

What To Do If You Have Education Concerns

It is very valuable for parents and teachers to get to know each other early in the school year. Clear communications and positive relationships can often prevent misunderstandings from arising.

If problems do arise, some general suggestions include the following.

- ▶ Begin by talking with your child so you fully understand their experience and what is making you feel concerned.
- ▶ Try to think about all points of view. Keep an open mind as you try to find out what happened.
- ▶ Decide if your child can handle the issue on their own or if your support is needed. Step in when you think it is necessary to do so.
- ▶ If you decide that you should act on a concern, remember to keep a record of the phone calls you make, letters or emails you send, and meetings that take place.

It is important to know that there is a process to resolve concerns with the school. In some cases, if you skip a step in the process, you may be asked to begin again by reaching out to someone else.

Most concerns are best dealt with at the school level. You should always start there.

- ▶ The teacher is usually the first person you should approach with a concern. Remember, teachers are ultimately responsible for the education of every student in their classroom.
- ▶ If for some reason you can't reach the teacher or you can't resolve the issue together, then you can approach the school principal.

If you don't get an adequate response at the school level, other options are available, as described on the following pages.

No matter where your child attends school ...

STEP ONE: Meet With Your Child's Teacher

- ▶ You can send the teacher your concern in writing, or you can reach out by phone or in-person.
- ▶ If you need to meet, set up a meeting time that is convenient for you both.
- ▶ If it will make you feel more comfortable, bring someone with you for support.
- ▶ When you meet, outline your concerns clearly. Then focus on solutions.
- ▶ Listen carefully to what the teacher says. Take notes and write down your questions and the answers you receive.
- ▶ After the meeting, consider whether you are satisfied. Do you feel you made progress? Is another meeting needed? Will it help to talk to the same person again, or should you talk with someone else?
- ▶ If you do not feel that meeting with the teacher resolved the matter, let the teacher know how you feel. Perhaps suggest that you both meet with the principal to discuss your concerns. Or let the teacher know that you appreciate their time, but you feel you need to take the matter to the principal.

STEP TWO: Meet With the School Principal

- ▶ If it will help you feel more comfortable, ask a support person to attend the meeting with you.
- ▶ State your concerns clearly and describe the steps you have already taken.
- ▶ State what you would like to happen next. What do you expect? What would effectively address your concern?
- ▶ Listen carefully and take notes.
- ▶ At the end of the meeting, restate what you think will happen next. Make sure you agree about any follow-up to take place.
- ▶ Send a letter or email to confirm what you think is going to be done.

If meeting with the teacher and principal does not resolve your concerns, the next steps depend on what type of school your child attends.

If Your Child Attends a First Nation School ...

STEP THREE: Go To the School Governing Authority

- ▶ Contact the School Governing Authority and follow the procedures established by your community to resolve disputes about school matters.
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If Your Child Attends a Private or Independent School ...

STEP THREE: Go To the Independent School's Governing Authority

- ▶ Involve the community's Education Director / Education Coordinator or other support person, if it will help.
 - ▶ Contact the Independent School Board. Ask for and follow the Board's policies and procedures to resolve disputes.
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If Your Child Attends a Public School ...

STEP THREE: Talk To School District Representatives

- ▶ At the school district level, there are a variety of people who you can contact, including the Superintendent, a First Nation District Principal, a Director of Instruction, or a representative of the Indigenous Education Council for the district.
- ▶ Each school district is required to have a code of conduct and an appeal process for decisions or non-decisions that significantly affect the education, health, or safety of a student. Parents have a right to ask about the school district's appeal process. The process is different for each school district; it usually involves submitting an appeal in writing, meeting with a representative of the school district, a review by the Board, and formal communication of the appeal results.
- ▶ Many district appeal policies require that people try to resolve concerns at the school level before making an appeal to a School Board. That is why starting with the teacher and principal is best.
- ▶ You can have support people communicate with the school district with you, such as a friend, family member, or a representative of your First Nation.
- ▶ Follow the same suggestions listed for meeting with the principal.

If you are still not satisfied after meeting with the School Board ...**STEP FOUR: Superintendent Of Appeals**

If your child attends a public school, you can appeal to a BC Superintendent of Appeals, as long as the matter relates to:

- ▶ Expulsion or suspension from an educational program.
- ▶ Suspension from an educational program where no other educational program is made available.
- ▶ Distributed learning required as part of a disciplinary matter.
- ▶ A decision about whether to provide a student with an Individual Education Plan (IEP).
- ▶ Consultation about placement of a student with disabilities and diverse abilities.
- ▶ Bullying behaviours, including intimidation, harassment, or threats of violence by a student against another student.
- ▶ Exclusion due to a medical condition that endangers others.

