

Bureau of Special Education Mediators

Christine Barrington: Received her B.A. and M.P.A. from the University of Rhode Island and her J.D. from the University of Massachusetts School of Law. After graduating, she practiced as a criminal defense attorney in Boston before relocating to Connecticut and opening a private general practice which included special appointments from both the Connecticut and Massachusetts Department of Education to ensure disabled children who are wards of the state have their educational rights protected. She also serves as the Director of the Paralegal Program at Branford Hall Career Institute. Additionally, Attorney Barrington volunteers as a Guardian Ad Litem for Children in Placement and has volunteered as a collaborating attorney with the New Britain Truancy Intervention Project and Lawyers for Children America. She also served on the RIPIN Advisory Board committee for USDOE PIRC Grand Administration.

Patricia D. Connelly: Received her B.A. from the College of William and Mary and her J.D. from Rutgers Law School. From 1980 to 1984, she was a Deputy Attorney General for the State of New Jersey. She worked in private practice until 2011, where she practiced special education law and represented parties in mediation sessions and due process hearings. From 2011 to 2022, she was employed by the New Jersey Department of Education in the Office of Special Education. During her tenure at the Department of Education, she conducted mediation sessions in due process and complaint investigation matters. Ms. Connelly's goal as an independent special education mediator is to use her skills and knowledge to assist families and schools in resolving disputes through a process that emphasizes respectful communication between the parties.

Robert D. Cronin PH.D.: Began his career as an elementary teacher both at the primary and intermediate levels. Before moving into administration, he also served as a school psychologist in Naugatuck at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. In 1987 he was appointed principal of Salem Elementary School in Naugatuck where he served until 1992 when he was appointed Director of Special Services. In 1996 his responsibilities were expanded to Assistant Superintendent/Director of Special Services for the district. He went on to serve as superintendent of the Naugatuck Public Schools beginning in 2001 through 2006 when he was appointed superintendent of Regional School District 14 serving the towns of Bethlehem and Woodbury. Finally, he served as the superintendent of the North Haven Public Schools until his retirement in 2019. Dr. Cronin has a B.S. in Early Childhood/Elementary Education from Eastern Connecticut State University, his M.S., and his 6th year certification in School Psychology from Southern Connecticut State University where he also received additional certification in Educational Leadership. His doctorate is from the University of Connecticut in Educational Administration. Dr. Cronin currently holds Connecticut certification in Early Childhood and Elementary Teaching, school psychology, and School Administration.

Jason Harper: Is the founder of Harper Conflict Resolution, LLC and is a nationally recognized alternative dispute resolution (ADR) consultant, conflict management coach, adjunct professor, and trainer. Most notably, Jason is an ADR Consultant providing mediation and conflict resolution services to over 800 school districts and charter schools, including California, Ohio, and Colorado. He is a Lecturer in Law at the University of Southern California, Gould School of Law teaching on Cross-Cultural Dispute Resolution. Jason has been recognized by the California State Senate and the United States Congress for his mediation training. Jason received his master's degree in Negotiation, Conflict Resolution, and Peacebuilding from California State University, Dominguez Hills and his mediation training from Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, California.

Susan Kaplan: Began her education career as an elementary and middle school teacher for nine years before serving as Helen Keller Middle School Assistant Principal (three years) and Principal (ten years) in Easton CT. While Principal, Susan led HKMS's successful effort for recognition (2011) as a National Blue Ribbon School, and co-led multiple Tri-State Consortium reviews of other high-performing districts. For the last two years, Susan has worked as a negotiator for the Connecticut Federation of School Administrators. Ms. Kaplan received her B.A. and M.P.A. from New York University, her Master of Science in Teaching from SUNY New Paltz, and her 092 certification from Sacred Heart University. She also holds a Certificate in Mediation from the Quinnipiac Law School Center on Dispute Resolution. Before her career in education, Susan worked for eleven years at IBM, serving in various roles including as Financial Analyst and Asset Operations Manager,

Ann Paul: Served as Assistant Superintendent/Director of Special Services for the Wilton Public Schools from July 2007 through June 2017. In this position, she had district-wide responsibilities for all Special Education and support services programs and staff and conducted all district special education mediations. Previous to this position she served for 3 years as Assistant Director of Special Education and Student Services Secondary level for the Darien Public Schools. Prior to this, Ms. Paul served as a school psychologist for school districts in Connecticut and New York as well as with adolescents in a private hospital setting. Ms. Paul has a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania; a Masters of Education from Teachers College, Columbia University; 092 certification through the Sacred Heart University certificate program and additional training in school neuropsychology, counseling psychology and learning disabilities. Ms. Paul holds Connecticut certification as an administrator and school psychologist.

Kimberly Schulist: Prior to becoming a special education mediator and facilitator, Kim was a special education attorney for over twenty years. She has her Master of Laws (LLM) in Dispute Resolution from Pepperdine University School of Law's Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution. Her passion has always been in the field of special education and she has now devoted her practice to exclusively special education alternative dispute resolution. She is committed to establishing healthy and communicative long-term relationships between schools and families. Her background as a special education attorney and now a mediator provides unique insights in her special education mediation practice.

Elaine Talley: Has conducted over 3000 special education mediations and IEP team meeting facilitations. In addition to serving as an independent mediator and facilitator, her professional experience includes three years serving in a leadership role as the Mediation Coordinator at the California Special Education Hearing Office. Ms. Talley has been an invited speaker at the Association for Conflict Resolution national conference, the American Bar Association Section on Dispute Resolution national conference, and the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education (CADRE) National Symposium. Ms. Talley holds a Bachelor of Science from U.C. Berkeley, and a Master of Education and a Law degree, both from U.C. Davis. While studying law she emphasized alternative dispute resolution and was a Public Interest Law Scholar. Ms. Talley is a member of the State Bar of California and the Association for Conflict Resolution, an international group devoted to mediation and other forms of alternative dispute resolution. Ms. Talley has a passion for dispute resolution and has honed her skills working with diverse individuals and groups to find common ground and resolve complex issues.

Crystal Williams: A Disability Informed Mediator and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) consultant, leads White & Williams ADR Services LLC, specializing in Special Education

Dispute Resolution. Her expertise encompasses IEP facilitation, conflict management coaching, professional development, parent engagement, and trauma-informed practices. With a Masters of Dispute Resolution from the University of Southern California's Gould School of Law, Crystal expanded her mediation training through Waymakers Dispute Resolution Services and Mosten Guthrie Academy. Active in various organizations, Crystal holds positions as a Board Member for the Southern California Mediation Association, Program Advisory co-chair for the Western Justice Center, advisor to the Board for Kids Managing Conflict, and coordinator of the Youth Police Dialogue series through the San Pedro Rotary Club. Educationally, Crystal holds a Master of Arts in Teacher Education with dual special education credentials from Claremont Graduate University. With 15 years of K-12 teaching experience across different school levels, she now serves as a Social Justice Educator at Claremont Graduate University and the University of Redlands in their graduate teacher education preparation programs. Additionally, she earned a Master of Arts in Forensic Psychology from Argosy University, focusing on treatment, and obtained a BA in Social Science with emphases in Psychology, along with minors in Psychology and Law and Children and Families in Urban America from The University of Southern California. Her commitment extends to a 5-year tenure as an Adjunct Instructor at the Learning Rights Law Center's T.I.G.E.R program, guiding parents through the IEP process and empowering families to navigate the special education system effectively. Moreover, she is a seasoned public speaker, presenting at numerous local and national conferences.

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