

Mediation and Due Process Hearing A Comparison

MEDIATION	HEARING
Purpose: The mediator uses an informal process to assist parties through their negotiations and planning to an outcome they themselves determine.	Purpose: The hearing officer uses a formal process requiring presentation of evidence, sworn testimony, and cross-examination to determine facts, which help him/her to form a conclusion. The officer then makes a decision for the parties.
History: The mediator encourages parties to focus on the child's current skills and needs as a foundation for exploring the possibility of an agreement.	History: The hearing officer is likely to hear and consider more detailed history, especially with regard to procedural violations or failure of school staff or parents to fulfill their obligations in the past.
Intervention style: The mediator may intervene to guide parties in discussion, to clarify what is intended, to elicit parties' best thinking, to maintain a civil process, and to reframe important questions in a way that engages people.	Intervention style: The hearing officer must remain in control of the hearing environment while ensuring that parties are permitted to present their cases. They also must have on the record the evidence necessary to decide the case.
Preparation: Parties need to think about the student's current performance, progress, and any need for special support or instruction. The requirement for preparation is not exhaustive and is oriented toward the present.	Preparation: The requirements for preparation are exhaustive. Representatives for parents and schools must be able to marshal all evidence, prepare witnesses to testify, fully inform the hearing officer, and create a record for appeal, if necessary.
Resources: The resources required for this effort are the two to three hours spent by the parties and mediator to identify and work on the issues they wish to resolve.	Resources: The resources required for a hearing include the costs of representation, the time and cost of preparation, and the several days parties typically spend at the hearing.
Parties' relationship: The mediation is an assisted negotiation. The mediator will try to maintain or restore a working relationship between the parent(s) and school staff in order to help them to complete their negotiations and planning process successfully.	Parties' relationship: The hearing officer will try to minimize the acrimony and tension at the hearing, but much of it is inherent in an adversarial proceeding. Parties cross-examine each other and challenge each other's credibility and competence.
Private discussion: The mediator will meet with parties together and separately in private discussions in which parties may make statements that are later held confidential.	Private discussion: No ex parte or private discussions may occur between parties and the hearing officer. The decision is based on the record of documents and testimony.
Confidentiality: The comments and offers made during mediation sessions are confidential and cannot be used in another forum.	Confidentiality: the record of the hearing is confidential but will be used if the case is appealed to a court of law.
Sources of information: The mediator relies on the verbal statements of the parties as the primary source to inform each other and him/herself about the child's program, their concerns and aspirations, and the goals, interests, and choices before them.	Sources of information: The hearing officer relies on documentary evidence and testimony, and assesses the credibility of witnesses and expert opinions, especially the diagnostic, evaluative, and testing qualifications of professionals involved in evaluating a student and delivering services.
Skills of the mediator: The mediator prepares people for the mediation and guides them through it in ways that contribute to a successful negotiation, employing interpersonal, facilitative, and cognitive skills. The mediator must be knowledgeable about legal standards in special education issues.	Skills of the hearing officer: The hearing officer's role is to conduct a fair and orderly hearing, to inform him/herself, to rule on evidence, and to develop the record. Outside the hearing, the officer weighs the evidence and writes a logical, persuasive, and legally defensible decision. Knowledge of the law is essential.