

Webinar Presenters Biographies

Selene A. Almazan is the Director of Advocacy Services and Co-Director of the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education (MCIE), a non-profit organization founded in 1989. For the last fourteen years, Selene has represented parents in special education matters with a primary focus on least restrictive environment issues at the MCIE. As the Director of Advocacy Services, she directs the only legal services project devoted solely to the issue of least restrictive environment in the country. The Advocacy Project has represented over 1900 individual students in the last fifteen years throughout the state of Maryland. Selene represents families at IEP team meetings, state complaint proceedings, mediations, due process hearings, suspension/expulsion proceedings and federal court proceedings, including matters involving violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Selene is a former Supervising Attorney for the Legal Aid Bureau of Maryland where she represented children in the foster care system, including representation in special education matters. She has extensive experience training families, teachers, school administrators, attorneys and advocates on legal issues related to special education law as well as disability discrimination issues. Selene is a member of COPAA and TASH. She was Chair of the Board of Directors for COPAA for 2006-2007 and is currently the Treasurer of the COPAA Board and Co-Chair of the COPAA Amicus Committee.

Matthew D. Cohen is co-founder of the firm Monahan and Cohen and is well known for his work in special education law and has extensive experience in health care and mental health law. He has been the principal litigator in a number of important special education cases, most notably the Max M. v. Thompson, Lavon M. v. Turlington, McManus v. School Dist. 39, Joey T. v. Azcoitia, District 130 v. ISBE and Cara B. cases. He is the primary or collaborating author of several amendments to the mental health and special education laws of Illinois. In 1997, he was invited to the White House to participate in the signing ceremony for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, in recognition of his participation in the process leading to passage of that legislation. Mr. Cohen has lectured nationally on a wide variety of topics, including special education and mental health and confidentiality law and has authored numerous articles on these subjects. He has represented or consulted with hospitals, residential treatment centers, community mental health centers, agencies, police social workers and private health care, social services and education practitioners. Mr. Cohen is an adjunct professor of law at Loyola University Law School. He also is a founding and current Board member of the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, (COPAA), most important, Matt is an outstanding and passionate advocate for children.

Barbara J. Ebenstein ("BJ") is a parent and an attorney with a private special education practice. BJ also serves as an impartial hearing officer in New York City and Long Island, and as a Vocational Rehabilitation hearing officer. She is an adjunct associate professor at New York University. BJ served on the Disability Policy Committee of the presidential campaign of Barack Obama, and she served as a surrogate speaking on disability issues on behalf of the campaign. BJ has extensive experience conducting trainings for attorneys, parents, and advocates from Hawaii to New Hampshire. BJ served as Chair of COPAA from 2005 to 2006, was the lead instructor of the NY pilot site of SEAT, and she is an attorney skills trainer. Barbara J. Ebenstein holds a J.D. from Pace University Law School, a M.A. from Teachers College of Columbia University, and a B.A. cum laude from Boston University.

Matthew Engel is a Senior Attorney with the Disability Law Center in Northampton, MA, where he has worked for the past 23 years. The majority of his practice focuses on the rights of children with disabilities, with an emphasis on school discipline issues. He is also a frequent presenter at conferences and workshops on education law.

Charles P. Fox has been practicing as a special education attorney since 1994. He is also a parent of a 17 year old child with special needs. He is a former law professor at DePaul Law School where he taught at the newly established Special Education Law Clinic.

Judith Gran is a cum laude graduate of Temple University School of Law where she was a staff member of the Temple Law Quarterly. She holds an A.B. with honors from Wellesley College and an A.M. from the University of Chicago in political science. She was awarded a Fulbright-Hayes fellowship for research in Egypt and she was a National Defense Title IV and Title VI fellow. Judith worked for PILCOP from 1984 -2009 and is currently in private practice and is a Partner, Reisman Carolla Gran LLP. Judith has devoted her legal career to representing persons with disabilities and their organizations in litigation, and COPAA is extremely appreciative of Judith's time and expertise in presenting the Annual Case Law Review each year. Judith is a founding and past Board member of COPAA and currently serves on the Governmental Affairs Committee.

