



Maintaining our rights:
when systems fail, we

RISE

SEEK 2025 CONFERENCE

October 26, 2025

The Heritage Hotel & Conference Center, Southbury, CT

seekct.com

HOTEL MAP

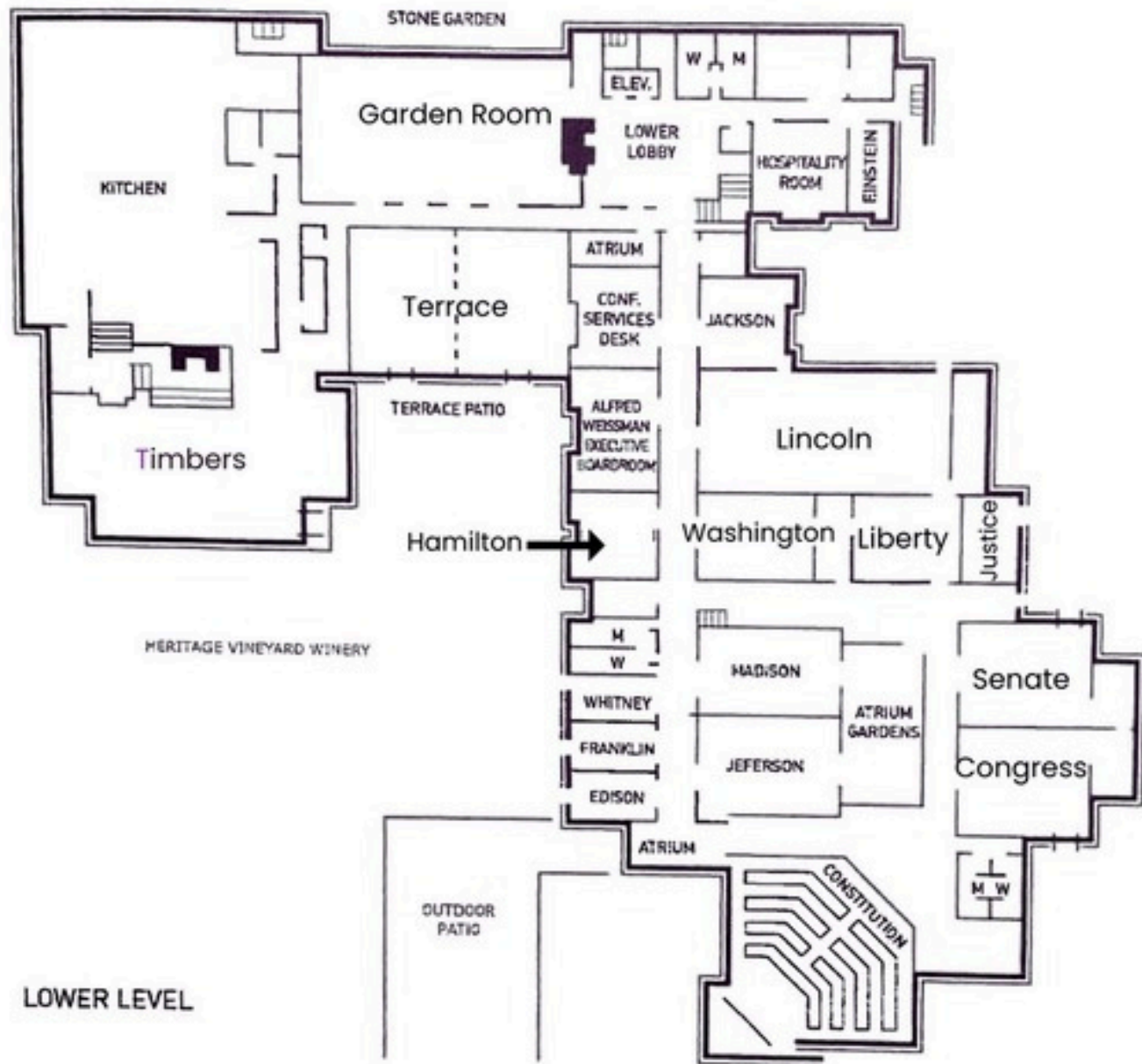


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This conference was made possible by the expertise of our presenters, the leadership of the SEEK Board of Directors, and the tireless dedication of our planning team.



