

# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

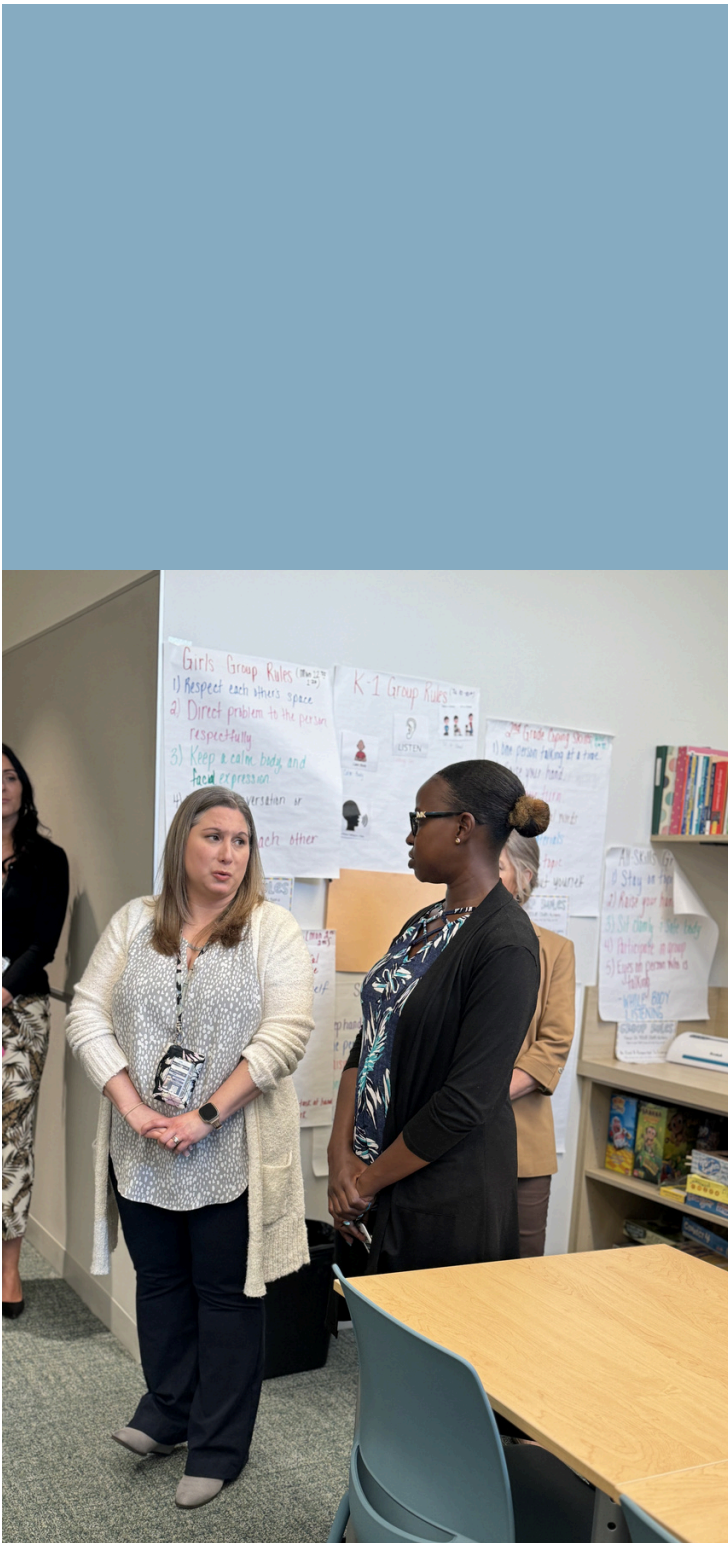
FACILITATED INDIVIDUALIZED  
EDUCATION/504 PROGRAM



# FACILITATED INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION/504 PROGRAM (FIEP)

The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE), with support from the Rhode Island General Assembly, started the Facilitated Individualized Education/504 Program (FIEP) on March 1, 2024. Three (3) experienced education professionals implement the FIEP program. This program is a significant step by RIDE to help Rhode Island families and school districts collaborate more effectively. This program helps schools and families discuss disagreements, clarify misunderstandings, and find common ground on a student's individualized education program (IEP) or 504 Plan. The FIEP program offers a helpful option before families and schools engage in formal ways to resolve disagreements.

