

When a School Concern Is Not Resolved: From Teacher to District Office

Most school concerns should begin with the person closest to the problem. Escalation means moving the concern to the next appropriate level when an earlier plan has not resolved it. The purpose is not to punish anyone. The purpose is to protect the child and obtain a clear response.

Before moving forward, review what has already happened. Record the concern, dates, people contacted, information received, agreed actions, follow-up dates, and results. Give the teacher or staff member a fair opportunity to respond unless the concern involves immediate safety, abuse, a serious threat, or a medical emergency.

If the concern continues, contact the next appropriate school person. Depending on the issue, this may be a counselor, nurse, case manager, grade-level leader, assistant principal, or principal. Use the same email thread when practical so the history stays together. Summarize the unresolved point and request one reasonable next action.

If school-level efforts do not solve the problem, review the student handbook, school website, and district procedures. The next contact may be a superintendent or district office responsible for student services, special education, civil rights, attendance, transportation, or another program. Titles and pathways differ by district.

A support request is not always the same as a formal complaint. Some concerns—such as discrimination, disability services, student records, harassment, discipline, or bullying—may have a specialized grievance, review, or appeal process. Follow the published procedure, required format, and deadline instead of assuming that one general pathway applies.

At every level, remain factual, chronological, respectful, and child-centered. Carry forward only the information needed to understand the concern. Ask who will take action, what will happen next, and when the response will be reviewed. When the matter is resolved, send a brief closure message and preserve the record.

Did You Know?

- ✓ StopBullying.gov lists a school-response sequence for bullying that begins with the teacher and can continue through the school counselor, principal, superintendent, and state department of education.¹
- ✓ The U.S. Department of Education explains that civil-rights complaints use a specialized process and that its Office for Civil Rights acts as a neutral fact-finder rather than an advocate for either side.²
- ✓ The U.S. Department of Education provides parent question guides to support productive conversations and stronger partnerships with schools before and during problem solving.³

Research Sources

1. StopBullying.gov. ["Get Help Now."](#) Date last reviewed February 5, 2025.
2. U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. ["Questions and Answers on OCR's Complaint Process."](#)
3. U.S. Department of Education. ["Family Partnership and Engagement."](#) Page last reviewed February 26, 2026.

Universal Chain-of-Command Schematic

Use this general pathway to organize an unresolved concern. School and district titles differ, and specialized procedures may control. Immediate safety, abuse, serious threats, or medical emergencies should not wait through the ordinary sequence.

Parent/caregiver: _____	Date started: _____
Child: _____	School/district: _____

1. START — Safety and Correct Path Check

Immediate danger, abuse, serious threat, or medical emergency? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, use the appropriate emergency, safety, child-protection, or medical channel now.

Concern type: ☐ Academic ☐ Behavior ☐ Attendance ☐ Health ☐ Safety

☐ Bullying/harassment ☐ Disability/service ☐ Records/privacy ☐ Other: _____

Published specialized process found? ☐ Yes ☐ No Procedure: _____

2. LEVEL 1 — Person Closest to the Concern

Teacher/staff member: _____ Contact date: _____

Concern stated in one sentence: _____

Requested action: _____

Response/agreed plan: _____

Follow-up date: _____ Result: ☐ Resolved ☐ Improved ☐ Unresolved

3. LEVEL 2 — School Support or Administrator

Contact: ☐ Counselor ☐ Nurse ☐ Case manager ☐ Grade lead ☐ Principal

Name/role: _____ Contact date: _____

Reason for moving forward: _____

Prior plan and result summarized: _____

New action requested/agreed: _____

Follow-up date: _____ Result: ☐ Resolved ☐ Improved ☐ Unresolved

4. LEVEL 3 — District Office or Formal/Specialized Process

District contact/office: _____

Possible office: student services, special education, civil rights, attendance, transportation, superintendent/designee, or another office named in the published procedure.

Procedure/policy title: _____ Filing deadline: _____

Submission date: _____ Case/reference number: _____

Requested resolution: _____

Response/review date: _____ Outcome: _____

5. DOCUMENTATION, FOLLOW-UP, AND CLOSURE

☐ Keep one email thread for the same continuing concern when practical.

☐ Use dates, direct observations, reported information, actions, and results.

☐ Separate facts from conclusions; include only information needed for the concern.

☐ Ask who will act, what will happen, and when the response will be reviewed.

☐ Preserve key messages, plans, forms, and decision notices.

Final status: ☐ Resolved ☐ Ongoing plan ☐ Further review/appeal ☐ Urgent referral

Closure or next-step date: _____ Notes: _____