We extend heartfelt thanks to our financial supporters, families, self-advocates, and volunteers whose commitment made today possible.

Thank you for advancing equity and excellence in special education.

SCHEDULE

8:30 AM

Registrants check in
Continental Breakfast and Refreshments
are served in the Terrace Room

9:00 AM - 11:10 AM

Conference Kick-Off
Legislative & Administrative Updates
In the Lincoln Room

11:10 AM - 11:30 AM

Morning Break
Exhibit Hall

11:30 AM - 12:30 PM

Break-Out Sessions
Round A

12:30 PM - 1:55 PM

Buffet Lunch
Keynote Address
Update from the CT State Department of Education
In the Terrace Room & Timbers

2:00 PM - 3:00 PM

Break-Out Sessions
Round B

3:00 PM - 3:30 PM

Afternoon Snacks

3:30 PM - 5:00 PM

General Session with SEEK's Advocacy Committee
In the Lincoln Room

OPENING SCHEDULE (CONFERENCE KICK-OFF)

Opening Remarks by SEEK

Vice President and Conference Chair, NAOMI NOVA

President, JOHN FLANDERS

**Keynote Address from Chief Executive Officer of
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
(COPAA)**

DENISE MARSHALL

**Discussion of Recent Investigations led by the
CT Dept. of Education**

**ANDY FEINSTEIN, Chair of SEEK's Advocacy Committee
MIKE MCKEON, Director of Legal and Government
Affairs for the CT State Dept. of Education**

**Panel Discussion by the
Select Committee on Special Education
of the Connecticut General Assembly**

**Senator Sujata Gadkar-Wilcox, Co-Chair
Representative Maryam Khan, Co-Chair
Representative Tina Courpas, Ranking Member**

BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

Round A

1. **Obtaining and Using District-Paid Independent Educational Evaluations (IEEs): Understanding your Rights and Maximizing Your Advocacy:** Learn when parents can request a public-funded Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE), common pitfalls, and its impact on PPTs, mediation, and due process hearings.

Madison

by: Diane Willcutts and Jennifer Laviano, Esq.

2. **Empowering Futures: Person-Centered Planning Strategies for Parents and Advocates:** Person-Centered Planning: Tools for Meaningful IEPs and Family Advocacy

Hamilton

by: Anamaria Arteaga, Ph.D.

3. **Making the Case: Supporting Speech and Language Needs Through Effective Advocacy:** Workshop on what a good multi-disciplinary evaluation looks like, why it is important, and integrating services across disciplines.

Washington

by: Elizabeth Johnson, M.S., CCC-SLP and Mary Liguori, M.S., CCC-SLP

BREAK-OUT SESSIONS



Round A

4. **Opening the Conversation Around the "T" word: Recognizing How Trauma Impacts Neurodiverse Learners:** Explore how trauma and ACES affect neurodiverse learners and how schools can create safe, supportive learning environments.

by: Chris Abildgaard, NCSP, LPC, NCC

Jefferson
5. **Making Reading Work: Science of Reading in Practice and Advocacy:** Learn how the Science of Reading informs advocacy, giving families and professionals tools to identify effective instruction and advocate for better support.

by: Kristen Viesselman, M.Ed. and Laura Sullivan, Esq.

Liberty
- 6 **Parent Decompression Space**

Justice

BREAK-OUT SESSIONS

Round B

1. **The Anatomy of a Settlement Agreement: Pitfalls and Solutions:** Discussing settlement agreement components, potential issues, and solutions.

by: Meredith Braxton, Esq.

Madison
2. **Insights and Answers from a Special Ed Teacher and Advocate:** What Every Parent Needs to Know. Join an interactive workshop offering practical strategies, emotional support, and empowering insights to navigate IEPs, student needs, and school collaboration with confidence.

by: Robin Fox, M.Ed. and Julie Swanson

Liberty
3. **Challenging Behavior Is Not a Crime: Protecting Students' Rights to Functional Behavior Assessments and Intervention Plans:** Challenging behavior signals unmet needs, not wrongdoing. Learn how Functional Behavior Assessments and Intervention Plans safeguard students' right to individualized support.

by: Molly Yordon, BCBA

Jefferson

BREAK-OUT SESSIONS



Round B

4. **Executive Functions: Developmental Factors, Emotion Regulation, and Stress and Practical Intervention:** Executive Functions, Emotion Regulation, and Stress: Practical Solutions for Everyday Challenges

Hamilton

by: Christopher Bogart, Ph.D
5. **Navigating Adult Services and DDS Eligibility:** This presentation provides an introduction to the DDS Children's Services Division, explains who they serve, and provides an overview of the DDS' Children's Services In-Home Support Program, including its eligibility criteria.