The initiative has helped schools and families address disagreements, resolve misunderstandings, and work through different ideas about a student's individualized education programming. The FIEP program has shown promising engagement throughout school districts during its first year.



# FACILITATED IEP/504 MEETINGS

A facilitated IEP/504 meeting uses a neutral third party to help a student's IEP/504 team communicate clearly and fairly, and reach consensus on issues related to the student's IEP/504 plan. These discussions happen during an IEP or 504 meeting. A neutral facilitator guides the team's discussion and relies on the knowledge of the entire IEP team which includes the expertise of the parent(s). Participation in a facilitated IEP/504 meeting is voluntary and both the parent and the school district must agree to using a facilitator. Facilitation is available for all meetings that are part of the IEP process (i.e. Referral, Evaluation/Eligibility, Annual IEP, etc.). IEP/504 meeting facilitation is a free service provided by the Rhode Island Department of Education.

## BENEFITS OF FACILITATED IEP/504 MEETINGS

FIEP is an evidence-based practice that strengthens family-school relationships, leading to mutually satisfying resolutions for disputes. This collaborative approach greatly reduces the need for more formal dispute resolution procedures. A key aspect of this success lies in the modeling of effective communication skills by facilitators to build the capacity of all team members to address conflicts and increase collaboration. The focus of these efforts is on keeping the student at the center of the conversation, ensuring their well-being and academic success are prioritized at all times. This renewed trust and partnership between families and schools can have a positive impact on student outcomes, leading to better attendance, improved test scores, and higher graduation rates<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Henderson, A.T. & Mapp, K.L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Southwest Educational Development Library

# IEP FACILITATED MEETING REQUESTS

From March 1 to June 30, 2024, there were 30 formal requests received. Of the 30 requests, 22 were initiated by parents/guardians and eight were initiated by school districts.

From July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, 99 formal requests were received. Of the 99 requests, 71 were initiated by parents/guardians and 26 were initiated by school districts. One request was received from a non-school counselor, and one was received from the RI Department of Children, Youth, and Families.

