

Hello

# Engaging With Enduring Conflict: The Work of Adaptive Leaders in Special Education

WASA SPEDA  
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# Community Connection



If your leadership style had a theme song right now, what would it be?



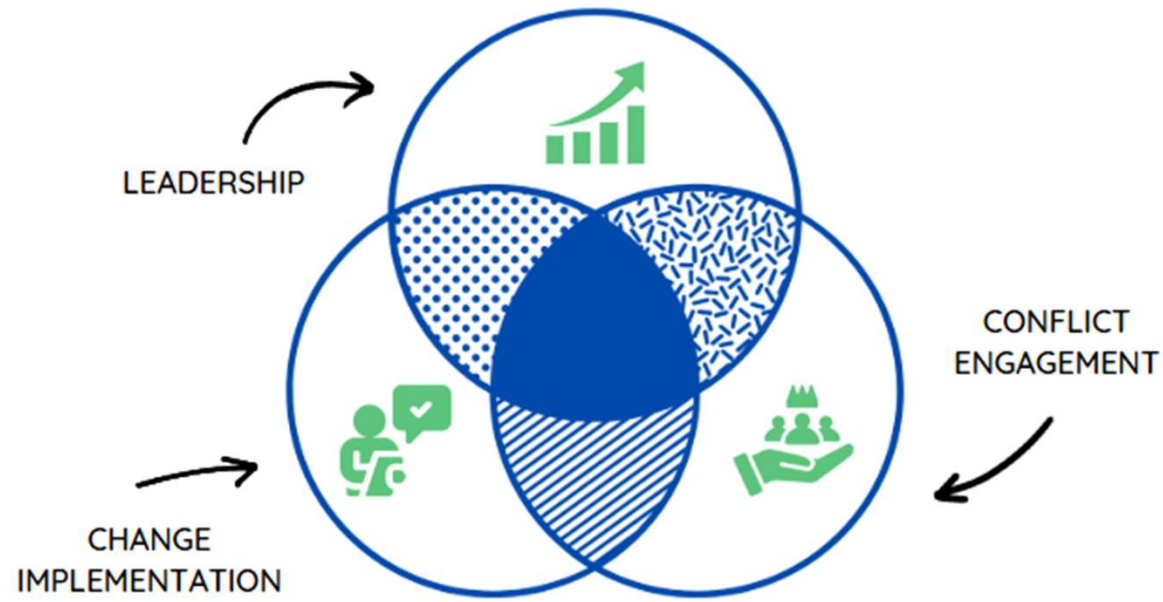
# Our Time Together Today

Practical takeaways that lead to

- Improved student outcomes
- Strengthened relationships and trust
- Reduced incidence of formal disputes



## THE WORK OF ADAPTIVE LEADERS



Concept Credit: Greg Abell

# Adaptive Leadership

Practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments.

It's especially useful when facing complex problems that don't have straightforward, technical solutions- like leading special education.

Ronald Heifetz & Marty Linsky



# Distinguishing Technical Problems From Adaptive Challenges

Technical problems have known solutions, often handled by expertise or standard procedures.

Adaptive challenges require new learning, changes in beliefs, values, or behaviors, and often involve multiple stakeholders with competing perspectives.

