

Know Your Rights in Schools

Plain-language guide for parents walking into any school meeting.

FOR EVERY PARENT AND CAREGIVER

*Your child has rights — in every school, every classroom, and every conversation with administrators. This guide puts the most important ones in plain language so you can walk into any meeting with confidence. **You are your child's most powerful advocate.***

01 YOUR RIGHT TO A Free, Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Every child has the legal right to a free public education — regardless of race, income, disability, language, or immigration status.

What this means for your family:

- ✓ Your child cannot be turned away from enrollment because of language barriers or missing documents
- ✓ Public schools must provide services for children with disabilities at no cost to you
- ✓ You have the right to request evaluations if you suspect your child has a learning disability
- ✓ All services must be appropriate to your child's individual needs

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- “ *What services is my child entitled to receive?*
- “ *Can you explain what FAPE means for my child specifically?*
- “ *How will you ensure my child's education is appropriate for their needs?*

02 YOUR RIGHT TO

An Individualized Education Program (IEP)

If your child has a disability, they may qualify for an IEP — a legally binding plan tailored specifically to your child's learning needs.

Your rights as a parent in the IEP process:

- ✓ You must be invited to and participate in all IEP meetings
- ✓ You can request an IEP meeting at any time — you do not have to wait for the school
- ✓ You can bring a support person, advocate, or interpreter to any meeting
- ✓ You must give written consent before the school can evaluate your child
- ✓ You can disagree with the IEP and request changes
- ✓ You have the right to an independent educational evaluation if you disagree with the school's assessment

03 YOUR RIGHT TO Language Access

Schools are required by federal law to communicate with families in a language they understand.

- ✓ You have the right to request an interpreter for meetings and phone calls
- ✓ Important documents must be provided in your home language
- ✓ Your child cannot be excluded from programs because of limited English proficiency
- ✓ Schools must notify you in your language about school programs, activities, and your rights

04 YOUR RIGHT TO Privacy (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) protects your child's school records.

- ✓ You have the right to review all of your child's educational records
- ✓ You can request corrections to records you believe are inaccurate
- ✓ Schools cannot share your child's records without your permission (with limited exceptions)
- ✓ You can ask the school what information is in your child's file and who has access to it

05 YOUR RIGHT TO BE Free from Discrimination

Federal law prohibits discrimination in schools based on race, color, national origin, sex, disability, and religion.

- ✓ Your child has the right to a safe, welcoming school environment
- ✓ Schools must address bullying and harassment — especially when it targets a student's identity
- ✓ Discipline policies cannot be applied in a racially discriminatory way
- ✓ Your child cannot be suspended or expelled without proper due process

"The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go."

At EVOLVE, we believe **informed families change outcomes**.
Keep this guide, share it, and never stop asking questions.

Quick Reference — Who to Contact

Issue	Who to Contact (In Order)
IEP / Special Education	Your child's school Special Education Coordinator , then the District Special Ed Director
Discrimination or Harassment	School Principal , then the District Civil Rights Coordinator , then the U.S. Dept. of Education — Office for Civil Rights (OCR)
Language Access	School Principal , then the District ELL / ESL Coordinator
Record Access (FERPA)	School Principal or District Records Officer
General Rights Violations	Your State Department of Education , or contact a local education advocacy organization

*This document is for informational purposes and does not constitute legal advice.
For complex situations, consider consulting a qualified education attorney or advocate.*

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Questions? Book a free discovery call. Need an advocate in the room with you? Our family coaching sessions help parents prepare for IEPs, 504s, disciplinary meetings, and beyond.