pingora, and the curriculum is ours. And that was part of the contract with Pingora, that they would develop the curriculum, and then it's owned by CDE. And when we train with PEAK, we don't put just the CDE logo on the curriculum, we put PEAK's logo as well, to again show that collaboration, that joint ownership in this project. And so

that's pretty much how it started. We shifted to focusing on some restorative practices, parent resources, educator resources, and we did that for a little bit. We did move the board to working groups, but then that came back and they were like, well, we really want to just kind of give advice, and then you take the advice and move forward. And that's actually been very helpful. So, in the last few board meetings, we've put up, like, a jam board. I don't know if anybody's familiar with jam board on Google, where everybody can put their ideas on certain topics. So, what do parents need? We have a jam board on that. How can we address those needs? And then we have another jam board where people put all that. And it's a great visual, because then we can take that information and say, all right, what are our next steps? What do we need to do with all of this input from our board, who are our stakeholders in the field? And so, we are, you know, continuously tweaking our work with the board so that we can get the best advice possible in order to move forward. And I know, Ann, you probably have a lot to say about the board too, because Ann is at every board meeting.

>> Mary Ann, thank you so much for that information, and giving us the history of the advisory board and how it has changed. So, Ann and Michele, from the parent center view, how does the advisory board function to ultimately serve families?

>> The number one thing, and I think sort of what the goal is, is the board and the work of the board in the project is really to improve outcomes for our students, because disputes are taking resources, and energy, and emotional, you know, costs that are detracting from our students' experience. So, I think in the big picture, the work of the board serves to improve outcomes for students, and let people really center their work around the student rather than around the conflict. And I think, we haven't really talked about this yet, but the ADR project through CDE takes a broader perspective than just providing facilitation. I know a lot of states have facilitation. But ours is sort of a more holistic approach, which is about providing tools to all the stakeholders. And that's why PEAK provides trainings as well. And we're not talking just the special education, we want tools for all the stakeholders. And that really aligns with PEAK's values of inclusion. We are hoping that through this preventing disputes, improving communication, and improving collaboration, that we're building stronger IEP teams. That's what we often call our trainings, our improving IEP teams. So, we're really trying to, you know, have a more holistic effect than not just preventing disputes and having people work together, and ultimately creating better results for students. And I think a couple pieces is having PEAK at CDE really supports the impartial nature of facilitation, because it is an impartial process. And if it were just CDE, [INAUDIBLE] might see it as, oh, you're there for the district. But having us partner shows that this is, you know, we're here together on this, and we want you to be together on this. I think it supports parents, because parents are often the ones who feel the imbalance at the IEP meetings. And so, supporting communication can really make parents feel more comfortable. But we don't just train to say, like, you know, we're going to help so that you can speak. We actually talk about preparing for the IEP meeting through the parent input form, and thinking about, you know, like what is meaningful participation? And that isn't just about the school letting you talk, that is about you thinking about what is important for you to get out of this IEP meeting, and preparing, and thinking about how you want to communicate that to the team. So, we're really hoping to support parents to be more proactive participants in the meetings, and ultimately, again, have a better outcome for the students. Cause that's really what we all are in this for, but sometimes, in a time of scarce resources, and increasingly scarce resources and staffing issues, you know, even though we have all these rights and we have all these systems, it doesn't work if we don't work together. Because we're trying to do more with less. And so, I bring up the high leverage practices for special education. Collaboration among teams and collaboration with families is right up there to ensure greater success for our students. And that completely aligns with the work we're doing. So, I think everything in the spirit of how this project has been designed really supports families, and ultimately students. [INAUDIBLE]

>> And if I can add something, one of the critical pieces of our curriculum, and what we provide for families and educators, is the use of visuals. We want to ensure that there is understanding, because if there isn't understanding, then meaningful engagement can't happen. And then again, the data piece is huge. So, data from our trainings, data from our facilitations, is also important. We have an evaluation from facilitations as to how the facilitator made you feel during the meeting, what was the outcome of the meeting, and whether or not people feel that it would reduce the option to move towards dispute resolution processes. And the data is huge that comes back, and really drives our decisions moving forward, too.

>> I think, you know, one of the things that really stood out for me, when I started hearing more and more about the project, was the fact that we were building communication skills within individuals. Not everyone is a great communicator, or knows how to use their voice. And whatever way their voice is, even in a youth-led IEP, right? Whatever way that they could take up space in that meeting, and be able to, you know, talk and communicate, that is a skill building approach that the project brings. It's not just a curriculum where it's such an academic focus. It's a curriculum around building confidence, right? Competency. I think, you know, Ann, you said it best when you talked

about the prep for an IEP. You know, how to maybe research or understand, and what, you know, speaks to you for that specific disability that your child might have, that might, you know, be able to foster an effective meeting that leads to the outcomes that Ann was describing. So, I think that skill building piece within individuals is a critical, I'm going to use the term life skill that anyone can benefit from. And it's very specific in this, to really foster a relationship within school districts that isn't adversarial, that is more partnership.