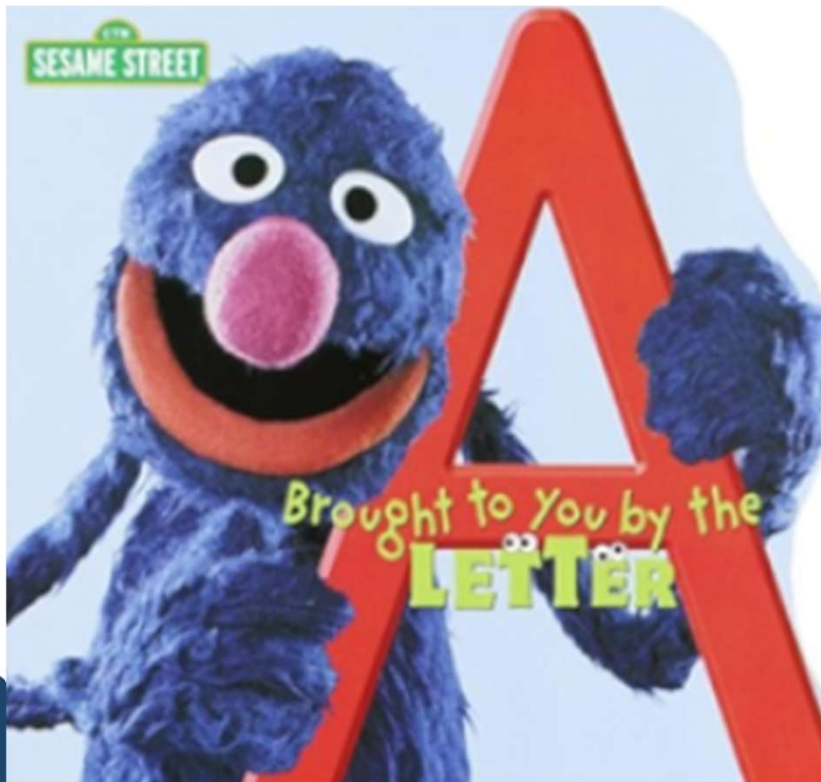


# IEP Meeting



Technical problem  
or adaptive  
challenge?

# This IEP Meeting is Brought to You By the Letter A



- Appropriate
- Adequate
- Awesome
- Advocacy



# Interpreting the A in FAPE Is Personal



# IEP Meeting

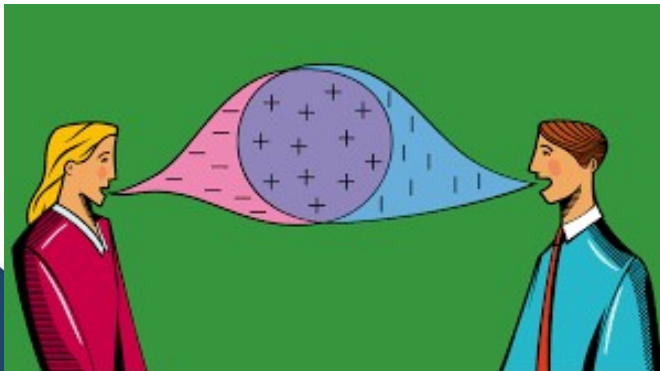
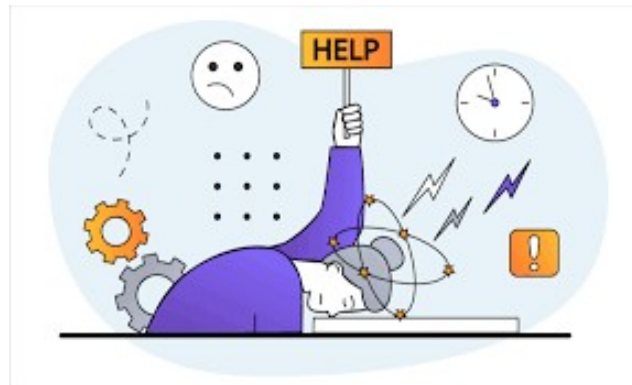


Technical problem  
or adaptive  
challenge?

# What about when there is conflict in an IEP meeting?



# How Do You Handle Conflict in Special Education?





## Enduring Conflict

- Deeply rooted
- Identity based
- Value driven
- Embedded in structure
- Systemic and complex
- Rooted in distrust
- Involves fundamental issues of power



Staying with Conflict, Bernard Mayer

# Supporting People to Engage With Enduring Conflict

- Remain engaged
- Work on the problems
- Relate to the people we are in conflict with
- Communicate about conflict
- Deepen our understanding about how other think about the issue
- Develop the emotional and intellectual capacity to live with enduring conflict
- Look for areas where progress can be made



# What does it mean to “stay” with conflict?

- 1) Accepting Enduring Conflict
- 2) Engaging Rather Than Resolving
- 3) Building Capacity for Enduring Engagement

