

Know Your Legal Rights

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law, guarantees:

Parents and guardians can view their student's educational records. Once students turn 18, they have access to their records.

If you feel your student's records are inaccurate, you can request that the school correct the problem. If the school refuses, you have the right to a hearing. Even if you lose at the hearing, you can have your own interpretation of the inaccuracies permanently added to the student's records.

In most cases, the school must get your permission to show your student's records to others.

The Washington Public Records Act allows citizens to request and review most documents produced by schools and school districts—including policies and procedures, budgets, school business correspondence and teachers' lesson plans.

How To Complain So People Will Listen

Go to the person directly.

Begin by talking with the person you disagree with.

Be organized.

Prepare to discuss the problem by making a list of questions or points to bring up. Know what's most important and keep the conversation on track.

Stay calm.

Take a deep breath. Focus on the problem, not the person. Talk about facts and be clear. Don't attack.

Be positive.

Even if you're not satisfied with the situation, let people know you appreciate their work to resolve the problem.

See the other side.

Try to fully understand the other person's view of the situation and solutions they might propose. Ask questions about anything that is unclear.

Use the right language.

Say "I believe," "I feel," or "We can" rather than "You should." Try "I understand that money is limited..." or "I know that you have a lot of priorities to balance..." Use the word "and" instead of "but."

Stay flexible.

Recognize that problems can be solved in more than one way. Be open to creative solutions.

Keep records.

Save copies of letters, completed forms, and other materials. Keep dated notes about who you talked to, what was said, and the results of that communication.

Office of the Education Ombudsman

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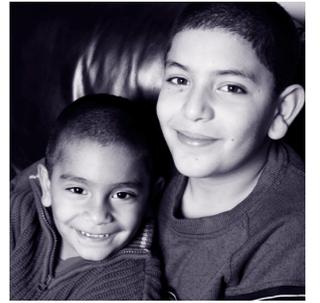
Toll free: 1-866-297-2597

Fax: (360) 586-0052

www.waparentslearn.org

Contact the Office of the Education Ombudsman if you'd like to receive this document in an alternative format to accommodate people with disabilities.

The Office of the Education Ombudsman provides information and referral services to students, families and communities regarding the public education system, promotes family and community involvement in education, and helps families and students resolve conflict with schools.



Resolving Conflict with Schools

Office of the Education Ombudsman A Guide for Families



State of Washington
Office of the Governor

The Education Ombudsman

The Office of the Education Ombudsman is an agency within the Governor's Office that was established by the Legislature in 2006. We help Washington state students succeed by informing students and families about the public school system, helping them communicate more effectively with school staff members, and by helping students and families resolve conflicts with their school or school district. The Office of the Education Ombudsman reports the needs of public school students and families to the Governor, Legislature and the State Board of Education, and recommends improvements to the state education system.



Steps to Resolve Conflict with Schools

Many conflicts can be solved with only the first step listed below. Try that, and if you're not satisfied, keep trying as many more steps as you need. For help along the way, contact the Office of the Education Ombudsman.

1. Speak to the school staff member you are in conflict with. If you are uncomfortable alone or speaking up is not part of your culture, you may bring an advocate or a family member. If English is not your first language, request that the school provide an interpreter.
2. Speak with that school staff member's supervisor or the school principal.
3. Speak with the principal's supervisor at the school district main office. In a small district, the principal may report to the Superintendent. In a large school district, the supervisor might be the Assistant Superintendent, the Education Director, Chief of Staff, or Chief Academic Officer.
4. Speak directly with the Superintendent, the top employee in the school district, if you haven't already done so.
5. If the problem is with the system as a whole, you can also speak with the School Board member who represents your neighborhood. Your School Board members are elected officials and together they hire and oversee the Superintendent.

6. Parents of students in special education and bilingual programs should follow complaint procedures set by federal law, which districts are required to explain.

Each time you decide to take the question to a new level, let the last person know, and keep the discussion open to find ways to create a solution. If none of this works, contact the Office of the Education Ombudsman.

If the Problem Continues

If you can't resolve the difficulty on your own, and the problem fits the Education Ombudsman's guidelines, we can help. Our job is to help if:

Your school did not respond when you complained, or responded inappropriately;

The school did not follow state law, federal law or school district policy,

and

Your student's learning suffered, or the learning environment was negatively affected by the school's action or failure to act.

PROBLEMS TO TAKE ELSEWHERE

We will refer you to other sources of help for:

Complaints against elected officials.

Problems with private schools, private organizations or businesses.

Legal advice.

HOW WE CAN HELP

The Office of the Education Ombudsman offers a neutral view of the difficult situation you are experiencing and assistance to solve the problem.

We accept written complaints from parents, legal guardians or students from Washington elementary and secondary public schools. Our complaint forms are available in various languages. Get a complaint form by calling our office or print one from our website. www.waparentslearn.org

If parents or students believe they were treated differently than others based on race, gender, disability, religion or another reason, they have a right to file a discrimination complaint with the Washington Human Rights Commission or the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights.

Washington State Human Rights Commission
Toll free: 1-800-233-3247

**U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights**
Seattle Office: (206) 220-7900