Ron Hager is a senior staff attorney at the National Disability Rights Network. In that position, Ron provides technical assistance and training to the Protection and Advocacy programs throughout the country on special education issues. He has specialized in disability law, particularly special education, since 1979, when he started his legal career in Buffalo as a VISTA attorney. After that, he was a Clinical Professor at the State University of New York at Buffalo Law School for nine years, supervising the Education Law Clinic

Elaine Holden, Ph.D. Fellow of the [Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators](#), Dr. Holden has worked as a specialist, consultant, college professor, and supervisor in the area of reading for over thirty years. As the author of numerous articles, contributor to language texts and evaluation tools, as well as a noted speaker at educational conferences for over twenty years, Dr. Holden brings a wealth of professional knowledge to the Foundation. Dr. Holden has been a reading specialist/consultant in the New England area for over 30 years. Currently she directs the tutorials for The Reading Foundation, is a professor in the Graduate School of Education at Rivier College, Nashua, New Hampshire, evaluates children both privately and for school districts in the area of reading and related language disorders, and sits on the governing boards for the Associate of Specialists in the Assessment of Intellectual Functioning (ASAIF). She is also a member of the New Hampshire board of directors of The International Dyslexia Association, and is the only Orton-Gillingham Academy Fellow in the State of New Hampshire. Elaine lives with her 99 year old mother and 5 spoiled cats of varying temperament, in Peterborough, New Hampshire, where she also keeps her antique cars, 18 foot sailboat, and several thousand books.

Melissa Farrall, Ph.D. Dr. Farrall presently works as an independent evaluator through her business, Mind Matters, Inc. She was one of the founding directors of The Reading Foundation in Amherst, New Hampshire. She has always had a strong interest in language, and she has taught computers how to read and talk, provided specialized instruction in the public schools, and taught graduate level courses in language, reading, cognition, and at Rivier College. Dr. Farrall currently teaches the structure of language at Simmons College in Boston, MA. She received her doctorate from Brown University in 1981 in the area of Slavic Linguistics, and her Master's Degree from Rivier College in Learning Disabilities in 1994, and her certification as a Specialist in the Assessment of Intellectual Functioning in 1999. Melissa has served on the Board of Directors for the New Hampshire Branch of the International Dyslexia Association for several years. Dr. Farrall lives in Merrimack, New Hampshire with her husband and two children, one of whom has a reading disability.

Sonja Kerr Sonja brings more than 20 years of national disabilities rights litigation expertise to her current position as the **Director, Disabilities Rights Project at PILCOP**. She currently is on the Board of Directors, and was the first chair, of COPAA. Sonja has litigated special education cases in several different states, including Minnesota, Indiana and Alaska, gaining a national reputation with groundbreaking litigation on behalf of children with disabilities. Her accomplishments include litigating the first special education cases on an Indian reservation in Minnesota and in what is known as "The Bush" in Alaska - communities which are off the road system and may only be accessed by plane or dogsled. Before joining the Law Center she started the first private practice firms in both Alaska and Minnesota to exclusively serve individuals with disabilities, and litigated many of the first special education cases in both regions and throughout the Midwest. Ms. Kerr is a *Summa Cum Laude* graduate

of Northwest Nazarene College in Idaho, and she received a Masters in Counseling Psychology from Purdue University and J.D. from Indiana University School of Law. Prior to law school she was a social worker for United Cerebral Palsy of Indiana, and other disability organizations in the Midwest. Ms. Kerr is admitted to practice in Minnesota (non-active by choice), Indiana, Alaska and most recently, Pennsylvania. She is also admitted to the 9th, 8th, and 7th circuit courts of appeals and the United States Supreme Court as well as various federal district courts in those circuits.

