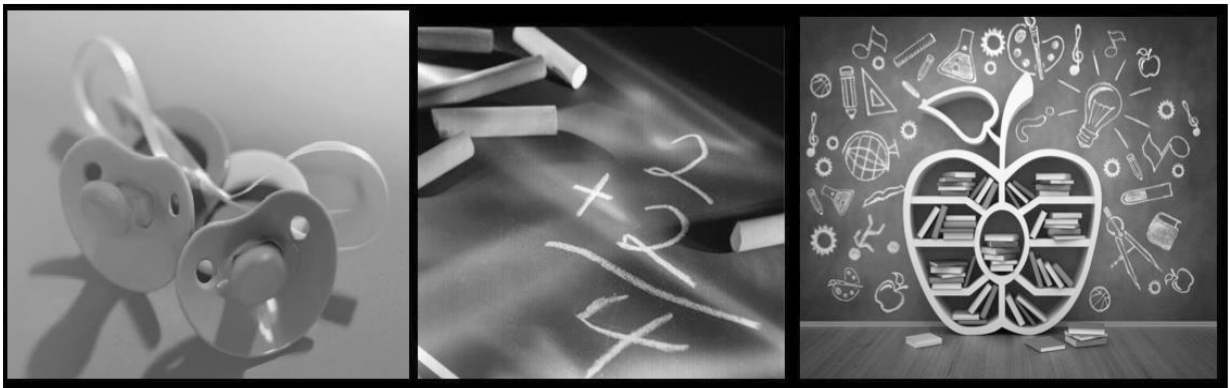


# Parental Rights

## MARYLAND PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS NOTICE

*Infants and Toddlers Early Intervention  
Preschool Special Education  
and  
Special Education*



**REVISED July 2021**



**Parental Rights**  
**Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice**  
**Infants and Toddlers, Preschool, Special Education**  
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## **PROCEDURAL SAFEGUARDS NOTICE**

**34 C.F.R. § 300.504 and § 303.421 and § 303.404**

**The procedural safeguards notice includes a full explanation of parental rights in an easily understandable manner and in a parent’s native language, where applicable. This Procedural Safeguards notice applies to children with disabilities and families under the federal law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.**

The protections included in this document are established by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 20 U.S.C. §1400 *et seq.*, the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), 34 C.F.R. § 300.1 *et. seq.* (IEP) and 34 C.F.R. § 303.1 *et. seq.* (IFSP) and the following chapters of the Code of Maryland Regulations or COMAR: COMAR 13A.05.01, COMAR 13A.08.03, and COMAR 13A.13.01. Each public agency shall establish, maintain, and implement procedural safeguards that meet the requirements of the IDEA. Where appropriate, this notice will indicate which sections are applicable to either Part B or Part C of the IDEA by indicating IEP for Part B and IFSP for Part C. For children and families receiving services through an IFSP, parents are to receive a copy of Procedural Safeguards:

- along with Prior Written Notice, including when the Early Intervention Services provider proposes, or refuses, to initiate or change the identification, evaluation, or placement of the child, or the provision of early intervention services to the child and that child's family;
- when a child is referred for Early Intervention Services under Part C; or
- with a copy of the State's system of payments policies when obtaining consent for provision of early intervention services.

For children receiving services through an IEP, parents are to receive a copy of the procedural safeguards document one time a year, except a public agency must give parents another copy of the document:

- Upon initial referral or parental request for evaluation;
- Upon receipt of the first written State complaint in a school year;
- Upon receipt of the first due process complaint in a school year;
- When a decision is made to take a disciplinary action; and
- Upon parent request.

A public agency may place a current copy of the procedural safeguards notice on its Internet web site, if such web site exists.

The procedural safeguards document includes a full explanation of the parents’ rights, in an easily understandable manner and in the parent’s native language, unless it clearly is not feasible to do so. If the native language or other mode of communication of the parent is not a written language, the public agency shall take steps to translate the procedural safeguards orally or by other means in the parent’s native language or other mode of communication. The public agency must keep written evidence to document the translation of the notice and the parents understood the content of the procedural safeguards.