Figure 1: Who’s Requesting Facilitation

## WHO’S REQUESTING FACILITATION?

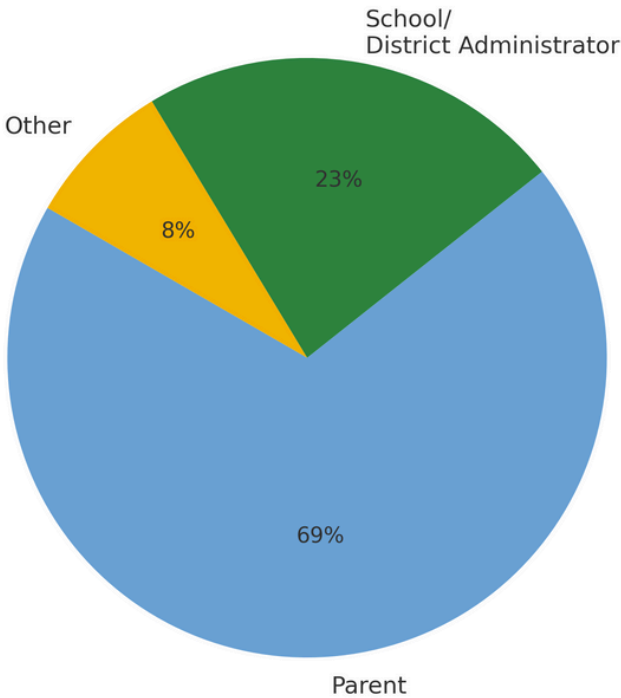
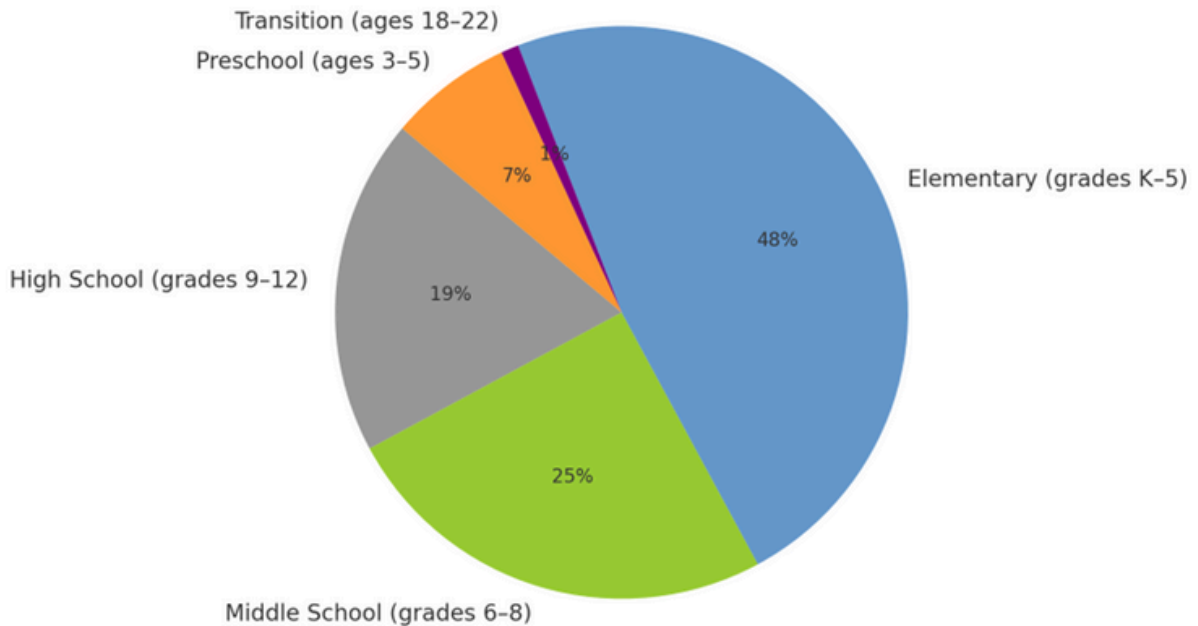


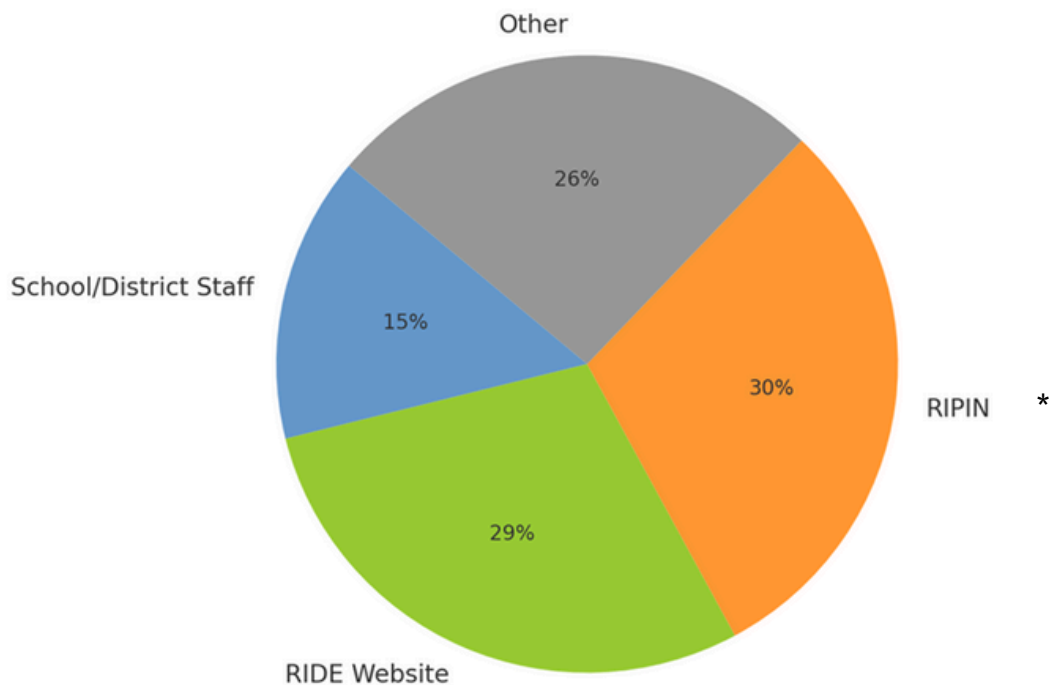
Figure 1 highlights the critical role families play in accessing facilitated meetings and points to opportunities for schools and districts to expand their use of this resource.