Washington

by: Sylvia Murray, MPP
and Kendall Fenton, Ed.D., LCSW
6. **Parent Decompression Session**

Justice

Meet Our Legislative Panel:



Select Committee on Special Education



Senator Sujata
Gadkar-Wilcox,
Co-Chair



Rep. Maryam
Khan,
Co-Chair



Rep. Tina
Courpas,
Ranking Member



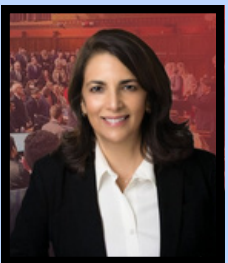
Senator Gadkar-Wilcox is Senator-Elect for Senate District 22 in the Connecticut General Assembly, representing Bridgeport, Trumbull, and Monroe. She will serve as the chair of the new Government Oversight Committee, the Regulations Review Committee, and a Select Committee on Special Education. She will also serve as Vice Chair of the Judiciary Committee and the Higher Education and Employment Committee.

Sujata is also Professor of Legal Studies at Quinnipiac University, where she teaches classes in constitutional law, comparative law, and human rights law, among other subjects. She is the Executive Director of the Oxford Consortium for Human Rights and a Fulbright-Nehru Scholar.



Representative Khan Maryam Khan was elected during a 2022 special election in March to represent the 5th District, serving Hartford and Windsor, and is the first Muslim member of the Connecticut House, a historic triumph. In November 2022, she was re-elected to serve her first full legislative term which now includes South Windsor. Rep. Khan currently serves as the House Chair of the Select Committee on Special

Education and as a member of the Appropriations, Education, and Judiciary Committees.



Representative Courpas was elected in 2024 to represent the 149th District, serving Greenwich and Stamford. She has over 20 years of experience in investment banking and corporate law, including roles at Goldman, Sachs & Co. and Silver Point Capital. She later led two nonprofits: The Hellenic Initiative and Connecticut's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. In the 2025 session, she serves on the Appropriations,

Education, and Housing committees, as well as the Select Committee on Special Education. Rep. Courpas is deeply committed to issues affecting education, women's rights, fiscal responsibility, and strong local governance.

Meet Our Keynote Speakers:



Denise Stile Marshall, M.S.
Chief Executive Officer,
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates

Denise has led the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) since 2005. She graduated from Johns Hopkins University with a Master of Science in Applied Behavioral Science.

Denise has over 40 years' experience in the field of disabilities in a variety of support, management, and advocacy capacities. She has a wealth of non-profit association management experience and is a dynamic trainer, experienced in leading sessions for participants of diverse abilities and experience levels. Denise's specific areas of interest are civil rights to quality education, positive behavioral supports, prevention and reduction in the use of restraints, abolishment of seclusion and aversive techniques, family supports, grassroots advocacy, self-advocacy, and experiential learning.

copaa.org

Meet Our Keynote Speakers:



Christopher Mattei, Esq.

Trial Attorney

Koskoff Koskoff & Bieder PC

Chris is widely regarded as one of the nation's premier trial attorneys. A highly effective courtroom advocate, Chris has been called upon to handle some of the highest profile trials in the country, including serving as lead

counsel for Sandy Hook families in their defamation lawsuit against far-right media personality, Alex Jones. That trial culminated in a \$1.4 billion jury verdict, the largest defamation verdict in American history and the largest verdict of any kind in Connecticut history. Chris represents victims of defamation, medical negligence, sexual abuse, and civil rights violations. He also has an extensive pro bono practice. Described by one New York Times reporter as an "incredible powerhouse lawyer," Chris often appears in major media outlets, including MSNBC, CNN, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post, to offer legal commentary concerning the rule of law. **koskoff.com**

Meet our Guest Speakers from the CT State Department of Education



Mike McKeon, Esq.

Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs, CT State Dept. of Education

Mike McKeon has served as the Connecticut State Department of Education Director of Legal and Government Affairs since 2021. Prior to accepting that role, he had specialized in education law for over 30 years, representing both public school districts and private schools across Connecticut before administrative agencies and in both federal and state courts on the trial and appellate levels, establishing new case law in the areas of special education and Title IX. Mike has also spoken on education and employment law, including on the national level, at annual conferences for the National School Boards Association and the Council of School Attorneys.



Bryan Klimkiewicz

State Director of Special Education, CT State Dept. of Education

Bryan Klimkiewicz began his job as Special Education Division Director in Connecticut in 2017. He serves on the CT State Advisory Council for Special Education. Bryan believes the best part about leading special education in Connecticut is having the opportunity to support students across the state in achieving positive and successful outcomes throughout their educational journey.

Meet Our SEEK Advocacy Panel:



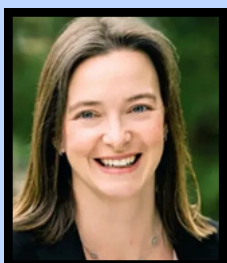
Andy Feinstein has protected the rights of students with disabilities and their families for the past 25 years, first in Hartford with David C. Shaw, then as a solo practitioner in Mystic, Connecticut, and, since 2015, as the owner of Feinstein Education Law Group, LLC. He serves as co-chair of the Government Relations Committee for the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA) and as a Board member, Treasurer, and Advocacy Chair for SEEK. Andy graduated from the New York University School of Law in 1975. He completed the Senior Manager in Government Program at the Kennedy School, Harvard University, in 1983. He has served as a professional staff member of the House Committee on Armed Services and Chief Counsel of the House Civil Service Subcommittee. **attorneyfeinstein.com**



John Flanders is an attorney representing families in special education matters. He is a founding member, president, and member of the Advocacy Committee of SEEK. He was the Executive Director of Connecticut's Parent Training and Information Center and the Children's Rights Advocate for the A.G. Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. He has served on the Connecticut Council on Developmental Disabilities, the State Advisory Committee on Special Education, and the State Board of Education Task Force. He is a member and Chair of the Connecticut Association of School-Based Health Center's Advocacy Committee. **[Law Offices of John M Flanders](#)**



Naomi Nova is a special education attorney for children with disabilities. She has a special focus on exclusionary discipline, including the use of restraint, seclusion, suspensions, and expulsions on schoolchildren. Naomi has testified before the Connecticut General Assembly on various special education matters, and in support of legislation to limit the use of restraint and ban the use of seclusion. Naomi graduated from Case Western Reserve University School of Law in 2007. She is the Vice President and Conference Chair of SEEK. **braxton-law.com**



Stacey Tie is a professional Non-Attorney Special Education Advocate, and founder of Whole Child Advocates. Stacey is the newest member of SEEK's Advocacy Committee, and has testified on critical issues impacting students with disabilities. She has completed 60+ hours of training in Orton Gillingham. Stacey has an associate's degree in Theater from the American Musical and Dramatic Academy and a Bachelor in Business Finance from Pace University. **stacey@wholechildadvocates.com**

Meet Our Presenters:

Diane Wilcutts and Jennifer Laviano * District-Paid IEEs: Rights & Advocacy



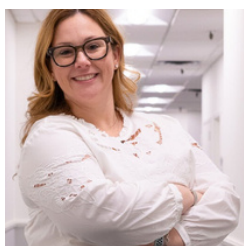
For the past 22 years, Diane Wilcutts has provided advocacy services for Connecticut families of children with disabilities. She has previously served as the President of the Learning Disabilities Association of Connecticut and as an instructor for the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates' (COPAA) renowned Special Education Advocate Training (SEAT). Diane is a graduate student in Bay Path University's