## **NATIVE LANGUAGE**

### **IEP and IFSP**

#### **34 C.F.R. § 300.612, § 300.29, § 303.421, and § 303.25**

Parents have the right to receive information in the language they understand.

- Native language, when used with an individual who has limited English proficiency, means the following:
- The language normally used by that person, or, in the case of a child, the language normally used by the child's parents;
- In all direct contact with a child (including evaluation of the child), the language normally used by the child in the home or learning environment.

For a person with deafness or blindness, or for a person with no written language, the mode of communication is what the person normally uses (such as sign language, Braille, or oral communication). Parents may request their child's completed IFSP or IEP to be translated into the parents' native language. If the native language spoken by the parents is spoken by more than one percent (1%) of the student population in the local school system, appropriate school personnel must provide the parents with the translated document within 30 days after the date of the request. This one percent translation requirement is also discussed in the mediation section of this document.

## **ELECTRONIC MAIL**

### **IEP and IFSP**

#### **34 C.F.R. § 300.505**

**Parents may choose to receive notices electronically if this option is available.** If the public agency offers parents the choice of receiving documents by e-mail, a parent may choose to receive the following by e-mail:

- Prior written notice;
- Procedural safeguards notice; and
- Notices related to a request for due process.

## **PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE**

### **IEP and IFSP**

#### **34 C.F.R. §§ 300.503 and 303.421**

**Parents have the right to receive written information about the public agency's actions concerning their child's early intervention services or special education and related services.**

### **Notice:**

A public agency must give parents written notice a reasonable time before it proposes, or refuses, to initiate or change the:

- Identification;
- Evaluation;
- Educational program;
- Educational placement of a child
- Provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to a child; or
- Provision of early intervention services to the child and the child’s family through an IFSP, or
- Provision of special education and related services to the child through an IEP.

When written notice relates to an action that requires parental consent, the public agency may give written notice at the same time.

### **Content of Written Notice:**

For children and families receiving services through an IFSP, written notice must:

- Describe the action that is being proposed or refused;
- Explain the reasons for taking the action: and
- Include the Procedural Safeguards.

For children receiving services through an IEP, the written notice must:

- Describe the action(s) that the public agency proposed or refused to take;
- Explain why the public agency is proposing or refusing to take the action(s);
- Describe each evaluation procedure, assessment, record, or report the public agency used in deciding to propose or refuse the action(s);
- Include a statement that parents have protections under the procedural safeguards provisions in IDEA;
- Tell parents how they can obtain a description of the procedural safeguards if the action that the public agency is proposing or refusing is not an initial referral for evaluation;
- Include resources for parents to contact for help in understanding the IDEA;
- Describe any other choices that the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team considered and the reasons why those choices were rejected; and
- Provide a description of other reasons why the public agency proposed or refused the action.

### **CONSENT** **IEP and IFSP**

**34 C.F.R. § 300.300 and 34 C.F.R. § 303.420**

### **Parent Consent:**

**A public agency must get parental consent to assess a child for both early intervention and special education and related services, and before providing early intervention and special education and related services for the first time. Parents have the right to withdraw consent at any time. There are some exceptions to consent for evaluation.**

Consent means that the parents:

- Have been fully informed of all information relevant to the activity for which consent is sought, in their native language or other mode of communication;
- Understand and agree in writing to the carrying out of the activity for which their consent is sought and the consent describes that activity and lists the records (if any) that will be released and to whom; and
- Understand that the granting of consent is voluntary and may be revoked at any time.

If parents withdraw consent, it does not cancel out an action that occurred between the time the public agency received consent and before its withdrawal.

If the parent revokes consent, in writing, for their child to receive special education services after the child is initially provided special education and related services, the public agency is not required to amend the child's education records to remove any references to the child's receipt of special education and related services because of the revocation of consent.