You cannot make an appeal to a Superintendent of Appeals until you have completed an appeal to your School Board.

If you want to proceed with this appeal, you need to submit a Notice of Appeal form and a copy of the School Board's appeal decision. See more information at: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/student-disputes-and-appeals>

If you need to pursue a concern further ...**STEP FIVE: Office Of the BC Ombudsperson**

If the appeal process is not satisfactory, the Office of the BC Ombudsperson can investigate complaints about public schools and all 60 school districts in BC regarding decisions made and services provided to students.

"Have a complaint and feel like no one is listening? Don't like the way you've been treated by a public organization? Having problems getting services you need? We listen. We investigate. We help find solutions." www.bcombudsperson.ca

- ▶ The BC Ombudsperson Office is specifically committed to advancing and supporting reconciliation and ensuring all Indigenous peoples across BC are treated fairly.
- ▶ The Ombudsperson Office cannot make a binding decision, but it can make recommendations and will try to help resolve issues.

- ▶ The Ombudsperson Office website has a number of tools to help you access assistance. See www.bcombudsperson.ca

STEP SIX: BC Human Rights Tribunal

If a School Board makes a decision that you believe discriminates against your child on the basis of Indigenous identity, ancestry, race, disability, or other grounds, you can file a complaint with the BC Human Rights Tribunal. The Tribunal is responsible for accepting, screening, mediating, and adjudicating human rights complaints. The Tribunal offers the parties an opportunity to try to resolve a complaint through mediation. If that process does not resolve the complaint, the Tribunal holds a hearing.

To make a complaint, you begin by submitting a form. On that form, you can self-identify as Indigenous and ask the Tribunal to contact you. Then the Tribunal will call to:

- ▶ explain the process and options for proceeding.
- ▶ talk about including Indigenous protocols in the process.
- ▶ talk about Indigenous ways to deal with the complaint.

The Tribunal has mediators who can help the parties agree about how to solve a complaint. Mediation is voluntary. An Indigenous person can tell the Tribunal that they want:

- ▶ a traditional ceremony before or after the mediation, such as a smudge, prayer, or song.
- ▶ an Indigenous mediator and an Indigenous dispute resolution approach.

More information about the BC Human Rights Tribunal can be found at www.bchrt.bc.ca.

FOR ALL TYPES OF SCHOOLS

BC Ministry of Education Teacher Regulation Branch

If you have a concern about the conduct or competence of a teacher who has been certified by the BC Ministry of Education, you can make a written complaint to the Commissioner for Teacher Regulation.

The Commissioner for Teacher Regulation is responsible for overseeing how BC certified teachers behave and how well they do their jobs. The Commissioner does not have a role for other school staff.

Before submitting a complaint to the Commissioner, you should discuss your concerns with the teacher or principal. If relevant, you should also contact the School Governing Authority or School Board.

If your concerns about an educator are not adequately addressed at those levels, you can contact the Commissioner for Teacher Regulation and ask for assistance.

More information about reaching the Teacher Regulation Branch is available at: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teacher-regulation/standards-for-educators/complaint_faq_tools.pdf

Professional Standards for BC Educators effective June 19, 2019

All BC certified teachers are expected to uphold the following professional standards. (See https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/teach/teacher-regulation/standards-for-educators/edu_standards.pdf for more detail about the standards).

1. Educators value the success of all students. Educators care for students and act in their best interests.
2. Educators act ethically and maintain the integrity, credibility and reputation of the profession.
3. Educators understand and apply knowledge of student growth and development.
4. Educators value the involvement and support of parents, guardians, families and communities in schools.
5. Educators implement effective planning, instruction, assessment and reporting practices to create respectful, inclusive environments for student learning and development.
6. Educators demonstrate a broad knowledge base and an understanding of areas they teach.
7. Educators engage in professional learning.
8. Educators contribute to the profession.
9. Educators respect and value the history of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada and the impact of the past on the present and the future. Educators contribute towards truth, reconciliation and healing. Educators foster a deeper understanding of ways of knowing and being, histories, and culture of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.