



NDRN & NASDSE Collaboration Survey Results

Background

In September of 2014, the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) surveyed their members in an effort to better understand the relationship between the state directors of special education and the Protection and Advocacy System (P&As) in the states and territories.

NDRN is the nonprofit membership organization for the federally mandated Protection and Advocacy (P&A) System and the Client Assistance Programs (CAP) for individuals with disabilities. The P&A / CAP Network is in every state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. territories of American Samoa, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, and the Northern Mariana Islands, and affiliated with the Native American Consortium which includes the Hopi, Navajo and Piute Nations in the Four Corners region of the Southwest.

The P&A / CAP Network works to improve the lives of people with disabilities by guarding against abuse; advocating for basic rights; and ensuring accountability in health care, education, employment, housing, transportation, and within the juvenile and criminal justice systems. A central part of the work of the P&As (more than 10,000 individual cases in 2013) has been to advocate for opportunities for students with disabilities to receive a quality education with their peers. Collectively, the P&A/ CAP Network is the largest provider of legally based advocacy services to people with disabilities in the United States.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) is the nonprofit organization that represents the state directors of special education in the states, the District of Columbia, the federal territories, the Freely Associated States and the Department of Defense Education Agency. These individuals have been designated by their state education agency with specific responsibility for directing, coordinating or supervising programs and services for the education of students with disabilities. NASDSE provides services to state agencies to facilitate their efforts to maximize educational outcomes for infants, toddlers, children and youth ages birth-21.

Goals for this joint initiative

NASDSE and NDRN undertook this joint initiative to share with our members the message that 'collaboration is in the best interest of children with disabilities and their families.' Our two organizations have worked together on many national policy issues with none of the friction that we know sometimes exists at the state level. We wanted to share some best practices that are happening at the state level in an effort to encourage collaboration where it might not currently exist.

Survey

Thirty-two P&As and twenty-six state directors of special education responded to the surveys. The results to the survey questions are summarized below. Because different states responded to the survey, the numbers may not match up between the P&A responses and the state director responses.

P&A Response	State Director Response
Overall level of engagement/collaboration No engagement 4 Minimal engagement 11 Some engagement 9 Ongoing engagement 8	Overall level of engagement/collaboration No engagement 1 Minimal engagement 5 Some engagement 10 Ongoing engagement 10
Do you regularly meet with your state director? Yes 9 (29%) No 22 (71%)	Do you regularly meet with your P&A? Yes 10 (38%) No 16 (62%)
How often do you meet? Once a month 0 (0%) Quarterly 3 (17%) Semi-annually 0 (0%) Annually 2 (11%) As needed 7 (39%) Other 6 (33%)	How often do you meet? Once a month 0 (0%) Quarterly 6 (60%) Semi-annually 0 (0%) Annually 2 (20%) As needed 0 (0%) Other 2 (20%)
How would you rate your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of your state director's office? No knowledge 0 (0%) Minimal knowledge 2 (7%) Some knowledge 15 (50%) Very knowledgeable 13 (43%)	How would you rate your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of your P&A entity? No knowledge 1 (3.8%) Minimal knowledge 3 (11.54%) Some knowledge 12 (46.15%) Very knowledgeable 10 (38.46%)
Does a representative of the P&A sit on the state's special education committee? Yes 9 (30%) No 21 (70%)	Does a representative of the P&A participate in your state's special education advisory committee? Yes 10 (40%) No 15 (60%)
Does a representative of the P&A sit on any other boards or commissions? Yes 19 (61.3%) No 12 (38.7%)	Does a representative of the P&A sit on any other boards or commissions? Yes 14 (56%) No 11 (44%)
What types of mechanisms do you use to share information and/or address concerns you might have with actions undertaken by a state director? Pick up the phone and call 7 (22%) Schedule a face-to-face meeting 4 (13%) Schedule a conference call 0 (0%) Email 3 (10%) Other 18 (56%)	What types of mechanisms do you use to share information and/or address concerns you might have with actions undertaken by the P&A? Pick up the phone and call 19 (76%) Schedule a face-to-face meeting 18 (72%) Schedule a conference call 10 (40%) Email 20 (80%) Other 1 (4%)

<p>Does your P&A have a current mechanism for information sharing and referral of individual disputes regarding students with disabilities? Yes 15 (48%) No 16 (52%)</p>	<p>Does your office have a current mechanism for information sharing and referral of individual disputes regarding students with disabilities? Yes 12 (48%) No 13 (52%)</p>
<p>In the past year, has the state director's office presented or attended any trainings or conferences with your P&A? Yes 9 (29%) No 22 (71%)</p>	<p>In the past year, have any staff from your office attended any trainings or conferences jointly with staff from your state's P&A? Yes 9 (35%) No 17 (65%)</p>