## **IEP – Part B**

### **Parental Consent for Initial Evaluation:**

A public agency must obtain parental consent before conducting an initial evaluation of a child to determine if the child is eligible for special education and related services, and before providing special education and related services for the first time.<sup>1</sup> Before a public agency can conduct an initial evaluation of a child to determine whether the child is eligible for special education and related services, the public agency must:

- Provide parents prior written notice of the proposed action; and
- Obtain informed consent from the parent before conducting an initial evaluation; and
- Must provide the parent with a copy of the procedural safeguards notice in addition to the prior written notice.

The public agency must make reasonable efforts to obtain informed consent for initial evaluation to decide whether the child is a child with a disability that requires the provision of special education and related services. If the parent of a child enrolled in public school or seeking to be enrolled in public school does not provide consent for initial evaluation, or the parent fails to respond to a request to provide consent, the public agency may, but is not required to, pursue the initial evaluation of the child by utilizing procedural safeguards discussed further herein, such as mediation or a due process complaint.<sup>2</sup>

If a parent of a child who is home schooled or placed in a private school by the parents at their own expense does not provide consent for the initial evaluation or the reevaluation, or the parent

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<sup>1</sup> 34 CFR § 300.300(a).

<sup>2</sup> 34 CFR § 300.300(a)(3)(i).



fails to respond to a request to provide consent, the public agency may not use the consent override procedures described above.<sup>3</sup>

A parent’s consent for initial evaluation does not mean the parent also gives consent for the public agency to start providing early intervention or special education and related services to their child.

### **Special Rules for Initial Evaluation of Wards of the State:**

If a child is a ward of the State and is not living with his/her parents, the public agency does not need consent from the parents for an initial evaluation to determine if the child is a child with a disability if:

- Despite reasonable efforts to do so, the public agency cannot find the child’s parent;
- The rights of the parents have been terminated in accordance with State law; or
- A judge has assigned the right to make educational decisions and to consent for an initial evaluation to an individual other than the parent.

### **Parental Consent for Services:**

A public agency must obtain informed consent before providing special education and related services to a child for the first time. A public agency must not use mediation or due process procedures to obtain an agreement or a ruling that special education and related services may be provided to the child without parental consent if the parents:

- Refuse to give consent for their child to receive special education and related services; or
- Do not respond to a request to provide consent for the provision of special education and related services for the first time.

If the parents refuse to give consent for their child to receive special education and related services for the first time, or if the parents do not respond to a request to provide consent, the public agency:

- Is not in violation of the requirement to make a free appropriate public education (FAPE) available to their child; and
- Is not required to have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting or develop an IEP for their child.

### **Withdrawal of Parental Consent for Services:**

If a parent of a child withdraws consent in writing for the continued provision of special education and related services, at any time after the public agency begins the initial provision of special education and related services, the public agency:

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<sup>3</sup> 34 CFR § 300.300(d)(4)(i-ii).

- Is not required to amend the child’s education records to remove any references to the child’s receipt of special education and related services because of the revocation of consent;
- May not continue to provide special education and related services to the child, but must provide prior written notice to the parent of the parent’s written request to stop all special education and related service, before ceasing the provision of special education and related services;
- May not use mediation or due process procedures to obtain agreement or a ruling that the services may be provided to the child;
- Will not be considered to be in violation of the requirement to make FAPE available to the child because of the failure to provide the child with further special education and related services; and
- Is not required to convene an IEP Team meeting or develop an IEP for the child for further provision of special education and related services.

Withdrawal of consent does not cancel out an action that occurred between the time the public agency received consent and before the withdrawal of consent.

### **Parental Consent for Reevaluations for IEP Children and Youth Only:**

A public agency must obtain informed consent before it conducts a reevaluation of a child, unless the public agency can demonstrate:

- It took reasonable steps to obtain parental consent for reevaluation; and
- The parent did not respond.

If parents refuse consent for new assessments, the public agency may, but is not required to, seek to override the parent’s refusal by using mediation or due process procedures to challenge the parent’s refusal to provide consent. As with initial evaluation, the public agency does not violate its obligations under the IDEA if it declines to pursue new assessments.