**Figure 2:** Grade Level for Facilitation Requests



**Figure 2** suggests that families and schools most often seek facilitation support during the elementary school years, when critical family/school partnerships are forming.

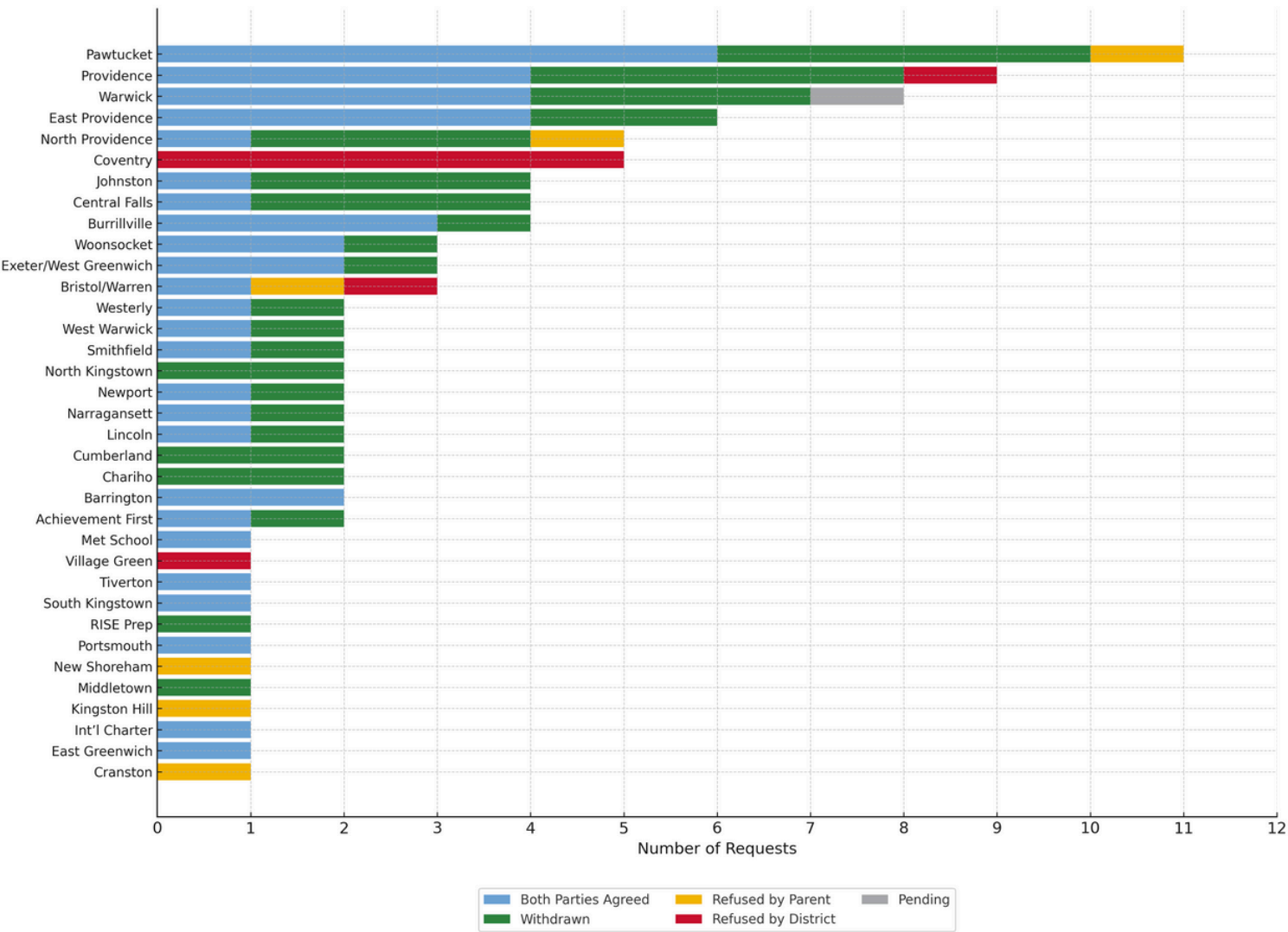
**Figure 3:** How Did You Find Out About the Option for Facilitated IEP/504 Meetings?