Joshua M. Kershenbaum, Esq. is a founding member of Frankel & Kershenbaum, LLC in West Conshohocken, PA, where he practices special education law. Josh trains parents, attorneys, and support professionals in special education law and advocacy, and co-teaches the Special Education Law seminar at Temple University's Beasley School of Law. He is a member of the Pennsylvania Bar Association's Legal Services for Exceptional Children Committee, an active member on children's issues for the Montgomery County Bar Association, and a legal content contributor to MetroKids magazine. Prior to starting his own practice, Josh was an attorney at Montgomery McCracken in Philadelphia, where he worked with Catherine Merino Reisman in the Special Education Practice Group and Litigation Department. While an evening student at Temple Law School, Josh worked during the day as an advocate at the Pennsylvania Health Law Project in Philadelphia, where he represented children with special needs in grievances with their Medicaid HMOs. Before going to law school, Josh was a classroom teacher at a public elementary school in Newton, MA. He earned his teaching certification from the Shady Hill School in Cambridge, Massachusetts and his B.A. from Amherst College. He is licensed to practice in Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

Catherine Merino Reisman, Esq. is a founding partner of Reisman Carolla Gran LLP, a firm that specializes in litigation and advice related to special education. She serves on COPAA's Board of Directors as its Vice Chair, is Co-Chair of the Amicus Committee and a member of the Governmental Relations Committee. She is a Parent Representative to the Program Advisory Board of the New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education. Prior to starting her own practice, Ms. Merino Reisman was the co-chair of the Special Education Practice Group at Montgomery McCracken in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She graduated from Yale Law School and received her B.A. from New York University. Ms. Merino Reisman, who is also the mother of a child with special education needs, speaks regularly to parent and attorney groups on special education law. She is licensed to practice in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Jodi Siegel has been an attorney with Southern Legal Counsel, Inc. ("SLC"), a non-profit public interest law firm, since 1985, and became its Executive Director in July 2004. A predominant portion of her responsibilities at SLC is in representing individuals with disabilities in a variety of forums. She has litigated class and individual actions involving federal constitutional and statutory actions under the Federal Civil Rights Act, the Federal Rehabilitation Act and the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act. She also has presented extensively to various groups on special education and other issues. She is a member of The Florida Bar, the U.S. Middle, Northern and Southern Districts of Florida, and the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. She is a Past Chair of the Board of Directors and currently Treasurer of The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA). She coordinated the 2003 and 2004 national conferences for COPAA. She is an Adjunct Professor for Nova Southeastern University's Shepard Broad Law Center where she teaches a Masters Level program in Special Education Law. She has been the Director of SLC's Special Education Advocacy Project since 1999, which is funded by the Florida Bar Foundation to provide state support and train, support, mentor and co-counsel legal service/aid lawyers and advocates to increase and improve special education advocacy. She is a Past Chair of The Florida Bar Public Interest Law Section and a member of the Section's Legal Needs of Children Committee.

Jon Zimring's practice focuses on education law, special education and civil rights. Mr. Zimring is a 1974 graduate of Duke University School of Law. He began his practice as Special Counsel at Dorothea Dix Hospital, Raleigh, N.C. In 1976, he began as education law and mental health law specialist with the Georgia Legal Services Program and was Director of the Georgia Mental Disability Law Project, a program funded by the ABA Commission on Mental

Disability. Since 1982, he has been in the private practice of law. He has served as chairman of the State Bar of Georgia Mental Health and the Law Committee, the ABA/Younger Lawyer's Section on the Law and the Handicapped, and Chairman of the School and College Law Section of the State Bar of Georgia. He has lectured in numerous Continuing Legal Education programs for judges, attorneys and for educators on educational rights, special education and civil rights issues. He served as guardian ad litem in *Olmstead v. L.C. and E.W. ex rel Zimring*, 527 U.S.581 (1999) which established the definition of discrimination under the ADA. He is President of the board of PEPP, Inc., the Parent Training Information Center for Georgia under IDEA and currently on the Board of COPAA.