### **Documentation of Reasonable Efforts to Obtain Parental Consent:**

A public agency must maintain documentation of reasonable efforts to obtain parental consent for initial evaluations, to provide special education and related services for the first time, for reevaluations, and to locate parents of wards of the State for initial evaluations.

The documentation must include a record of the public agency’s attempts to obtain parental consent, such as:

- Detailed records of telephone calls made or attempted and the results of those calls;
- Copies of correspondence sent to parents and any responses received; and
- Detailed records of visits made to the parent’s home or place of employment and the results of those visits.

### **Other Consent Requirements:**

Parental consent is not required before a public agency:

- Reviews existing data as part of your child's initial evaluation or reevaluation; or
- Gives your child a test or other evaluation that is given to all children unless, before that test or evaluation, consent is required from all parents of all children.

The public agency may not use a parent's refusal to consent to deny the parent or the child any other service, benefit, or activity.

If a parent home schools their child or enrolls their child in a private school at their own expense, a public agency may not use mediation or due process procedures to override consent, and the public agency is not required to consider the child as eligible for services under 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.132-300.144, if:

- The parent does not provide consent for their child's initial evaluation or reevaluation; or
- The parent fails to respond to a request to provide consent.

In addition to the actions for which the IDEA requires parental consent (initial evaluation, initial provision of services, and reevaluation), Maryland law requires that an IEP team must obtain the written consent of a parent if the team proposes to:

- Enroll the child in an alternative education program that does not issue or provide credits towards a Maryland High School Diploma;
- Identify the child for the alternative education assessment aligned with the State's alternative curriculum; or
- Include restraint or seclusion in the IEP to address the child's behavior as described in COMAR 13A.08.04.05.

If the parent does not provide written consent to any of the proposed actions listed above, the IEP team must send the parent written notice of their consent rights no later than five (5) business days after the IEP team meeting informing them that:

- The parent has the right to either consent to or refuse to consent to the action proposed; and
- If the parent does not provide written consent or a written refusal within fifteen (15) business days of the IEP team meeting, the IEP team may implement the proposed action.

If the parent refuses to consent to any of the proposed actions listed above, the public agency may use the dispute resolution options listed in Education Article §8-413 (mediation or due process) to resolve the matter.

## **IFSP – PART C**

### **Parent Consent for Services through an IFSP:**

Parents must give written informed consent before:

- All, screenings, evaluations, and assessments of the child and family
- Initiating the provision of early intervention services and additional assessments

- If written consent is not given, the local lead agency shall make reasonable efforts to ensure that the parent:
  - Is fully aware of the nature of the evaluation and assessment or the services that will be available; and
  - Understands that the child will not be able to receive the evaluation and assessment or the services unless written consent is given.

### **Parents also have a right to decline services:**

A parent of an eligible child may determine whether they, their child, or other family members will accept or decline any early intervention service and may decline this service after first accepting it without jeopardizing other early intervention services. If a parent chooses to continue early intervention services for a child three or older through an Extended IFSP, an educational component must be included. If the parent does not want the educational component, they are not eligible to receive early intervention services.

### **Parental Consent for Additional Assessments or Evaluations:**

A public agency must obtain informed consent before it conducts additional individualized evaluations and assessments of a child. If a parent does not give consent, the lead agency must make reasonable efforts to ensure that the parent:

- Is fully aware of the nature of the evaluation and assessment of the child that would be available; and
- Understands that the child will not be able to receive the evaluation and assessment unless consent is given.

If parents refuse consent for additional evaluations or assessments, the public agency may not use due process procedures to challenge the parent’s refusal to provide consent.

## **INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION**

**IEP Only**

**34 C.F.R. § 300.502**

**If a parent disagrees with an evaluation completed by the public agency, the parent has the right to have the child evaluated by someone who does not work for the public agency. Only parents of a child with a disability under Part B are entitled to an independent evaluation.**

### **Definitions:**

- Independent educational evaluation means an evaluation conducted by appropriately qualified personnel not employed by the public agency responsible for the education of the child; and
- Public expense means that the public agency either pays for the full cost of the evaluation or ensures that the evaluation is otherwise provided at no cost to the parents.