>> Just a quick add. Back before COVID, when we were able to train in person, you know, you get to have those conversations after the training. And people will say thing that they aren't going to write down on an evaluation or something. And so many people come up, especially, I mean, teachers as well, that just, like, I haven't had any training on this. This is so helpful. And so I miss that piece from in-person trainings, but I think it's still valid even though we aren't getting it in their online evaluations.

>> Thank you for all of that information. You've talked a little bit about the specific successes that have stemmed from the ADR advisory board, the curriculum being a huge one, consistent messaging. We'd like to hear just a little bit more about what the impact is for coaching for the districts that need additional support, and what that, you know, how that work has stemmed from the ADR advisory board. And Michele, you talked a little bit about-- or I'm sorry, Mary Ann, a little bit about the data. What does the sharing of data look like between the two agencies?

>> All right. So, every board meeting, we pore through the data, these data, and then put visuals together to share with the board so that they can look to see what's glaring, what's not, what is this telling us, what do we need to do? We did adjust one of our questions to be more of a Lichart scale, so we could get a little more information about how likely are you to move forward towards dispute resolution options or not. And that gives us a little deeper information. So, every board meeting, we pull data together. We often, in our conversations between PEAK and CDE, talk about what's going on, what more information data we've shared, and, you know, you and I have shared some of this data. So, we talked about what does this look like? Maybe we should add this question. Or, oh, maybe we should start providing more information around some of the IEP components in our training, because those questions come up regularly. And so whatever we could do to provide support, we do. The other thing, in terms of coaching for districts, we offer what we call buckets of training. So, if a district doesn't want to take the whole improving IEP teams training, or maybe they've had it, and now they need to, like, dig a little more deeper into the knowing idea with precision component, into the active listening skills component. Districts will call-- this last year, especially, oh my gosh, our trainings have increased tenfold. Because the needed support during the pandemic even more so than ever. How do we run effective IEP meetings? We've started tele-facilitating. And what does that look like for our district? How can we tele-facilitate our own meetings? And so they've dug deeper into the previous training they've had, and said, okay, we want you to come and do two hours on this topic and dig deeper. And then what we do is we ask them to bring their concerns, their conflicts, whatever they're dealing with, so that they can use the tools to work through their own conflicts, their own issues, so that then, the very next day, they can go into those IEP meetings and support families in terms of how do we work through this conflict? And they've got some more tools in their bucket. So, the coaching piece is around that. Our next steps are hoping to get more into the districts. The facilitators are very excited about going out and doing some more coaching. PEAK is talking about doing some more through not just the website, but, you know, with parent advisors. That's why we're connecting so strongly with them. And then we also have our office hours to provide some individual coaching. And what's occurred [INAUDIBLE] maybe one director will get on and talk about the concerns in that district. And then we can recommend all of these tools, which leads them to then say, oh, we need to have more training, we need to embed this more. I need to be talking about this in my staff meetings with educators. And so it just kind of spirals from there into really, what are your needs? Okay, well, we'll talk care of them. And so did that answer your question, Noella?

>> Yeah, yeah it did. PEAK, do you have anything you'd like to add?

>> No, I think Mary Ann really captured-- I think the data piece for us, too, and well, I will add this. We have sales force at PEAK, which we are also-- you know, it's been fairly new, but getting to use it more effectively and capturing data now that Mary Ann [INAUDIBLE] will be useful in future planning for the project. So, capturing, you know, with our parent advisors, the kind of calls we're getting. What's the common theme? You know, so then we can kind of really analyze that data and then drive programming for future to ensure that we're, you know, kind of meeting the current needs and staying relevant in the times, and really looking to-- and I'm proud of that at PEAK. Because, you know, we are now a 21st-century parent center. I think when it was first founded, this organization, I can specifically say, and really, it's amazing to me, it was founded before the ADA became even law. How powerful is that? So, you know, the tireless leaders and our fearless founding executive director was fighting this before we even had the law to back the work that we needed to do. And that was powerful for me. But now, taking it fast forward into the 21st century, we really need to make sure we're capturing the data effectively, so we can really be a great resource for our entire state

with positive outcomes for our young people and our families.