# #1 Accepting Enduring Conflict

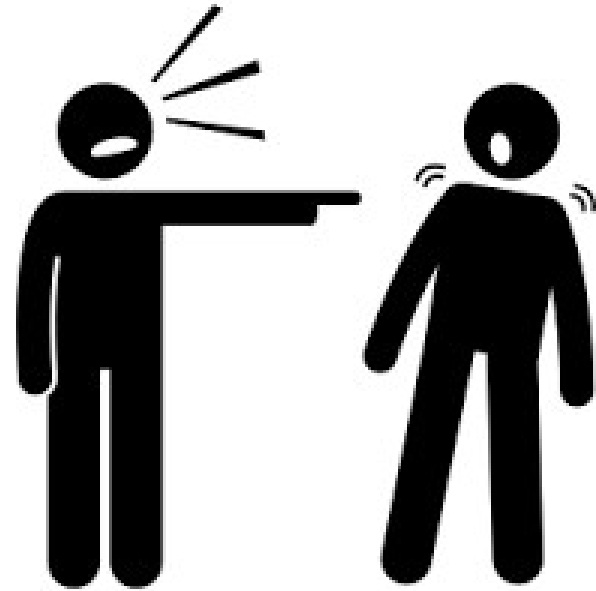
- Recognize that conflicts in special education and often stem from systemic issues such as limited resources, personal identities, and structural rules that are inherent and ongoing.
- Develop systems that acknowledge these conflicts as part of the landscape, rather than exceptions to be quickly resolved or eliminated.

# Systems to Engage Families

- Special Education Parent Advisory Council (SEPAC)
  - Is it effective?
- Coffee connections
- Communication portal for parents to submit questions and provide positive “shoutouts” for staff
- Parent newsletter
- Resource fairs/events

# Aggressive Advocates

Do you wonder why  
parents engage  
aggressive and  
adversarial  
advocates and  
attorneys?



# Advocates COMMUNICATE with Parents



CLICK HERE OR CALL  
FREE CONSULTATION  
BY PHONE OR VIRTUAL  
Phone [REDACTED]

Home New Link ADHD Behavior Reading & Dyslexia Communication Disorders Free Evaluations

**FREE CONSULTATION  
BY PHONE OR VIRTUAL**

**Evaluations  
for School**

Get an IEP or 504 Plan  
Learning Problems  
Reading - Dyslexia  
Math - Dyscalculia  
Writing - Dysgraphia  
Speech & Language  
Occupational Therapy  
Vision & Hearing  
Behavioral  
Autism Spectrum  
ADHD - Attention  
Executive Functioning  
Intellectual Functioning  
and More...

**We can help you!**

- Discover why your child struggles in the educational environment (school).
- Determine if your child is eligible for exceptional student education.
- Learn what supports your child needs in the educational environment to thrive.

Are you a parent frustrated by a school system that doesn't seem to understand your child's needs? Do you dream of seeing your child confidently reach their full potential in a supportive learning environment?

If you're looking to secure the resources your child deserves and unlock their academic potential, then you already know the importance of advocating for their needs.

