

# A PEATC

*Do You Know...*



## Special Education Mediation – Involving the Student

### Factsheet for Virginia’s Parents

#### What is Student-Involved Mediation?

Mediation is a confidential, voluntary process used to **resolve special education disagreements** between families and schools. It’s less formal than due process and centers on communication and collaboration. When students are involved—especially those 14 and older—it becomes more than problem-solving. It becomes a real opportunity to teach **advocacy, self-awareness, and respect**, and to support the **student’s voice** in decisions about their education.

#### Why Include Students?

- Students gain **confidence** by speaking for themselves
- It helps schools and families better understand **what matters to the student**
- Including students leads to more **personalized** and effective solutions
- Students are **key stakeholders** of the situation

#### When Should Students Be Involved?

- If the issue **directly affects** the student’s services, goals, or placement
- When the student is **mature** enough to express their views
- When **transition planning or self-advocacy** is part of the conversation

Student participation is always **voluntary**. The family, student, mediator, and school decide how and when the student should be involved.

#### What Can Student Involvement Look Like?

- **Attending** part or all of the mediation
- **Sharing** a written, recorded, or video statement
- Participating through **role-play or coaching** beforehand

#### By Participating in Mediation, Students Can

- Learn conflict resolution and negotiation skills
- Learn to understand the perspectives of others
- Improve their leadership and communication skills
- Learn about confidentiality and privacy
- Develop self-advocacy skills by having a voice in decisions that affect their education
- Learn how to manage emotions in difficult conversations
- Experience what a respectful, collaborative problem-solving process looks like
- Feel more ownership over the outcomes of their IEP or services
- Build trust with school staff and adults involved in their education
- See that disagreements can be resolved in a peaceful, constructive way

# Special Education Mediation – Involving the Student

## Possible Challenges

- **Feeling nervous or overwhelmed** by the situation or the people in the room
- **Lack of maturity or capacity** to participate
- **Not feeling equal** to the adults and unsure about speaking up
- **Not being prepared** or fully understanding what the meeting is about
- **Having trouble communicating** their thoughts or feelings clearly
- **Worrying about sharing personal things** in front of school staff
- **Being afraid of negative consequences** for speaking honestly
- **Not fully understanding the issues** being discussed
- **Getting tired or losing focus** during a long meeting

## Tips for Families:

- Prepare your student by discussing **the purpose** of mediation.
- Let them know **what to expect**, who will be there, and what might be discussed.
- Remind them it is **ok to ask questions** and help them write down their points ahead of time.
- Let them know they can **take breaks**.
- **Practice** with your student so they feel confident sharing their views.

You know your child best. There's **no single answer** as to when and how they should participate in mediation. Some signs they may be ready are:

- They are **asking questions** about their IEP or school experience.
- They've **expressed frustration** about decisions being made.
- They want to **be involved** in planning their future.

## Bottom Line

When students take part in mediation, they learn **important life skills**—and their voice helps shape better outcomes. **“Nothing about me without me.”**

### REFERENCE/RESOURCES:

[Resolving Disputes | Virginia Department of Education](#)

[The Involvement of Students in Their Special Education Mediations | CADRE-Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution](#)

PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with families, schools, and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.

For more information about us, please contact:

[www.peatc.org](http://www.peatc.org) | 703-923-0010 | [partners@peatc.org](mailto:partners@peatc.org)

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