

Special Education Program Review for Billings Public Schools

Biographies of Reviewers

Perry A. Zirkel

Perry A. Zirkel is university professor emeritus of education and law at Lehigh University, where he formerly was dean of the College of Education, and subsequently held the Iacocca Chair in Education for its five-year term. He has a Ph.D. in Educational Administration and a J.D. from the University of Connecticut, and a Master of Laws degree from Yale University. Perry has done presentations in every state in the United States. He has written more than 1,600 publications on various aspects of school law, with an emphasis on legal issues in special education. He also writes a regular column for *Exceptionality Journal*, NASP's *Communiqué* newsletter, and had previously written for *Phi Delta Kappan*, *Teaching Exceptional Children*, and *NAESP's Principal* magazine.

Perry was past president of the Education Law Association and co-chair of the Pennsylvania special education appeals panel from 1990 to 2007. He is the author of the CEC monograph: *The Legal Meaning of Specific Learning Disability*; the more recently published books: *A Digest of Supreme Court Decisions Affecting Education and Student Teaching and the Law*; and the two-volume reference *Section 504, the ADA and the Schools*.

In 2012, Perry received the Research into Practice Award from the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Excellence in Research Award from AERA's Division A (Administration, Organization & Leadership). In 2013, he received the University Council for Educational Administration's Edwin Bridges award for significant contributions to the preparation and development of school leaders. In 2016, Perry received the Education Law Association's Steven S. Goldberg Award for Distinguished Scholarship in Education Law. In 2017 he received the Council for Exceptional Children's Special Education Research Award. In 2021, he received the President's Award for Excellence from the National Association of School Psychologists.

Perry continues to direct the one-week Lehigh Special Education Law Symposium each June. He also provides a monthly special education legal update and shares his publications via his website.

E-mail: perry.zirkel@lehigh.edu
Telephone: 610-395-9405
Website: perryzirkel.com

Sowmya Kumar

Sowmya is a long-time special educator who has a systemic and student-centered approach to implementing programs and services for students who are at risk for learning due to disabilities, poverty, and limited language acquisition. She has a track record for improving programs and outcomes through continuous improvement planning based on data analysis and frequent monitoring of progress. Sowmya is a proponent of balancing compliance monitoring with improving outcomes for students through targeted professional development, clear and accessible operating guidelines, aligned resources and ongoing coaching, mentoring and support. She has conducted program reviews for special education, bilingual education and federal title programs at the state, regional and national levels.

In her long career, Sowmya has served in a variety of roles in New York, New Jersey and Texas at the school, district, and regional levels. For seven years, she was the Assistant Superintendent of Special Education for the Houston Independent School District, the seventh largest school district in the nation, ensuring quality services for students with disabilities under Section 504 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. She was an Education Specialist at Region 4 Education Service Center in Houston for thirteen years where she focused on developing products and providing professional development and technical assistance around school improvement, interpreting and implementing federal laws and state policies, funding, and state and federal accountability. Prior to moving to Houston, she served as Director of Special Services in Hackettstown, New Jersey for six years, and in teaching and educational diagnostician roles in a few other school districts in New York and New Jersey.

In 2017, Sowmya founded Systemic Special Education Support, and has been working as a thought partner with school districts and organizations that seek her guidance and expertise in improving special education services,

Sowmya has a B.A in Chemistry from Queens College, City University of New York; and an M.A in Special Education/ Supervision and Administration from Teachers College, Columbia University.

Email: sowmya@systemicspecialsupport.com
Telephone: 713-302-1013
Website: systemicspecialsupport.com