Parents have the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation of their child under the IDEA subject to the procedures provided below. The public agency shall provide parents, upon request for an independent educational evaluation, information about:

- Where an independent educational evaluation may be obtained; and
- The public agency’s criteria applicable for an independent educational evaluation.

### **Public Agency Criteria:**

When an independent educational evaluation is at public expense, the criteria under which the independent educational evaluation is obtained, including the location of the evaluation and the qualifications of the examiner, must be the same as the criteria that a public agency uses when it initiates an evaluation, to the extent those criteria are consistent with a parent’s right to an independent educational evaluation. Except for the criteria described above, a public agency may not impose conditions or timelines related to obtaining an independent educational evaluation at public expense.

### **A Parent's Right to Evaluation at Public Expense:**

Parents have the right to only one independent educational evaluation at public expense each time the public agency conducts an evaluation if:

- The parents disagree with an evaluation obtained by the public agency;<sup>4</sup> or
- The parents submit to the public agency a written request for an educational evaluation conducted by the public agency and the public agency:
  - Does not respond to the request within 30 days; or
  - Approves the request but the educational evaluation meeting does not occur, through no fault of the parent, within:
    - Sixty (60) days after the date on which the request was received by the public agency; or
    - If the State is under a State of Emergency proclaimed by the Governor, ninety (90) days after the date on which the request was received by the public agency.

If parents request an independent educational evaluation at public expense, the public agency must, without unnecessary delay, either approve the request and advise the parent of the process for arranging the evaluation at public expense, or deny the request and file for a due process hearing.

If the public agency initiates a due process hearing and the final decision is that the public agency’s evaluation is appropriate, parents still have the right to an independent educational evaluation, but not at public expense.

If parents request an independent educational evaluation, a public agency may ask parents for the reason why the parents object to the public evaluation. However, the parent's explanation is not required and the public agency may not unreasonably delay either providing the independent

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<sup>4</sup> 34 CFR § 300.502(b)(5).

educational evaluation at public expense or initiating the due process hearing to defend the public agency's evaluation.

### **Parent Initiated Evaluation:**

Parents always have the right to obtain an independent educational evaluation from qualified professionals of their choice, at their own expense. The results of a parent-initiated evaluations must be considered by the public agency and the IEP team, if it meets public agency criteria, when making any decisions with respect to the provision of FAPE to the child.<sup>5</sup> The results of parent-initiated private evaluation may also be presented as evidence at a due process hearing regarding the child.

### **Request for an Evaluation by an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ):**

If an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) with the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) requests an independent educational evaluation as a part of a due process hearing, the cost of the evaluation must be at public expense.

## **SURROGATE PARENTS**

### **IEP and IFSP**

### **34 C.F.R. § 300.519 and § 303.422**

The local lead agency, the local school system, or in some instances a judge, may assign a surrogate parent to represent an eligible child if:

- The parent cannot be identified;
- The public agency after reasonable efforts cannot find the child's parent; or
- The child is a ward of the State of Maryland.
- The lead agency must make reasonable efforts to ensure the assignment of a surrogate parent not more than 30 days after a public agency determines that the child needs a surrogate parent.

### **Criteria for Surrogate Parents:**

- No conflict with the interests of the child
- Has knowledge and skills that ensure adequate representation of the child
- Not an employee of the State or an employee of any service provider involved in the provision of early intervention or other services to the child or the child's family

Once appointed as a Surrogate Parent the Surrogate Parent has the same rights as a parent for all purposes.

- The Surrogate Parents will not be considered an agency employee solely because they are paid by a public agency to be a surrogate parent.

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<sup>5</sup> 34 CFR § 303.502(c).

