

10 Steps for Disagreeing with Your School District

Consider the following steps when you enter into a dispute with your school district related to your child's special education curriculum and needs:

1. Talk with your child's classroom teacher and other school personnel who are aware of your child's needs, such as the counselor, nurse, school psychologist, or social worker. Naturally, not all of these people are involved in every situation. Also, discuss the problem you face with any team members or specialists who know your child, such as therapists, classroom assistants, and other teachers, to see if adjustments or changes can be made through new understanding and effort.
2. If this first step does resolve the problem under consideration, be sure to find out who among the school personnel will be willing to offer support for your subsequent efforts. Is the teacher sympathetic? Will he or she stand by your request? Does the counselor have information that will help? Ask them if they will be willing to come to meetings with you later or supply statements in support of your position.
3. Discuss your concerns with professionals outside of school who know your child, such as your family doctor, pediatrician, psychologist, audiologist, neurologist, or other specialists. Will they support your efforts to get the requested services for your child? Will they write letters or come with you to important conferences to answer questions? Will they express their views on a tape recorder for you to bring to the school?
4. Remember to keep detailed notes on your conversations and a file of up-to-date records. These are invaluable.
5. Discuss your complaints with the school principal. Have a clear idea of your reasons for requesting a change in your child's program and present your documentation. Be straightforward and self-assured. You are an equal partner in this and other school conferences. It is neither necessary nor productive to be aggressive or apologetic. Approach it as a situation in which both of you are seeking a solution to a problem.
6. Go directly to your district Director of Special Education or Director of Pupil Personnel services if the school is unable or unwilling to change its decisions. If no such staff positions exist in your district, contact the superintendent of schools. The superintendent is responsible for all school programs in the district and must be involved if other officials are unresponsive. Again, your notes, records, and other files should be in order. Use them. In all of these conferences, it is important to know which parts of the federal and/or state law protects your child's rights.