Examples of successful collaboration from the P&A survey

- Our P&A collaborated with the Superintendent of Public Instruction in 2014 regarding an overlap between the Department of Health and a local school district. Collaboration has been necessitated by the lack of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two state departments and the ensuing need to coordinate wrap-around services for a child with disabilities. The interactions were positive. With the assistance of the state Superintendent, the local school district provided appropriate school-day services and conducted extensive testing that will assist the child in obtaining appropriate services and further assure that services will be forthcoming from the local school district.
- In conjunction with a local independent living center, we are planning a transition conference for February 2015. Our state director of special education has agreed to speak at the conference.
- Our present special education director is very open to engaging with us. She listens to concerns we raise whether they are voiced in public (e.g. meetings of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - required Special Education Advisory Panel) or via other contact (phone calls, email, etc.). We have also done joint workshops together for parents and school professionals.
- Our state director has signaled a willingness to listen and respond to our concerns. We had a meeting with the special education team at the state and may look to schedule regular meetings. We participate on a state Employment First work group on transition chaired by the state director of special education. At a recent meeting, we were asked to provide a legal summary of transition under the IDEA for the group. We have raised an emerging concern about graduation to the state director's attention. As far as outcomes, I think the most positive ones are that it appears we have an open door to use when the need may arise and we are viewed as a resource.
- For more than 34 years we have worked together on issues, particularly on the Parents Educating Parents program, which provides an in-depth 2 1/2 day training for parents that includes our staff as trainers. We have collaborated to survey how local education agencies (LEAs) implement restraint and staff knowledge of the state statute protecting

persons from restraint. This year we are following up on that survey and providing training to school staff. This effort is strongly supported by our state education agency (SEA). We've had numerous instances in which we were able to resolve a dispute by contacting the director or his staff.

- We have regular contact with our state director via meetings and other conversations. She meets with the P&A on a regular basis, and she meets regularly with the education advocacy coalition I chair. One of her many strengths is her willingness to work with advocates. We have been able to work collaboratively on a number of policy initiatives, and to resolve a number of systemic issues.
- The state special education director ensures that we are an invited member of stakeholder meetings regarding policy changes and regulatory changes. The state does not technically have a state director of special education at this time. That role and responsibility is assigned to an assistant commissioner who also has other responsibilities.
- At the request of the state director and his office, the P&A has participated in several of the state's stakeholder work group initiatives. One initiative is a statewide representative stakeholder committee which includes state and local compliance officers, school system special education directors, special education teachers, and school system and special education attorneys. The purpose of this group is to develop simple, understandable, efficient and legally compliant Individualized Education Program (IEP) forms. Our purpose for participating in these committee and subcommittee meetings is to revise the IEP form in a way that ensures timely and appropriate special education evaluations and services for all special education students, especially for at-risk students with disabilities.
- Our office meets quarterly with the state special education director, the policy person from that division and occasionally others. Discussions include what we see as emerging issues, districts/charter schools where we might see a number of complaints and overall policy concerns (especially during the state legislative session). We often "agree to disagree" but the interactions are not disagreeable. Right now we enjoy a good, respectful, professional relationship with the state office. It was not always that way. Our office has worked hard getting to this point because we firmly believe that it is in the best interest of students with disabilities in our state. There will always be turf battles, disagreements and personality conflicts. We try to let these go as we work on behalf of the students we both should be trying to serve.
- We met with the state director earlier this year to discuss issues of mutual concern. One of our staff serves on the state IDEA advisory council and she regularly interacts with the state director and other members of their team. We regularly attend trainings sponsored by our state department of education and interact with the state director's staff at those meetings.

Examples of successful collaboration from the state director survey

- We have regularly scheduled phone conferences. The P&A serves on our advisory committee and presents to our local special education directors at our annual meeting.
- Our state department of special education has an ongoing open relationship with our P&A.
- I feel that the state department of special education has a positive and proactive relationship with our P&A. We frequently meet and discuss concerns and successes then engage in problem solving to address concerns collaboratively.
- Although there is not always agreement on all issues, a respectful dialogue occurs.
- We work closely with our P&A on advocacy issues.
- We hold quarterly meetings with P&A education staff and SEA leadership team. We develop the agenda collaboratively, review concerns and make plans to address them. We share pertinent national and local reports, legislation and rules with opportunities for input and discussion.
- We conduct joint visits to LEAs.
- We have representation from the P&A on our state's Special Education Advisory Panel.
- We do joint presentations to LEAs and parents.
- We communicate as needed by phone and email.
- Our P&A is serving on our state's Commission on Special Education Access and Equity. The P&A also participates in state work groups and task forces that involve students with disabilities, including a work group on student discipline.
- We meet at the start of every school year to debrief issues from the previous school year and identify key issues of concern for the upcoming year.
- We attend each other's annual conferences.
- We have ongoing conversations as the year progresses on complaints.
- There is a willingness on both sides to compromise and discuss the bigger concerns within complaints. There is open communication concerning certain long-term issues.
- We work together to address policy concerns.