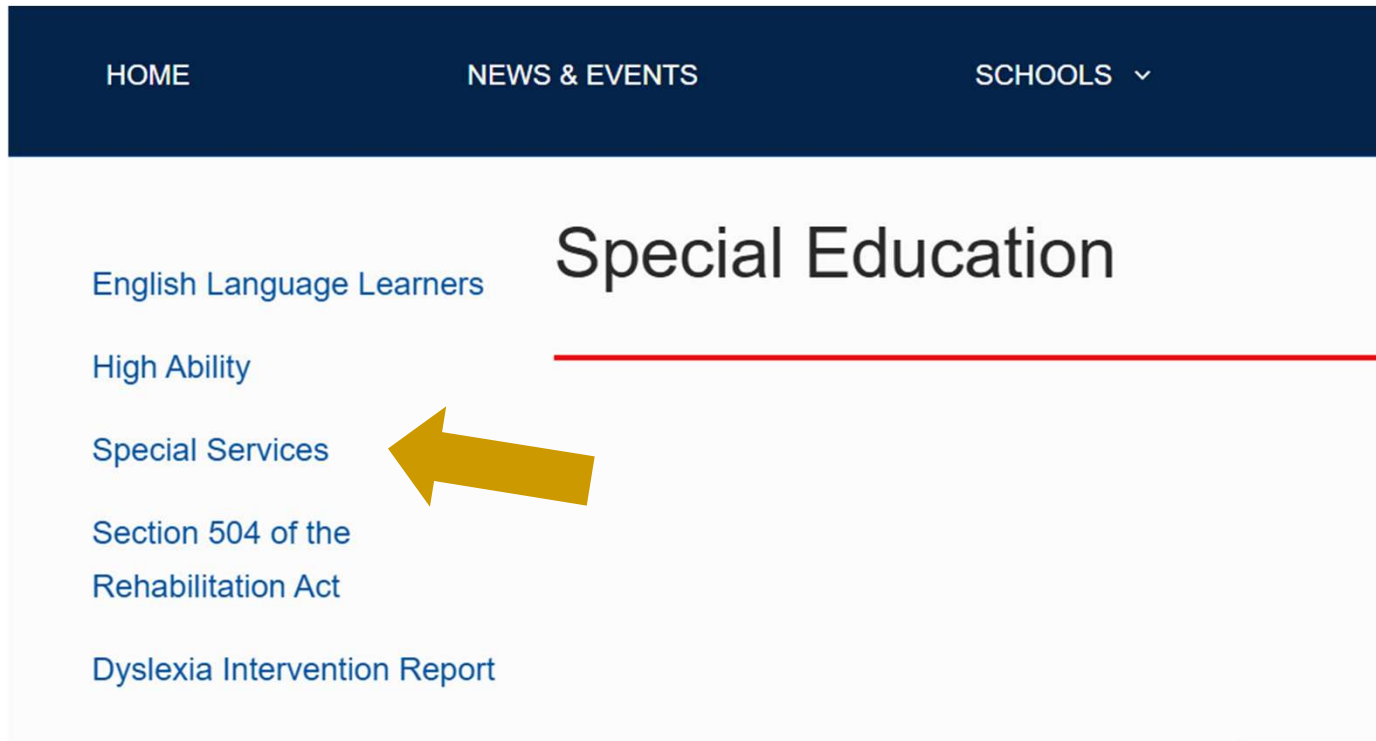


Here's what you likely face:

- ✓ **Feeling overwhelmed** by complex educational processes.
- ✓ **Struggling to communicate effectively** with the school system.
- ✓ **Worrying about your child falling behind** due to a lack of support.



# Example District Website for Special Ed





# Broken Links!



## This site can't be reached

Check if there is a typo in `elwood.k12.in.us`.

If spelling is correct, [try running Windows Network Diagnostics](#).

DNS\_PROBE\_FINISHED\_NXDOMAIN



Take a close look  
at your district  
website for parent  
information about  
special education



# Website Basics

- Director's name, title, email address, phone number
- Director's picture
- A welcome message from the Director
- Link to state special education laws/rules in all languages utilized in your community
- Links to Parents' Rights rules in all languages utilized in your community
- Link to the Parent Center in your area



# Website

- My child needs help. How do I get it?
  - Describe MTSS, child find, how to request an evaluation
- Developmental milestones
- Commonly Used Terms
- Links to community resources

# Empower Families with Information

## Communicating with Your Child's School

<https://cadreworks.org/resources/cadre-materials/steps-success-communicating-your-childs-school>

### Getting Started

First, understand that your role as a parent is unique. No one knows and loves your child the way that you do. You are the expert on your child. And, while you may not have all the answers, you want your child to be successful in school and in life. Your passion, as a parent, can help you communicate brilliantly, and sometimes, it can overtake you.

#### Step 1

##### BE MINDFUL OF YOUR EMOTIONAL PRESSURE GAUGE AS YOU WORK WITH YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL.

If you expect to have difficulty when meeting with school personnel, your mind and body will be primed for battle. How can you communicate successfully if you are on the verge of overflowing in anguish and outrage? Don't let your mind go there. Keep thoughts of past (or present) problems at school, worst fears, and other negatives from creeping into your mind. Focus positively on your goals and the view that the school wants to do their best for your child. Keep telling yourself that you and your child will succeed.



#### Step 2

##### PRIORITIZE AND PLAN.

What's the most important thing that needs to be accomplished for your child? Make a list of the issues, questions, and possible solutions. Rank them. Decide if there are any you can pass on and which one(s) must be addressed. Plan how you are willing to give and take in order to achieve the higher goal. Map out what you need to say and practice, if that helps.

"What's most important for Jordan right now is..."

"We really need to focus on..."

Referring to these few notes, with key phrases jotted down, can help keep you and the meeting on track.



#### Step 3

##### ACTIVELY LISTEN TO UNDERSTAND THE OTHER PERSON'S PERSPECTIVE.

If you don't understand what someone is saying, tell him or her. Be direct:

"I just don't understand what you are saying. Can you explain it in a different way or give me some examples?"