Reading and Literacy Instruction Program. **educationadvocacyllc.com**



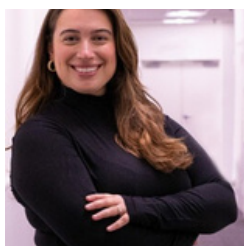
Attorney Laviano has dedicated her law practice entirely to the representation of children and adolescents with disabilities whose families are in disagreement with their public school districts. Her representation of children with special needs encompasses the full spectrum of Civil Rights advocacy under the IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), from attendance at IEP Team meetings and Mediation, to zealous and experienced litigation in Due Process Hearings and Federal Court. **lavianoandgagne.com**

Elizabeth Johnson and Mary Liguori * Advocating for Speech & Language



Elizabeth Johnson, M.S., CCC-SLP, is an experienced Speech-Language Pathologist with a focus on neurodevelopment, motor speech, and pediatric feeding disorders. She has worked across medical and educational settings, creating individualized, family-centered therapy programs. Elizabeth is certified in PROMPT Level II, NDT, and multiple feeding and apraxia approaches. She brings warmth, expertise, and a collaborative spirit to her advocacy for children and their communication needs.

essentialpeds.com



Mary Liguori, M.S., CCC-SLP, is a licensed Speech-Language Pathologist in NY and CT with a passion for supporting neuro-divergent learners. Specializing in language based learning differences, executive functioning, and social communication, Mary uses a neurodiversity affirming, trauma-informed approach to empower children with self-awareness and confidence. She is a lecturer at Adelphi University. Mary believes that learning should be joyful, individualized, and rooted in connection.

essentialpeds.com

Dr. Chris Abildgaard * Trauma and Its Impact on Neurodiverse Learners



Chris earned his Doctor of Education in School Psychology from Loyola University Chicago, is a Nationally Certified School Psychologist & a Licensed Professional Counselor with a specialization in Autism Spectrum Disorders and Neurodiverse learners. Along with being a Visiting Assistant Professor & Jackie McLean Fellow in the Department of Psychology at the University of Hartford, Chris the owner and director of the Social Learning Center (SLC), LLC. located in Cheshire, CT. **sociallearningcenter.org**

Robin Fox and Julie Swanson * Special Ed Q&A: Essential Parent Tips



Robin Fox, M.Ed., is a Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) specialist, trauma-informed educator, speaker, and improv actor with 40 years in education. She partners with CT agencies and schools. Robin is the lead author of federally funded project, Trust Talk for Teens: lesson plans that feature videos of teens teaching teens about brain science, responsible decision making, and secure gun storage. Her book, SocialEyes Together®, blends improv, mindfulness, and social cognition. **social-eyes.org**



Julie Swanson is a nationally recognized special education advocate with 20+ years of experience helping families secure services for children with disabilities. A parent of a child with autism, she co-authored Your Special Education Rights and The IEP Guide for All. Julie is the founding president of SEEK and a trained member of COPAA. **jsadvocacy.com** and **lifeskillslady.com**

Meredith Braxton * Settlement Agreements



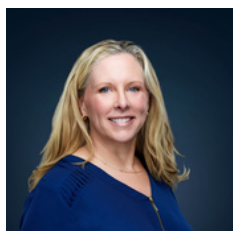
Meredith has spent the last 20 years in education law. After practicing general and business litigation in New York City's "big law" firms and two smaller Connecticut firms, she launched a solo practice representing students and parents in securing civil rights protections. She helps families ensure proper identification, access to services, and appropriate educational placements through PPT meetings, negotiation, administrative hearings, or federal court appeals. Her office is located in Greenwich, CT. **braxton-law.com**

Kristen Viesselman and Laura Sullivan * Reading



Kristen Viesselman is a literacy specialist with over twenty years of experience in conducting reading evaluations and working with students who have language-based learning differences, such as dyslexia. Kristen has extensive training and experience in implementing evidence-based multisensory Structured Literacy programs. She earned her M.A. in Special Education from the University of Connecticut and holds her Connecticut State Department of Education Certification. Additionally, she is an Associate Member of the Academy of Orton Gillingham Practitioners and Educators. She previously worked for Literacy How, Inc., Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes, and Westport Public Schools. She has provided professional development to teachers on topics such as reading assessment, progress monitoring, and Structured Literacy. She has also provided teacher training in each of the Lindamood-Bell programs.

kristen@readingachievementsolutions.com



Attorney Laura Sullivan proudly practices as a special education attorney, representing children and adolescents with disabilities who are not receiving appropriate services from their public school district in Connecticut. She began practicing in this area after experiencing the advocacy process as a parent through her son. She recently closed her private practice to take a position with Special Education Legal Fund.