>> Yeah, and I would just add that thanks to Michele's leadership, we are using sales force to, you know, have our data be more meaningful in some ways. And I know one that thing that, in Colorado, we experience, which I know many states have, is we have these metropolitan areas. And that's where a lot of the facilitations occur. And then we have a huge part of the state that is rural. And trying to figure out what the needs of the rural communities can be really difficult at the state level. And so that, to me, I think is on our radar to try and find ways to better figure out what the needs are in the different areas, and how we might tweak what we're doing to serve the rural areas better.

>> We have been able to serve the rural areas better, I believe, during the pandemic because everything went online. And so, before, I would drive. I would drive a day to go to Durango, train a day, drive a day back. And, you know, so I couldn't get out there all the time. But this year, for instance, Durango said, hey, we want to do all of these coaching trainings, and we provided four weeks in a row of training for them. We didn't have to drive down there. We were all online. And so the rural districts have really taken advantage of all of the online training. And we've really tweaked it to make it more interactive and visual, and using Cahoot to get everybody engaged in the training, you know? So, in a way, there are some positives that have come out of this year, for sure.

>> Well, we love to focus on the positives, and I think you're not alone [INAUDIBLE] trying to reach different populations. And I'm really looking forward to seeing the new PEAK website. I think that's going to be great, so we're definitely going to have our eyes on that.

>> So, thank you so much for all that information. Your enthusiasm and your excitement for your partnership is evident, and we just appreciate all that you're doing. And thanks for sharing all the benefits of your working collaboration. There's so much going on in Colorado that people can grab. What recommendations do you have for other states and parent centers who want to improve their working relationship?

>> From the parent center side, we both, you know, there's always parents entering the special education process, and we do have a lot of turnover with our teachers. I think that's nationwide. And so, we need to constantly be letting people know about facilitation and what it means, because you know, people come and they don't really understand what all these different dispute resolution options are. And we were just talking about this morning in a different meeting that if parents don't come in and say, tell me about facilitation. They generally come in and say, I need help with this, you know? And so, we want to make sure our parent advisors understand that the option's available, and at least in our state, you know-- I don't know about other states, but it's a pre-- you know, we're trying to prevent conflict. And so, helping them understand. Parents worry a lot about being that parent, and so they'll, you know, how will I be perceived if I bring up facilitation, and kind of working through that, I think, is an important piece to always kind of keep going, because there is, [INAUDIBLE] it's still relatively new. And we get a lot of questions where people, you know, what is facilitation? They don't, you know, they're asking what's an advocate, what's this? And so, just in the same way we need to make sure people are understanding the special education terms, we want to make sure they're understanding this option. And this is really an option to support families. And then one of the skills that's part of our training is reframing, and I just think that, you know, not just reframing in your meaning, but reframing how you think about the relationship, reframing how you think about the team is kind of my number one recommendation.

>> Yeah, I think both Mary Ann and Ann hit the nail on the head. I think people just want to feel supported. And this is a journey in the special education world. And I will tell you, you know, just again, my [INAUDIBLE] as an executive director, but then also as a parent of a legally deaf-blind child. And throughout his journey, he's been fully included. And that is the power of feeling supported and feeling connected, to be able to have conversations, right? Versus, like, oh, well, we need to have these very adversarial conversations, and now we're moving to, you know, a legal dispute. We haven't had to do that. So, I'm going to close with an African proverb. If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. And I think that is a powerful, you know, collaborative mindset, to go into this, to go together with people, and go and bring yourself to an opportunity to feel connected and supported along the journey, because everybody's a human being, you know? Educators are human beings, and having conversations and, you know, people are very busy when they're dealing with IEPs and different, and other students, and a lot of different needs. And [INAUDIBLE] so you really need to lean on each other, and be, I think, Mary Ann, you were saying the collaborative approach. Again, go together, don't go alone on this journey, and you'll really be able to, you know, get to some solutions and make sure the child's pathway is sound and really, you know, the outcomes are strong.

>> Thank you so much. Just a wealth of information and ideas there. So, thank you for sharing all of that. Noella?

>> Thanks to both of you for sharing your agency's work, and how you function together to best serve the needs of families and students. It's such a delight to get to know both of your agencies better. And we hope that others across the nation will reach out to you, perhaps try to replicate some of what you're doing to better strengthen their own collaborative relationships. So, thanks for taking the time to meet with us today and talk through what it looks like in



your state.

>> Thank you for having us.

>> Thank you, yes.

>> We really appreciate this opportunity.

>> Thank you. [INAUDIBLE]

>> Appreciate it.