**Figure 3** illustrates how stakeholders learned about the option for facilitated IEP/504 meetings in Rhode Island. The data suggests that RIDE's website and RIPIN play a critical role in raising awareness. Examples of "Other" include an internet search, a friend, the child's therapist, or a pediatrician.

\*Formerly known as Rhode Island Parent Information Network

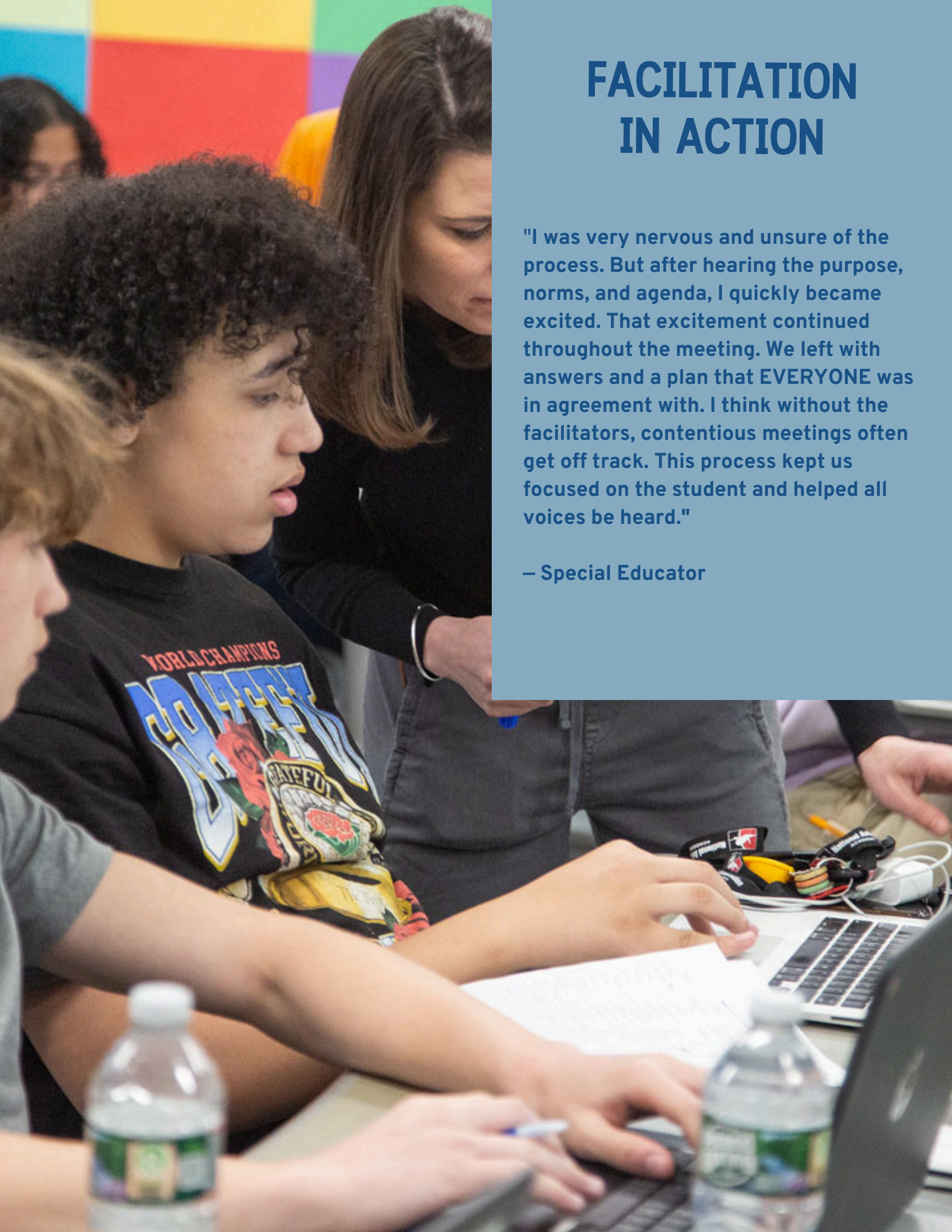
Figure 4: Number of Requests per School District by Status



