

## **Bureau of Special Education Mediators**

**Christine Barrington** received her B.A. and M.P.A. from the University of Rhode Island and her J.D. from the University of Massachusetts School of Law. After graduating, she practiced as a criminal defense attorney in Boston before relocating to Connecticut and opening a private general practice which included special appointments from both the Connecticut and Massachusetts Department of Education to ensure disabled children who are wards of the state have their educational rights protected. She also serves as the Director of the Paralegal Program at Branford Hall Career Institute. Additionally, Attorney Barrington volunteers as a Guardian Ad Litem for Children in Placement and has volunteered as a collaborating attorney with the New Britain Truancy Intervention Project and Lawyers for Children America. She also served on the RIPIN Advisory Board committee for USDOE PIRC Grand Administration.

**Karen Damboise** earned her undergraduate degree from Merrimack College and her law degree from Widener University School of Law. In 2005, Attorney Damboise founded the Damboise Law Offices in Andover, CT with a focus on child protection. She represents children, parents, grandparents, guardians and foster parents and serves as Guardian Ad Litem in all phases of child protection petitions in the juvenile court. From October 2009 through September 2011, Attorney Damboise served as the Court Liaison to the Office of the Chief Child Protection Attorney.

**Kirsten Dovenberg** graduated with a B.A. from American University, a Masters in Teaching from Trinity College, and a J.D. from Suffolk University Law School. Attorney Dovenberg has taught middle school History and adult English as a second language. She has also served as a special education consultant, a special education attorney, a non-profit special education case manager, and Massachusetts Department of Education Bureau of Special Education Appeals employee. Attorney Dovenberg has completed courses in alternative dispute resolution, the Stadler mediation training and the Wrightslaw Special Education Law seminar.

**Cynthia Gilchrest** began her career as a special education teacher: she taught for 8 years at every grade level and has teaching experience with all disabilities. She was a special education administrator for over 25 years serving as High School Special Education Coordinator in the Newtown and Westport Public Schools for 8 years; Westport Public Schools Preschool Special Education Coordinator for 1 year; Westport Public Schools Director of Pupil Services for 14 years and Westport Public Schools Director of Elementary Education for 3 years. Since retiring, Ms. Gilchrest has been a Special Education Consultant to several Connecticut school districts as well as an adjunct professor in special education at Fairfield University. She currently serves on the National Board for the Certification of School Nurses.

**Howard Klebanoff** graduated from Yale University and the University of Connecticut Law School. Upon graduation he worked as an attorney at the United States Department of Labor in the Kennedy administration. After moving to Hartford, he was elected to the Connecticut Legislature, and, as House Chairman of the Education Committee, sponsored Connecticut's first comprehensive special education laws. He also served on the legislative section of the regulation drafting committee for the federal special education law, 94-142. After leaving elective office, he served as Counsel to the Connecticut House of Representatives and was the first Chair of the Connecticut Board of Higher Education. Attorney Klebanoff has practiced in the area of education law for more than 40 years and has used alternative dispute resolution most successfully. For his work in the area of education law, he has been listed in Best Lawyers in America; US News and World Report; Super Lawyers, which published a cover story about his mediation skills; and Connecticut Magazine's top lawyers in Connecticut. He also received a Martindale-Hubbell commendation for 25 years of the highest peer

review rating in legal ability and ethical standards as well as the Hartford County Bar Association's President's Award for excellence in the practice of law. The University of Connecticut established the Howard Klebanoff Institute of Special Education at its Neag School of Education in recognition of his work in the area of special education.

**Ann Paul** served as Assistant Superintendent/Director of Special Services for the Wilton Public Schools from July 2007 through June 2017. In this position, she had district-wide responsibilities for all Special Education and support services programs and staff and conducted all district special education mediations. Previous to this position she served for 3 years as Assistant Director of Special Education and Student Services Secondary level for the Darien Public Schools. Prior to this, Ms. Paul served as a school psychologist for school districts in Connecticut and New York as well as with adolescents in a private hospital setting. Ms. Paul has a B.A. from the University of Pennsylvania; a Masters of Education from Teachers College, Columbia University; 092 certification through the Sacred Heart University certificate program and additional training in school neuropsychology, counseling psychology and learning disabilities. Ms. Paul holds Connecticut certification as an administrator and school psychologist.

**Dana Simoni** earned her B.A. degree from Hofstra University and J.D. degree with honors from Hofstra Law School where she was a member of the Hofstra Law Review. Upon graduation, she practiced as an associate at a small New York firm specializing in complex commercial litigation. She returned to Connecticut to serve as a Legal Research Clerk in the Superior Court of Stamford and New Haven for 2 years. Currently, Attorney Simoni works in private practice in the areas of juvenile and family law where her clients include parents and children involved in the child welfare system. She also serves as Guardian Ad Litem for child victims in criminal court and, from 2009 to June 2017, as education advocate/surrogate for children in the custody of the Department of Children and Families.