

# Sample Letters



## Writing to Discuss a Problem

*When might I want to write to my child's school?*

Sometimes your child may have a particular problem at school. You may have talked to your child's teacher about this concern. The two of you may have written notes back and forth or talked on the phone. If it seems like nothing is happening to resolve your concern, then you may want to write a formal

letter. Perhaps the informal communication hasn't been as clear as you think. Maybe you feel that the seriousness of your concern isn't fully understood. By writing a letter, the school will learn that you consider the matter to be an important one that needs to be addressed.

You can write about any concern—an IEP issue, a general education issue, school-yard bullying, or the need to help your child's social skills or improve behavior. There are no rules as to the type of problem you can write about. Any school problem is worth writing about if it is having a negative impact on your child and you need the school's assistance to resolve it.

Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Principal  
Name of School  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (Principal's name),

In this paragraph say who you are and give your child's full name and current class placement. Say something positive about your child's situation here, before you state your reason for writing.

BRIEFLY, explain why you are writing. Give *relevant* history and facts that support your concerns. (For example, your 3<sup>rd</sup> grader is struggling in school and you want to ask for help. You might say that your child's school work has been getting worse throughout the year. That fact is relevant. Something from your child's infancy probably isn't.)

In this paragraph state what you would like to have happen or what you would like to see changed. You may BRIEFLY say what you would *not* like, or what has been tried and not worked. However, spend most of this paragraph saying what you want.

Say what type of response you would prefer. For instance, do you need to meet with someone, do you want a return letter or email, or will a phone call be preferable?

Finally, give your daytime phone number and state that you look forward to hearing from the person soon or give a date ("Please respond by the 15<sup>th</sup>"). End the letter with "Thank you for your attention to this matter."

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: your child's teacher  
other staff



### Note:

The "cc:" at the bottom of the letter means you are sending a copy of your letter to the people listed after the cc. If you write to the Director of Special Education about a problem at your child's school, you should copy the principal. If you write to the principal about a problem, you should copy your child's teacher or other staff involved with your child. This follows the "chain of command." It also lets people involved know your concerns and that you are taking steps to resolve these concerns.

## 2 Requesting Your Child's Records

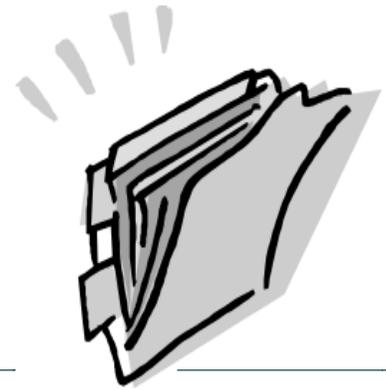
The IDEA gives you the right to look at all of your child's education records. This includes records about his or her identification, evaluation, educational placement, and special education program. You also have the right to ask the school to explain and interpret the records for you. You may ask the school to give you a copy of your child's records. They may charge you a reasonable fee for making a copy (but not for retrieving the records). More details are available online at NICHCY: <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/parental-rights/records>

*What might be some reasons to request copies of my child's school records?*

School records contain valuable information about your child's strengths and areas of need. These records can provide a formal way of communicating between the professionals at your child's school, you, and other professionals who may work with your child. Here are some reasons you might have for requesting a copy of your child's records:

- ◆ Reviewing records lets you be sure that the records are correct and contain all necessary information.
- ◆ When your family is moving to a new school district, records may need to be sent.
- ◆ When you're taking your child for an independent evaluation, copies of past records may be useful.

- ◆ The records may help the staff at other programs your child attends (like camp, tutors, or in-hospital schools) design their activities.
- ◆ Postsecondary programs may need to see copies of your child's records.
- ◆ It's a good idea to have a copy for your home files, especially if your child is finishing school.



Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Person to Whom You Are Writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (name),

I am writing to schedule a time to come and review all of my child's records. My son/daughter, (child's name), is in the (\_\_\_) grade at (name of school), in (teacher's name) class. I will also need copies of some or all of these records.

Please let me know where and when I can come in to see the records. I need these records by (date). You can reach me during the day at (give your phone number).