NUMBER OF  
REQUESTS PER  
SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BY STATUS

Figure 4 illustrates the variation in facilitated IEP request activity across districts. Districts not listed had no requests, while Pawtucket, Providence, and Warwick had the most. Most requests led to both sides agreeing to move forward. Other requests were withdrawn or declined by one side. This data offers valuable insight into how the facilitated IEP process is being accessed. It also shows ways to improve awareness, training, and outreach at the local level.





# FACILITATION IN ACTION

"I was very nervous and unsure of the process. But after hearing the purpose, norms, and agenda, I quickly became excited. That excitement continued throughout the meeting. We left with answers and a plan that **EVERYONE** was in agreement with. I think without the facilitators, contentious meetings often get off track. This process kept us focused on the student and helped all voices be heard."

– Special Educator

## 504 MEETING REQUESTS

From March 1, 2024 to June 30, 2024, there were 4 requests for 504 meeting facilitation. During the full reporting period, from July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, a total of 10 requests were received. This increase reflects growing awareness of and interest in using facilitation to support 504 team discussions.

## OUTCOMES

In 2025, the Rhode Island Department of Education received 99 requests for IEP/504 facilitation. Of these requests, 44 facilitated meetings were held, resulting in full or partial agreement between families and districts. One case remains active and is pending.

Key outcomes among the (remaining) requests:

- 39 were withdrawn, often following informal resolution efforts led by facilitators
- 15 were declined (7 by parents, 8 by districts)

Since the initiative launched on March 1, 2024, a total of 129 facilitation requests have been submitted. 12 percent proceeded to formal dispute resolution:

- 4 followed a facilitated meeting (9%)
- 6 followed a declined invitation to facilitate (40%)
- 4 followed a withdrawal (10%)
- 1 remains pending

These outcomes underscore the growing use of facilitation as a preventative and collaborative process. It helps teams address concerns early, reduce conflict and disagreements, and builds stronger partnerships to support students and their families. Rhode Island's shared commitment to this initiative is advancing collaborative partnerships, elevating parent input and voice, and creating supportive environments where the needs of students are met.



# INFORMATION AND TRAINING

RIDE has created a dedicated webpage to provide direct access to the FIEP/504 request form, along with resources to help parents and school districts prepare for a facilitated meeting.