The local lead agency or the local school system shall notify the State Superintendent of Schools, or the Superintendent’s designee, of the surrogate parent appointment. A surrogate parent may represent a child in all matters relating to the:

- Evaluation and assessment of the child;
- Development and implementation of child’s IFSP, including annual evaluations and periodic reviews;
- Development, review, and revision of a child’s IEP;
- Ongoing provision of early intervention services to child and family through the IFSP; or
- Provision of special education and related services to a child through the IEP.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION**

### **IEP and IFSP**

**34 C.F.R. §§ 300.610-627 and 34 C.F.R. §§ 303.401-417**

**Parents have the right to review their child’s records and ask the public agency to correct their child’s record if they think the record is not correct. Parental consent must be obtained before the release of personally identifiable information, yet your consent is not required in some circumstances, as described below. Parents have the right to expect the public agency to keep their child’s early intervention or educational records confidential and ask the public agency to destroy their child’s educational information when it is no longer needed to provide early intervention or educational services.**

### **Definitions:**

Destruction means physical destruction or removal of personal identifiers from information so that the information is no longer personally identifiable.

Education records means the type of records covered under the definition of “education records” in 34 C.F.R. Part 99 (the regulations implementing the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA] of 1974).

Early intervention records mean all records regarding a child that are required to be collected, maintained, or used under Part C of the IDEA and the regulations in this Part.

Participating agency means any agency or institution that collects, maintains, or uses personally identifiable information, or from which information is obtained under Part B of the IDEA. Under Part C, a participating agency includes the lead agency and early intervention service providers and any individual or entity that provides any early intervention services. It does not include primary referral sources, or public agencies (such as the State Medicaid or CHIP program) or private entities (such as private insurance companies) that act solely as funding sources for Part C services.

Personally identifiable information includes:

- Name of the child, child's parents, or other family member;
- Address of the child;
- A personal identifier, such as the child's social security number; or
- A list of personal characteristics or other information that would make it possible to identify the child with reasonable certainty.

For children being served by an IFSP, personally identifiable information also includes:

- Indirect identifiers, such as the child's date of birth, place of birth, and mother's maiden name;
- Other information that, alone or in combination, is linked or linkable to a specific child that would allow a reasonable person in the early intervention services community, who



does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the child with reasonable certainty; or

- Information requested by a person who the educational agency or institution reasonably believes knows the identity of the student to whom the education record relates.

### **Safeguards:**

Each participating agency shall protect the confidentiality of personally identifiable information at collection, storage, disclosure, and destruction stages. One official of a public agency is responsible for protecting the confidentiality of personally identifiable information. In addition to the requirements of these procedural safeguards, federal and State laws and regulations also govern the protection of educational records. All public agency personnel who collect or use personally identifiable information must receive training regarding the State’s policies and procedures on the confidentiality of personally identifiable information. Each participating agency shall maintain, for public inspection, a current listing of the names and positions of those employees within the agency who may have access to personally identifiable information.

### **Consent:**

Parental consent must be obtained before personally identifiable information is disclosed to parties, other than officials of participating agencies for purposes of meeting a requirement of Part B, unless the information is contained in education records, and the disclosure is authorized without parental consent under 34 C.F.R. Part 99. The public agency must obtain parental consent, or the consent of an eligible child who has reached the age of majority under State law, before personally identifiable information is released to officials of a participating agencies providing or paying for transition services under Part B of the IDEA (IEP); and if a child is enrolled, or is going to enroll in a private school that is not located in the school district of the parent’s residence, parental consent must be obtained before any personally identifiable information about the child is released between officials in the local educational agency (LEA) where the private school is located and officials in the LEA of the parent’s residence.<sup>6</sup>

MSDE has developed policies and procedures for public agencies, including sanctions, which the State uses to ensure that its policies and procedures are followed, and that the requirements for confidentiality, in accordance with IDEA and FERPA are met. If an organization or individual believes a public agency has violated confidentiality requirements under IDEA, a State complaint may be filed in order to resolve the matter.