I look forward to hearing from you soon. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Your name

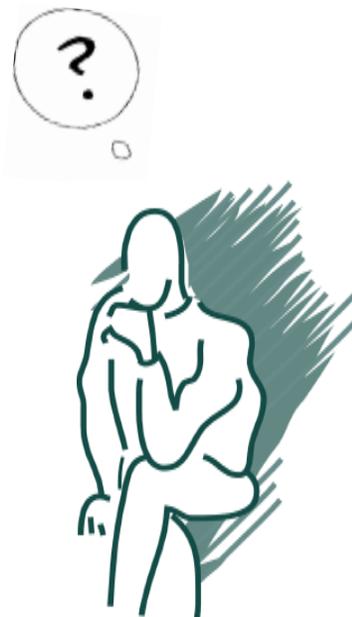
### 3 Writing a Follow-up Letter

*What do I do if I don't get a response to my first letter?*

When you have written a letter or sent an email making a request, you should get a response from the school system, either by telephone or in writing, within a reasonable period of time. In some cases, "reasonable" is defined (for example, local policy may say the school must answer you within 15 working days). In other cases, the timelines are not exact. So, be reasonable in your expectations.

But if you feel too much time has passed (10 working days or so) without receiving a response to your letter, then call and ask if your letter (or email) has been received. If you are sure the school has received your letter (some parents send their letters by certified or registered mail), then ask when you can expect an answer. More than likely, when you call you will talk to a secretary or administrative assistant. Leave a message for the person you wrote to; ask that person to call you back.

If your request still goes unanswered, then you may want to write again. It's useful to enclose a copy of your original request with this letter. Be sure *not* to send your only copy. Remember, you always need to have a copy for your records.



Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Person To Whom You Originally Wrote  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (name),

I wrote to you on (date) and also called to make sure you had received my letter. I left a message for you to call me back on (date), but since I have not heard from you, I thought it best to write again.

I am writing to request . . .

Enclosed is a copy of my first letter to you.

I would like to hear from you by (give a date, 3-5 working days).  
Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Your name

Enclosure

## 4 Writing a Positive Feedback Letter

Once you've begun to write letters, be sure to write when things are going well, too! If a teacher, therapist, or other staff member has made good things happen for your child, let them and their supervisors know. Everyone likes and needs compliments and encouragement from time to time. Positive feedback is what keeps good schools running well. Just as you want to know "how it's going," so does the school staff.

Good communication, team work, and effective schools take a lot of hard work. There's an old saying that goes, "Things can go wrong all by themselves, but you have to work hard to make things go right." This statement applies doubly to maintaining a successful parent-professional working relationship. Be sure your child's teacher(s), principal, and superintendent also hear from you when things are going right.



Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Person to Whom You Are Writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (name),

I am writing to let you know how very pleased I am with the education my son/daughter, (child's name), is receiving at (name of school).

(Child's name) has had great success with (briefly say what is going right). In particular, (name the professionals working with your child and how they have made a difference).

I look forward to (child's name) making continued progress. Thank you for all your efforts, and those of your staff.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: If you write to the school district's Superintendent or Director of Special Education, make sure to copy the people who directly deserve recognition for your child's success—the principal, teachers, and other staff.

## 5 Requesting an Initial Evaluation for Special Education Services

*When would I request an evaluation for special education services?*

If your child has been consistently struggling in school, his or her problems may be due to a disability. If the school thinks your child may have a disability, they will contact you to request your written permission to evaluate your child. Under the IDEA, you also have the right to ask the school to evaluate your child. The purpose of the evaluation is to see if he or she has a disability and needs special education services. This evaluation is free of charge.

For more information on evaluation, see NICHCY's publication, *Your Child's Evaluation* or visit our evaluation pages online, at: <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/evaluation/>

*Note: If your child has been identified as having a disability by professionals outside the school system, add the sentence below to the end of the first paragraph.*

"(Child's name) has been identified as having (name of disability) by (name of professional). Enclosed is a copy of the report(s) I have received that explains (child's name) condition."

If your child has been identified by your doctor or other professionals as having a disability, you will want to include this information in your letter to the school. You should also provide copies of any reports you have received that explain your child's condition.

If you decide to write the school and ask that your child be evaluated, here's an example of what you may want to say.

Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Principal or Special Education Administrator  
Name of School  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (Principal's or Administrator's name),

I am writing to request that my son/daughter, (child's name), be evaluated for special education services. I am worried that (child's name) is not doing well in school and believe he/she may need special services in order to learn. (Child's name) is in the ( \_ ) grade at (name of school). (Teacher's name) is his/her teacher.

Specifically, I am worried, because (child's name) does/does not (give a few direct examples of your child's problems at school).

We have tried the following to help (child's name): (If you or the school have done anything extra to help your child, briefly state it here).