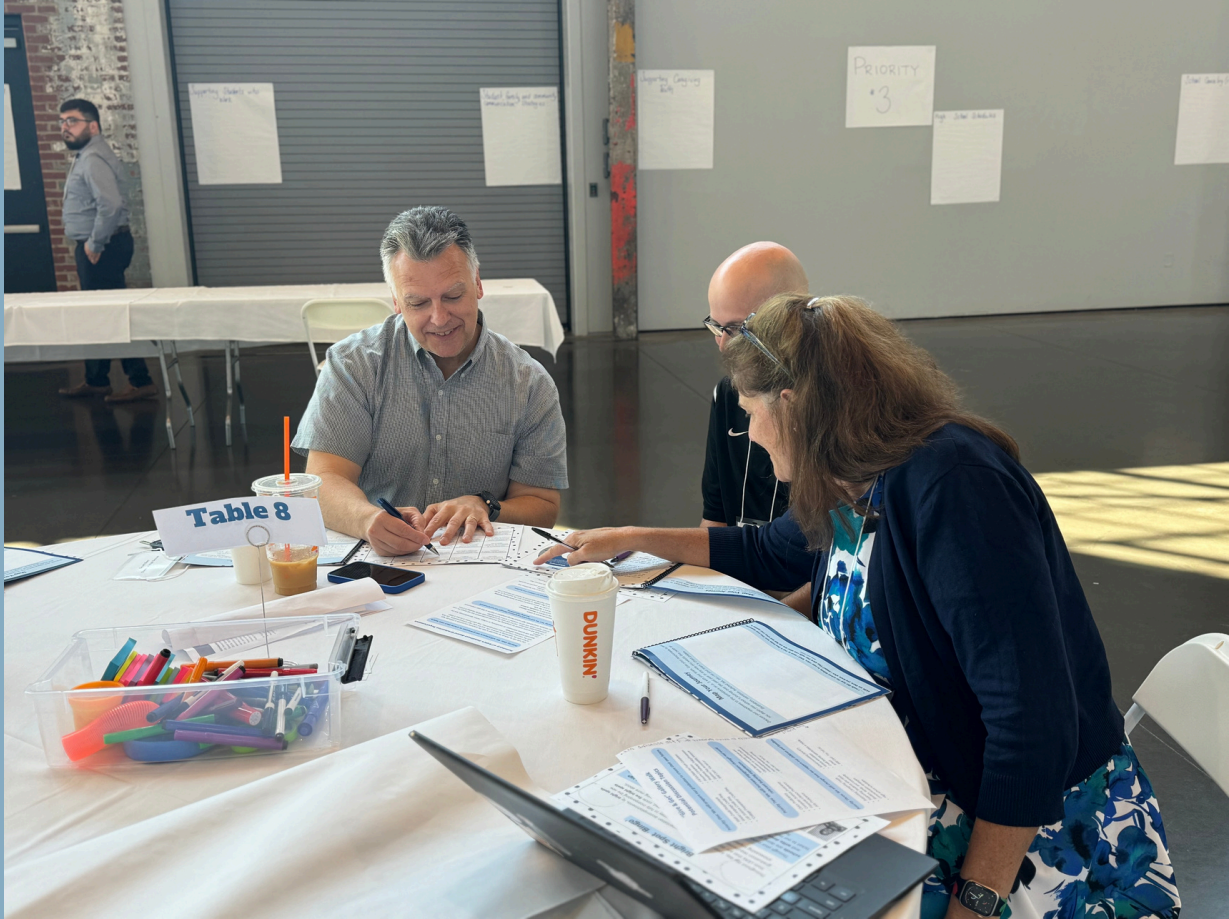
Since the launch of the FIEP/504 program, the RIDE facilitation team has delivered 27 informational presentations to key stakeholders, including members of the Rhode Island General Assembly, the RI Principals Association, and Special Education Administrators (including public schools, charter schools, and state-run schools).

RIDE collaborated with Key2Ed, a nationally recognized technical assistance center for facilitation, to hold four trainings on *Conflict Prevention and Resolution Through IEP Meeting Facilitation*. These sessions supported local education agencies (LEAs) to train district-level IEP/504 facilitators. Participants learned the skills and knowledge to structure meetings more effectively, promote meaningful participation from families and school-level team members, and apply strategies that support stronger collaboration and shared decision-making.

Local level facilitated IEP training continues in partnership with Key2Ed.

RIDE offered IEP/504 stakeholder sessions to build the capacity of team members in understanding and applying facilitative strategies, with a strong emphasis on strengthening family engagement and supporting consensus-based decision-making. Feedback from participants has been consistently positive, highlighting the immediate applicability of collaborative tools and techniques in district practices following the training. As one participant noted, “The strategies were practical and immediately useful—we were able to bring them back to our teams the next day.”





# VOICES FROM THE FIELD

“This was the best meeting I have ever had. The facilitators made a world of difference for my son and family. I finally felt respected by the school, and they listened—because of the facilitation process I walked out hopeful for my son.”

— Parent

“Having sequential steps (Agenda) was so beneficial for our specific situation. In previous meetings, we got bogged down trying to make several decisions at once. The structure made all the difference.”

— Parent

“This process is incredibly valuable—IEP meetings can become emotional, and it’s easy to lose focus on the student. Having objective facilitators present helps keep the conversation centered and supports consensus-building. I appreciated the clear agenda, established norms, and visual indicators of agreement. The facilitators guided the process with skill and professionalism.”

— Special Educator

“This process creates a valuable space for meaningful collaboration between families and school districts. The facilitators guide the team toward solutions that prioritize each student’s individual needs. Ultimately, this approach strengthens partnerships while ensuring that every child receives the individualized support necessary to thrive in their educational journey and supports student success.”

— Assistant Superintendent