Each public agency is required to have procedures in place for how adequate notice is provided to fully inform parents about the requirements of confidentiality of personally identifiable information including a:

- Description of the extent that the notice is given in the native languages of the various population groups in the State;
- Description of the children on whom personally identifiable information is maintained, and the types of information sought;

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<sup>6</sup> 34 CFR § 300.622.

- Summary of the policies and procedures that participating agencies must follow regarding storage, disclosure to third parties, retention, and destruction of personally identifiable information;
- Description of policies and procedures used in the event that a parent refuses to provide consent; and
- Description of all of the rights of parents and children regarding this information, including the rights under FERPA and implementing regulations in 34 C.F.R. Part 99.

Before any major identification, location, or evaluation activity, the notice must be published or announced in newspapers or other media, or both, with circulation adequate to notify parents throughout the jurisdiction of the activity.

Further, personally identifiable information may not be disclosed to anyone other than officials of participating agencies collecting or using the information under the IDEA, or for any purpose other than meeting the requirements of providing a child with a disability FAPE or early intervention services under the IDEA. During transition from early intervention to preschool services, the lead agency will provide notification to MSDE and the local school system that the child may be eligible for special education services as required by 34 C.F.R. § 303.209(b)(1)(i). This notification will include the child's name, date of birth, and parent contact information as required by 34 C.F.R. § 303.209(b)(1) and § 303.401. Disclosures addressed in referral to and action by law enforcement and judicial authorities regarding reporting a crime committed by a child with a disability do not require parental consent to the extent that the transmission is permitted by FERPA.

### **Access Rights:**

For children and families receiving early intervention services, the local lead agency shall provide parents an initial copy of their child's early intervention record at no cost to the parents. The local lead agency must also provide at no cost to parents, a copy of each evaluation, assessment of the child, family assessment, and IFSP as soon as possible after each IFSP meeting. Each public agency shall permit parents to inspect and review any education records relating to their child that is collected, maintained, or used by the public agency with respect to the identification, evaluation, and educational placement of their child, development and implementation of the IFSP and the provision of FAPE. For children and families receiving services through an IFSP, the local lead agency shall comply with a request without unnecessary delay and before any meeting regarding an IFSP, or any due process hearing, and in no case more than 10 days after the request.

For children receiving services through an IEP, the public agency shall comply with a request without unnecessary delay and before any meeting regarding an IEP, or any due process hearing or resolution session, and in no case more than 45 days after the request. A parent's right to inspect and review educational records under this section includes the parent's right to:

- A response from the public agency to reasonable requests for explanations and interpretations of the records;
- Request that the public agency provide copies of the record if failure to provide copies would effectively prevent the parent from exercising the right to inspect and review the records; and
- Have the parent's representative inspect and review the records.

A public agency may presume parents have the authority to inspect and review records relating to their child unless the public agency has been advised that a parent does not have the authority under applicable State law governing such matters as guardianship, separation, and divorce.

### **Record of Access:**

Each public agency shall keep a record of individuals, other than parents and authorized employees of the public agency, obtaining access to education records collected, maintained, or used under Part C or Part B of the IDEA, including the name of the individual, the date access was given, and the purpose for which the individual is authorized to use the records. If any education record includes information on more than one child, the parents of those children have the right to inspect and review only the information relating to their child or to be informed of that specific information. Each public agency shall provide parents, on request, a list of the types and locations of education records collected, maintained, or used by the public agency. Each public agency may charge a fee for copies of education records that are made for parents if the fee does not effectively prevent the parents from exercising their right to inspect and review those records. A public agency may not charge a fee to search for or retrieve information from education records.

### **Amendment of Records at Parent's Request:**

If a parent believes that information in the education records collected, maintained, or used under the IDEA is inaccurate or misleading or violates the privacy or other rights of their child, the parent may request the public agency that maintains the information, to amend the information. The public agency shall decide whether to amend the information in accordance with the parent request within a reasonable period of time of receiving the request. If the public agency refuses to amend the information in accordance with the request, it shall inform the parent of their refusal and advise the parent of their right to a hearing to challenge the information in educational records. A hearing conducted to challenge information in educational records must be conducted in accordance with FERPA procedures as found in 34 C.F.R. §99.22.