(S.E.L.F.) as their first Staff Attorney, to lead S.E.L.F. Legal Aid—a newly formed legal aid program created to expand access to legal advocacy for under-resourced families navigating the special education system. In an effort to advocate effectively for the increasing number of dyslexia cases that came to her, Laura completed 60+ hours of training in OG Plus, an IDA-approved program. **spedlegalfund.org**

Molly Yordon * Challenging Behaviors



Molly is a Senior Board Certified Behavior Analyst at The Hangout Spot who specializes in supporting clients with complex behaviors. After earning her Bachelor's in Psychology from UConn, she began her career in a private special education school, where she developed a passion for helping children and families. She later pursued her Master's in ABA and is a talented, empathetic clinician dedicated to

creating a collaborative, supportive experience for all. **thehangoutspotllc.com**

Dr. Christopher Bogart * Executive Functions



Dr. Christopher Bogart is a licensed clinical psychologist who has worked in both the private and public sectors for the past thirty years. Dr. Bogart works with children, adolescents and parents, conducting comprehensive psychoeducational and AD/HD evaluations as well as therapy services. Dr. Bogart serves as Executive Director at Sasco River Center. Dr. Bogart received his undergraduate training at Georgetown University and received his doctoral degree from The American University. **sascoriver.com**

Sylvia Murray and Kendall Fenton * Adult Services



Sylvia Murray, MPP is the Durational Project Manager for the Children's Services Division. Projects includes the creation and implementation of policies for the new division, along with supporting community outreach. Sylvia holds a Master's degree Public Policy and a Bachelor's degree in Human Development and Family Science from UConn.



Dr. Kendall Fenton, Ed.D., LCSW, is an Education Services Specialist with the DDS Children's Services Division. Her professional background in school social work centered on advancing social and emotional learning in educational settings.

Anamaria Arteaga, Ph.D. * Person-Centered Planning



Anamaria Arteaga, Ph.D., serves as the Vice President of Educational and Clinical Programs at Futures School, a state-approved special education program for students aged 14–22. In her role, she provides clinical leadership, oversees educational programming, and supports the social-emotional and academic growth of students with diverse needs. **futures-ct.org**

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Hubbard Day is proud to support SEEK CT and congratulates them on the important work they do for Connecticut communities with disabilities and differences, including neurological differences! Hubbard Day is an alternative special education school located in Stamford, Connecticut and is part of a consortium of several such schools around the country that serve children with Autism and related neurological differences.

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Julie Swanson, Special Education Advocate



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Stacey Tie

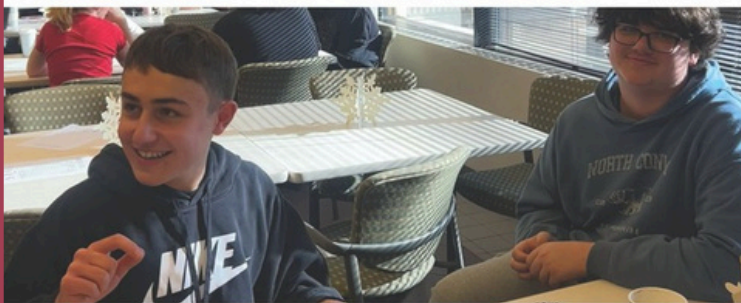
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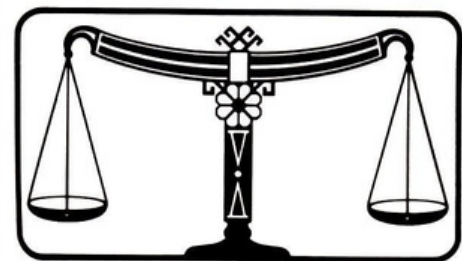
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schoolstatefinance.org



Connecticut Center for Psychological Services

Email: Support@CTPsychServices.com

Phone: (203) 364-4998

Address: 25 Church Hill Rd, Newtown, CT

ctpsychservices.com



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