

Actions Speak Louder than Words: How Do Special Education Administrators Prevent and Resolve Conflict with Families?

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Conflict between parents of children with disabilities and school district members has been an ongoing issue for decades. Special education administrators are often designated to address conflict with the intent to find an amicable resolution. Otherwise, conflict can lead to due process hearings that move valuable time and money away from general district funds. Understanding how administrators informally address such conflict can guide leaders as they promote collaboration between the home and school. This paper presents a qualitative interview study of special education directors' experiences with conflict prevention and resolution. Seven key action-based strategies that prevent and resolve conflict with families were identified: establish communication, provide parent support, level the playing field, intervene at the lowest level possible, maintain the focus on the child, find a middle ground, and understand perspectives. Each of these themes is discussed in detail, along with implications for practice and future research.

Keywords: parent-school partnership, conflict prevention, conflict resolution