I understand that I have to give written permission in order for (child's name) to be evaluated. Before the evaluation begins, I have some questions about the process that I need to have answered (list any questions you may have). I would be happy to talk with you about (child's name). You can send me information or call me during the day at (daytime telephone number). Thank you for your prompt attention to my request.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: your child's principal (if letter is addressed to an administrator)  
your child's teacher(s)

## 7 Requesting a Meeting to Review the Individualized Education Program (IEP)

If your child is receiving special education services, he or she must have a written plan known as an Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP lists, among other things, annual goals for your child and the special education services that he or she will receive. You are a member of the team that writes your child's IEP. As an IEP team member, you can ask that your child's IEP be reviewed and revised, if needed. This part of the *Parent's Guide* looks at writing a letter to request that your child's IEP be reviewed.



*Why might I ask for a review of my child's IEP?*

Some reasons for requesting an IEP review include:

- ◆ Your child has met one, or several, of the goals written in the IEP.
- ◆ Your child does not seem to be making enough progress toward one, or several, of the goals written in IEP.
- ◆ You feel your child needs more services or other services in order to make progress.
- ◆ You feel that your child no longer needs a service he or she is currently receiving.
- ◆ Your child has experienced a major change, such as illness, injury, or surgery.

Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Your Child's Special Education Teacher  
Name of School  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (Teacher's name),

I am writing to request an IEP review meeting. I would like to discuss making some changes in (child's name)'s IEP. I am concerned about (state your reasons, but don't go into detail about the specific changes you want to make—save those for the meeting).

I would also like to have (names of specialists or other staff) attend. I think his/her/their ideas about the changes we may need to make will be valuable.

I can arrange to meet with you and the other members of the IEP team on (days) between (give a range of time, such as between 2:00 and 4:00). Please let me know what time would be best for you.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. My daytime telephone number is (give your phone number). Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: specialists or other staff

# 10 Requesting Prior Written Notice

What is prior written notice, and why would I want it?

There are certain times when the school must put in writing its decisions about your child's education and the reasons for those decisions. This written communication is called *prior written notice*. You have the right to receive prior written notice whenever the school wants to (or refuses to):

- ◆ evaluate your child,
- ◆ change your child's disability identification,
- ◆ change your child's educational placement, or
- ◆ change the way in which your child is provided with FAPE.

The school system is supposed to automatically provide you with prior written notice in any of these events. In practice, though, sometimes the school may tell you its decision over the telephone, in a meeting, or in a one-on-one conversation. If you want the notification in writing, you may ask the school system to provide it. And it is best that you put your request in writing.

For example, you may have asked for an IEE at public expense. The school system may tell you on the phone that it has denied your request. You may ask for prior written notice of this denial. The school must then put its decision in writing and explain the reasons for the decision. This information can be helpful if you pursue the IEE through a due process hearing. You will then have in writing the school system's reasons for denying the IEE.



Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Person to Whom You Are Writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (name),

At our meeting (or) during our phone conversation on (date), we discussed my child's (evaluation, eligibility, placement, IEP, services, etc.). I requested (\_\_\_\_\_). . . and was denied (or) I was told the school intends to (\_\_\_\_\_). . . but I have never received any information about this decision in writing. In accordance with the IDEA regulations, I am requesting prior written notice regarding (be very specific about the issue/decision you want the school to respond to. Bullet or number the items.)

According to the IDEA, at 34 CRF §300.503, prior written notice must include the following:

1. A description of what the school is proposing or refusing to do;
2. An explanation of why the school proposes or refuses this action;
3. A description of any other options the school considered and the reasons why those options were rejected;
4. A description of each evaluation procedure, test, record, or report the school used as a basis for this decision;
5. A description of any other relevant factors that went into this decision;
6. Information on how I can obtain a copy of procedural safeguards available to me under the law and a full explanation of the safeguards, and
7. Information on sources I can contact for help in understanding IDEA's regulations.

I look forward to receiving a detailed response to my request as soon as possible. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: the principal, supervisor, or special education administrator  
other members of the meeting

## 11 Requesting Mediation

*When would I make a request for mediation?*

Anytime you have a serious disagreement with the school and you feel it isn't getting resolved, you may request mediation. In mediation, you and school personnel sit down with an impartial third person (called a mediator), talk openly about the areas where you disagree, and try to reach an agreement. Mediation is voluntary, so *both parties must agree to meet with a mediator.*

There are benefits to mediation, both for you and for the school. One of the chief benefits is that mediation allows you and the school to state your concerns and work together to reach a solution that focuses on the needs of the student and is acceptable to both of you.