"Is there something you can show me, in writing, so I can fully understand?"

Keep asking and wait for responses until you do fully understand. Resist any temptation to answer your own questions or put words into someone else's mouth.

#### Step 4

##### CLARIFY YOUR STATEMENTS IF YOU SEE A PUZZLED EXPRESSION ON SOMEONE'S FACE AND ASK FOR CLARIFICATION IN RETURN.

Paraphrase, or restate so that you and others are clear in your understanding.

To be understood:

"I must not be explaining this clearly, what I'm trying to say is..."

"Here's a copy of... Let's look at this together. It shows that..."

So that you understand:

"It sounds like you're saying..."

"It sounds like you correctly, you're saying... is that right?"

"If I understand you correctly, so I can read it?"

"Is that written down anywhere so I can read it?"

Often, the process of clarifying one's understanding provides an opportunity to clear up a misconception or correct misinformation that could be critical to finding a satisfactory solution for your child.

So, don't overlook the value of this technique.

Steps to Success: Communicating with Your Child's School



Make Sure Parents Know You & How To  
Connect With You....

Beyond the Website





# Parents' Rights Cover Sheet

Greetings Parents & Guardians,

Your child is important to us. **Name of Local School Corporation** is committed to working in partnership with you. The attached booklet is your copy of Indiana's Procedural Safeguards which outline our responsibilities to you and your child. An additional helpful resource, titled *Navigating the Course*, is a companion guide. It is available at this link <https://www.earlywood.org/domain/142> or a printed copy will be provided upon request.

If you have questions, concerns, or ideas about your child's educational program, we want to hear from you. Below is the contact information of people that can assist you. Please contact us so we can work together with you.

Your child's special education teacher of record  
Teacher Name  
[teacher@email.k12.in.us](mailto:teacher@email.k12.in.us)  
317-999-9999

Your child's building principal  
Name  
[principal@email.k12.in.us](mailto:principal@email.k12.in.us)  
317-999-9999

District Director, Director of Special Education  
Name  
[director@email.k12.in.us](mailto:director@email.k12.in.us)  
317-999-9999



Executive Director of Earlywood Educational Services  
Dr. Angela Balsley  
[abalsley@earlywood.org](mailto:abalsley@earlywood.org)  
317-736-8495

We also encourage you to check out these resources:  
[Corporation's web address]



<http://www.earlywood.org>



<https://www.pinterest.com/ssicsss/>

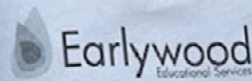


<https://www.youtube.com/user/pdssicss>



[www.facebook.com/ssicssschools](https://www.facebook.com/ssicssschools)





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[www.earlywood.org](http://www.earlywood.org)

Hello Parents / Guardians!

Your child is unique and important. Being the parent of a child who needs special education is also unique and important. Your child is relying on you to be an active member of the case conference committee to make decisions that will build on their individual strengths and skills. To do that, you need to know about your rights and the processes involved in special education. This booklet explains those rights and processes. However, the legal language can be technical and complex. Please know that there are people who can help you along the way. Your questions, concerns, ideas, and thoughts are important and need to be heard. I encourage you to have open communication with your child's teacher of record, principal, and the school district special education director. I am also here to help you and your child navigate the journey. Please call or email me.

Kind Regards,  
©Angie

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317-736-8495

Edinburgh Community School Corp  
Flat Rock-Hawcreek Community School Corp  
Franklin Community School Corp

Greenwood Community School Corp  
Nineveh-Hensley-Jackson United School Corp  
Southwestern Consolidated School Corp

# First Page of Parents' Rights



## #2 Engaging Rather Than Resolving

- Focus on engaging with the conflict constructively rather than seeking immediate resolution. This means continuing to work on issues even when a permanent solution seems elusive.
- Implement Continuous dialog and negotiation strategies that focus on incremental progress, enhancing trust and understanding, rather than solely aiming for dispute resolution.



Show up for  
our staff!  
Engage with  
them!

# Actively & Collaboratively Work with Staff on the Issues They Face

## **Invest in retention strategies**

- Address caseload vs. workload
- Consider a survey of staff on working conditions
  - RESPECT Survey
- Be creative with solutions
  - Alternate quality pathways
  - Professional flex days

# Personnel Resources

## **National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education & Related Services**

<https://specialedshortages.org>

## **Lead IDEA Center: Principal Navigator: Special Educator Retention**

<https://lead-idea.org/navigator/retention>





## #3 Build Capacity for Enduring Engagement

- Provide training for all stakeholders in effective communication, negotiation, and understanding of legal and procedural aspects of special education.
- Develop skills in collaborative problem solving, focusing on articulating interests rather than positions and finding common ground where possible.