NASDSE/NDRN Joint Webinars

In an effort to highlight best practices between state directors and the P&As, NDRN and NASDSE held two webinars - one on February 26, 2015 and one on March 16, 2015. The first webinar featured two state directors of special education – Glenna Gallo from Utah and Bill Hussey from North Carolina – who highlighted the collaboration in their states between their offices and the P&A agency in their state. The second webinar featured three P&A agencies presenting to the state directors of special education -- Pete Cantrell from South Carolina, Nancy Anderson from Alabama and Randy Chapman from Colorado, who highlighted the ways in which their P&As collaborate with their state’s department of special education.

Each of the presenters highlighted specific collaboration in their states. Below are a few brief highlights from their presentations. Both of these webinars are available on the NDRN website at:

Webcast: Collaborating with your Protection and Advocacy - System Monday March 16, 2015

- [Video](https://taschnow.adobeconnect.com/_a1092097982/p80y3z9ruj0/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal)
(https://taschnow.adobeconnect.com/_a1092097982/p80y3z9ruj0/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal)
- [Powerpoint Presentation](http://www.ndrn.org/images/webcasts/2015/Collaboration-with-PA.pdf) (<http://www.ndrn.org/images/webcasts/2015/Collaboration-with-PA.pdf>)
- [Transcript](http://www.ndrn.org/images/webcasts/2015/Transcript-031615-3PM-Call.pdf) (<http://www.ndrn.org/images/webcasts/2015/Transcript-031615-3PM-Call.pdf>)

Webcast: Collaborating with Your State Director of Special Education Webcast - Thursday February 26, 2015

- [Video](https://taschnow.adobeconnect.com/_a1092097982/p2i37enzahj/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal)
(https://taschnow.adobeconnect.com/_a1092097982/p2i37enzahj/?launcher=false&fcsContent=true&pbMode=normal)
- [Powerpoint Presentation](http://www.ndrn.org/images/webcasts/2015/Collaboration_Initiatives_presentation.pdf)
(http://www.ndrn.org/images/webcasts/2015/Collaboration_Initiatives_presentation.pdf)
- [Transcript](http://www.ndrn.org/images/webcasts/2015/Transcript-Special-Education2-26-15.pdf) (<http://www.ndrn.org/images/webcasts/2015/Transcript-Special-Education2-26-15.pdf>)

Utah

- The P&A staff, education staff and SEA leadership meet quarterly. The agenda is developed collaboratively. The meetings are used to review concerns and plans to address them.
- The two entities share national and local reports and legislation and rules with opportunities for input and discussion.
- P&A and SEA staff make joint visits to local school districts.
- A representative from the P&A sits on the state’s Special Education Advisory Panel.
- P&A and SEA staff do joint presentations.

North Carolina

- P&A and state special education staff hold an annual yearly planning meeting at the start of every school year to debrief issues from the previous year and identify key issues of

concern for the upcoming year. They follow this up with conversations as the year progresses on complaints.

- The P&A is a member of the SEA's stakeholder group and participates on other statewide task forces.
- Representatives from the SEA and the P&A attend each other's annual conferences.
- The P&A will participate in the state's school-based mental health initiative.
- The P&A and the state have ongoing communication about long-term issues (e.g., private residential treatment facilities).

Alabama

- The Alabama P&A and the state department of education conducted joint trainings on relevant topics, including: Alabama's Children's Summit; A Call to Action: Fostering Success through Education, and Preparing for Independence; IEP Transition Planning.
- The collaboration between the Alabama P&A and the state department of education has been successful because of shared priorities around special education, namely: a student focused lens, mutual respect, open lines of communication, and avoiding the big surprises.

Colorado

- The Colorado P&A and the state department of education have collaborated on topical trainings around independent hearing officers/mediators and surrogate parent training.
- The P&A and the state department of education have also collaborated on legislative efforts regarding seclusion and restraint, specifically regarding: rule drafting, data on use of restraint as well as solution-based suggestions.

South Carolina

- The South Carolina P&A is a member of the IDEA Advisory Council. Some joint issues are seclusion and restraint and transition credentials.
- The P&A has made several presentations including at a transition conference, and has sat on a transition panel.
- Some recommendations for collaboration are, invite the P&A, listen to the P&A and recognize differing roles.

Conclusion

It is the hope of NDRN and NASDSE that both the webinars and this document provide an overview of the current collaborative practices between the state directors of special education and the Protection and Advocacy System as well as highlight some current best practices surrounding collaboration. We welcome suggestions and input from all of our members as to how to further this collaboration and what steps our two organizations might take in the future to facilitate collaboration amongst our members.