For more information on mediation, visit CADRE, the Consortium for Appropriate Dispute Resolution in Special Education, at: [www.directionservice.org/cadre](http://www.directionservice.org/cadre)

NICHCY also offers detailed information about mediation under IDEA, beginning at: <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/disputes/mediation/>



Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Person to Whom You Are Writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (name),

My son/daughter, (child's name), currently attends (name of school) and is in the (\_\_\_) grade in (teacher's name) class. I am writing to inform you that the school and I are in disagreement concerning (BRIEFLY state what the disagreement is about). We have been unsuccessful in resolving this dispute, and I am requesting mediation so that we may resolve our differences.

I would like the mediation to be done as soon as possible. Please let me know when this can be arranged and send me a copy of the school's guidelines on mediation. My daytime telephone number is (give your phone number). Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Your name

cc: your child's principal  
your child's teacher

## 12 Requesting a Due Process Hearing

You've read about due process in other places in this *Parent's Guide*. Due process is one approach that parents and schools can use to resolve disagreements. Basically, in a due process hearing, you and the school present evidence before an impartial third person called a hearing officer. The hearing officer then decides how to resolve the problem.

You have the right to request a due process hearing on any matter related to:

- ◆ your child's identification as a "child with a disability,"
- ◆ his or her evaluation,
- ◆ his or her educational placement, and
- ◆ the special education and related services that the school provides to your child.

*When would I request a due process hearing?*

Some reasons why a parent might file for due process include:

- ◆ The school refuses to evaluate your child.
- ◆ You disagree with the eligibility decision.
- ◆ You disagree with the services or goals in the IEP.
- ◆ The school refuses to provide a related service, modification, or supplementary aid you think your child needs.
- ◆ You disagree with the placement decision.

Generally speaking, when the family and school disagree, it is important for both sides to first discuss their concerns and try to reach a compromise. Remember, the goal is to provide an appropriate education for your child. There are many options when deciding what an appropriate education is, and some trial and error may be necessary to develop a successful program for your child.

However, if you and the school have fully communicated, understand each other's positions, tried such strategies as IEP meetings and/or mediation, and you still disagree, you may want to request a due process hearing. A due process hearing is a formal proceeding. As was said above, you and the school system share your information and concerns in front of a qualified, impartial hearing officer. The school system will probably be represented by an attorney. While parents are not required to have an attorney, you are strongly encouraged to have one. Your state's PTI center will have information on special education attorneys in your area. The school system must also tell you about any free or low-cost legal (and other relevant) services available in the area if you request a due process hearing or if you simply request this information.

In the due process hearing, the hearing officer will listen to both you and the school system. The hearing officer will then make a decision about how to resolve the conflict, based upon the evidence and the requirements of law.

*How do I request a due process hearing?*

The first step is to file a due process complaint. This complaint must be signed and must include specific information:

- ◆ the name of your child;
- ◆ the address of your child's residence;
- ◆ the name of your child's school;
- ◆ a description of the problem, including facts relating to the problem; and
- ◆ how you would resolve the problem, to the extent that a solution is known and available to you as parents.



Information in the complaint must be kept confidential. Each state is required to have a model form to help parents write a due process complaint. You are not required to use the model form. However, if you want, you should be able to get a copy of this model from your school system or State Education Agency.

*To whom do I send the complaint?*

Your school district must have procedures in place so that you can file your complaint. You'll need to ask what those are—the Director of Special Education in your school or district will know. This will include the person or office with whom you need to file your complaint. IDEA also requires that you provide a copy of your

complaint to the other party (in this case, the school system) and to the State Education Agency.

*What happens next?*

If your complaint includes the required information and is deemed “sufficient,” quite a lot happens next! First, within 10 days of receiving your complaint, the other party (i.e., the school system) will send you a response that specifically addresses the issues raised in your complaint. IDEA also requires that the school system convene a **resolution meeting** within 15 days of receiving notice that you have filed a due process complaint. The purpose of the resolution meeting is for you as parents to discuss your due process complaint and the facts that form the basis of that complaint, so that the school system has the opportunity to resolve the dispute without holding a due process hearing.

There’s a lot to know about due process complaints, resolution meetings, and due process hearings, far too much to explain it all here. We refer you to the detailed information available on our website, beginning at: <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/disputes/dueprocess/>



Today’s Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Person to Whom You Are Writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (name),

I am writing to request a due process hearing on behalf of my child, (child’s name), whose address is (give your child’s address, even if it is the same as your own). (Child’s name) attends (name of school).

