

CADRE and JAMS Foundation Present:
Voices from the Field
Interview Clip #1 Transcript – Cindy Swain

Marshall: Cindy, Texas makes a significant investment in complaints investigation and findings. Can you tell us a little bit about that process? I know it produces terrific results.

Cindy: Thank you. I agree - our investigators do a great job. I think I have to tell you a little history of how the process started, if that's alright. In 2003, we had one of the famous Texas legislative budget cuts and our agency suffered a reorganization and along with it, drastic reduction in force. And at that time the complaints investigations were sitting in a very strange place, not really related to special education. And so in the reorganization that got, that got rearranged to the special education division, which was a boon. Unfortunately, the system was broken at that time and so Kathy Clayton, our fearless leader blew it up and said let's start over again. And that's what we did. And so in a very collaborative effort with our legal services, with our monitoring division, with our stakeholders from advocacy groups, and parent groups and school groups we collected information to create a system that would work for everyone. So that system, as it is in place now, involves an investment in that continued collaboration. So on set, our investigators of course collaborate with each other, they collaborate with the specialists in the areas of the issues that come to us under complaints and they collaborate with management and come to decisions at every stage of an investigation. And those decisions are by consensus and they're very, very good at that and it never gets old, it never gets routine. Built into the system are ways to re-up, to re get excited, to figure out how can we do this better. And so that continuous improvement is part of what we do. So that panel process really does help us get excellent results. Now, we know they're excellent results because we get feedback from stakeholders once or twice a year. Those stakeholders include those school district attorneys, the parent attorneys, the advocates in both in the Parent Training and Information system and freelance advocates and of course parents. All of whom, and superintendents and directors, I said school staff but those, we focus in on individuals and groups who have experienced the system within the past year, so we get fresh information every year.