# Resources to Begin To Address These Issues

The Center for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education



[www.CADREworks.org](http://www.CADREworks.org)



# Continuum of Dispute Resolution Options

| CADRE Continuum of Dispute Resolution Processes & Practices               |                            |                                    |                     |                           |                             |              |                        |              |                  |                       |                                  |                    |                      |                          |                     |                                   |            |             |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|------------------------|--------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|-------------|
| Levels of Intervention  | Prevention                 |                                    |                     |                           | Disagreement                |              | Conflict               |              |                  | Procedural Safeguards |                                  |                    | Legal Review         |                          |                     |                                   |            |             |
| Assistance/<br>Intervention<br>Options                                    | Family Engagement          | Participant & Stakeholder Training | Stakeholder Council | Collaborative Rule Making | Parent to Parent Assistance | Case Manager | Telephone Intermediary | Facilitation | Mediation Models | Ombudsperson          | Third Party Opinion/Consultation | Resolution Meeting | Mediation Under IDEA | Written State Complaints | Due Process Hearing | Hearing Appeal (Two-Tier Systems) | Litigation | Legislation |
| Dimensions that help clarify placement of the options along the Continuum | Third-Party Assistance     |                                    |                     |                           |                             |              |                        |              |                  |                       | Third-Party Intervention         |                    |                      |                          |                     |                                   |            |             |
|   | Decision Making by Parties |                                    |                     |                           |                             |              |                        |              |                  |                       | Decision Making by Third-Party   |                    |                      |                          |                     |                                   |            |             |
|   | Interest-Based Focus       |                                    |                     |                           |                             |              |                        |              |                  |                       | Rights-Based Focus               |                    |                      |                          |                     |                                   |            |             |
|   | Informal & Flexible        |                                    |                     |                           |                             |              |                        |              |                  |                       | Formal & Fixed                   |                    |                      |                          |                     |                                   |            |             |

# CADRE National Study

**MOVING THE NEEDLE: Administrators' Perspectives on School Districts' Needs and Opportunities to Improve Special Education Dispute Resolution Capacity**  
January 2025

Link to study:

<https://www.cadreworks.org/media/6708/download?attachment>



A photograph of yellow school lockers with silver handles. The text 'CADRE's For Districts Webpage' is overlaid on the left side.

# **CADRE's For Districts Webpage**

<https://www.cadeworks.org/for-districts>





<https://www.cadreworks.org/dr-coordination-leadership/building-local-level-capacity>

# **CADRE's Building Local Level Capacity Portal**







<https://www.cadeworks.org/resources/cadre-materials/district-self-assessment-for-collaborative-and-early-dispute-resolution>

## District Self-Assessment for Collaborative & Early Dispute Resolution Processes



## THE DRIVERS & LEVERS of

### SPECIAL EDUCATION LEGAL COSTS

Are you **concerned** with the **increasing** costs of special education legal fees?



**Connect** with Dr. Angie Balsley to **understand** the drivers and **engage** the levers to **lower** special education legal costs



#### Strategic Leadership Objectives

1. **Deepen** understanding of cost drivers
2. **Learn** levers to lower costs
3. **Assess** your current use of levers
4. **Gain** resources to implement levers
5. **Create** an action plan to lower special education legal costs

Target Stakeholders: School leaders, attorneys, insurance brokers



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www.unifiedleadership.org

# Mitigating Legal Risks in Special Ed



# Engage With Conflict

- Work with the issues
- Do so without seeking quick fixes to serious problems
- Resist throwing your hands up and walking away or burying our heads in the sand.
- Develop your capacity to fully engage



# Keep Tending the Garden



# References

Heifetz, R. A., Grashow, A., & Linsky, M. (2009). *The practice of adaptive leadership: Tools and tactics for changing your organization and the world*. Harvard Business Press.

Heifetz, R. A., & Linsky, M. (2002). *Leadership on the line: Staying alive through the dangers of leading*. Harvard Business School Press.

Heifetz, R. A. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Harvard University Press.