I have met with school personnel in an effort to resolve our differences concerning my son’s/daughter’s (IEP, placement, testing, or . . . ) and have been unable to do so. The nature of our disagreement is as follows:

- Explain the problem with BRIEF statements of fact.
- Consider listing the facts with bullets or numbers.
- An acceptable resolution of the problem would include . . . (To the extent that you know how you want the disagreement to be resolved, state these facts here, again bulleting or numbering the items if possible.)

Please advise me as soon as possible as to the date and time of this hearing so that I can make the necessary arrangements. My daytime telephone number is (give your phone number).

I also request that this hearing be (open/closed) to persons other than those directly involved. (Child’s name) will/will not attend the hearing. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: your child’s principal  
your advocate/attorney

## 13 Filing a Complaint with the State Education Agency

*What's a State complaint, and why would I file one?*

You've read about two means of resolving conflicts with the school system: mediation and due process. A third means is filing a complaint with the State Education Agency (SEA). Under IDEA, you have the right to file a complaint when you believe that the state or school district has violated a requirement of the IDEA. The SEA must resolve your complaint within 60 calendar days (not business days) from the day they receive it, unless there are exceptional circumstances with respect to the complaint. The complaint process can be effective in resolving conflicts with the school system and is less costly and intimidating than a due process hearing.

Detailed information about the State complaint procedure is available at NICHCY, beginning at: <http://nichcy.org/schoolage/disputes/statecomplaint/>

It's important, however, to know what your State's policies are. Contact your SEA to find out the details of its requirements.

Whenever you file a State complaint (or seek mediation or due process), it is a good idea as well to seek advice from the Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) or the Protection and Advocacy Agency (P&A) in your state. These organizations are listed on NICHCY's *State Resource Sheet* for your state, available at: <http://nichcy.org/state-organization-search-by-state>

You can file a State complaint with the SEA about any of the matters for which you might otherwise file a request for a due process hearing, as well as for any other reason you feel that the school system has violated the IDEA. However, be aware that, if you write a complaint on an issue that is also part of a current due process hearing, the SEA will not investigate this issue. The due process hearing takes precedence over the State complaint process. The SEA will only investigate those issues in your State complaint that are not part of your due process hearing.

Some examples of issues you might write a State complaint about include:

- ◆ Your child is denied the opportunity to attend or participate in school-sponsored events, such as field trips or after school activities.
- ◆ Your child has a shorter school day, because the special education students arrive later or are dismissed from school earlier than the general education students are.
- ◆ You use mediation to resolve a disagreement with the school, but the school fails to implement the signed agreement.
- ◆ The school fails to give you appropriate prior written notice. Or,
- ◆ You have a decision from a hearing officer that the school district is not implementing.

*How do I file a complaint with the State Education Agency?*

Your state's policies for filing a State complaint should be included in its IDEA regulations. Call your local special education office or the SEA if you need more information about the policies.

Also ask for the name and address of the person to whom you should write your letter. Your complaint must be signed. Among other things, it must also contain:

- ◆ a statement that a public agency (for example, your school system) has violated a requirement of Part B of the IDEA or its regulations, and
- ◆ the facts on which you base this statement.



The letter on the next page is an example of how you might write this complaint. Note that it is important to state what requirement of the law has been violated. The PTI or P&A in your state can help you identify the specific sections of IDEA to list in your complaint.

## Sample Letter 13: Filing a Complaint with the State Education Agency

Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Person to Whom You Are Writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (name),

I am writing to file a complaint on behalf of my son/daughter, (child's name), regarding his/her education in the (name of school district). The nature of my complaint is as follows:

- Explain the problem with BRIEF statements of fact.
- Consider listing the facts that support your complaint with bullets or numbers.

For the above reasons, I believe the school district is in violation of certain requirements in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, specifically: (list the requirements of IDEA you feel the school system has violated. For example,

"The school system has violated the following requirements of the IDEA:

- to consider whether my child needs assistive technology services or devices, as required by Section 300.324(a)(2)(v);
- to include in my child's IEP a statement of the special education, related services and supplementary aids and services, including assistive technology, that he/she needs as required by Section 300.320(a)(4)."

Enclosed are copies of relevant documents and correspondence I have sent to and received from the school district concerning this matter. These documents are (List the documents you have enclosed, giving the date sent, by whom, to whom, and the issue discussed.)

Please provide me with copies of any information you obtain in the process of investigating my complaint. If you need further information or clarification on my complaint, I can be reached at (give your phone number). Thank you.

Sincerely,

Your name

cc: school district special education director  
your child's principal  
your advocate/attorney

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