The public agency, upon request, shall provide the parent with an opportunity for a hearing to challenge information in education records to ensure that it is not inaccurate, misleading, or otherwise in violation of the privacy or other rights of your child. If, as a result of the hearing, the public agency decides that the information is inaccurate or misleading or otherwise in violation of the privacy or other rights of the child, the public agency shall amend the information accordingly and so inform the parent of the amendment in writing. If, as a result of the hearing, the public agency decides that the information is not inaccurate or misleading or otherwise in violation of the privacy or other rights of the child, it shall inform the parent of their right to place in the records it maintains on their child, a statement commenting on the information or setting forth any reasons for disagreeing with the decision of the public agency.

Any explanation placed in the records of your child must:

- Be maintained by the public agency as part of the child's record as long as the record or contested portion is maintained by the public agency; and
- Disclose the explanation to any party requesting a copy of the child's record or the contested portion.

## **Procedures for the Destruction of Information:**

The public agency is required to inform parents when personally identifiable information collected, maintained, or used under the IDEA is no longer needed to provide early intervention or educational services to their child. The information must be destroyed at the request of the parents. However, for students receiving special education services under Part B, a permanent record of the child's name, address, and phone number, the child's grades, attendance record, classes attended, grade level completed, and year completed may be maintained without time limitation. Similarly, for children receiving early intervention services under Part C, a permanent record of a child's name, date of birth, parent contact information (including address and phone number), names of service coordinator(s) and EIS provider(s), and exit data (including year and age upon exit, and any programs entered into upon exiting) may be maintained without time limitation.

## **Children's Rights:**

Under the regulations for FERPA, parental rights regarding a child's education records transfer to the child once he/she reaches the age of 18, unless the child's disability makes him/her incompetent under State law. If the parent's rights under Part B of IDEA transfer to the child who reaches the age of majority, the IDEA confidentiality requirements must also transfer to the child. However, the public agency must provide the parent and the child any notice required under IDEA. Please refer to "Transfer of Parental Rights at Age of Majority" for more specific information.

## **Disciplinary Information:**

A public agency may include in a child's records a statement of any current or previous disciplinary action that has been taken against the child and transmit discipline information; to the same extent that disciplinary information is included in, and transmitted with the records of nondisabled children. The statement may include a description of any behavior engaged in by the child that required disciplinary action, a description of the disciplinary action taken, and any other information that is relevant to the safety of the child and other individuals involved with the child. If the child transfers from one school to another, the transmission of any of the child's records must include both the child's current IEP and any statement of current or previous disciplinary action taken against the child.

## **DISCIPLINE OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

### **IEP**

### **34 C.F.R. §§ 300.530 -300.536**

The information below applies to children with disabilities, ages 3 through 21, receiving services through an Extended IFSP or an IEP.

**Parents have the right to specific procedures and protections if the public agency takes certain disciplinary actions towards their child. Consistent with 34 C.F.R. § 300.530(d), a public agency must provide a child educational services after the child's removal for more than 10 school days in a school year for a violation(s) of a student code of conduct.**

## Definitions:

For purposes of this part, the following definitions apply:

- Controlled substance means a drug or other substance identified under schedules I, II, III, IV, or V in section 202(c) of the Controlled Substances Act (21 U.S.C. 812(c)).
- Illegal drug means a controlled substance, but does not include a substance that is legally possessed or used under the supervision of a licensed health-care professional or that is legally possessed or used under any other authority under the IDEA or under any other provision of federal law.
- Weapon has the meaning given the term “dangerous weapon” under paragraph (2) of the first subsection (g) of section 930 of title 18, United States Code.
- Serious bodily injury has the meaning given the term “serious bodily injury” under paragraph (3) of subsection (h) of section 1365 of title 18, United States Code.

## Authority of School Personnel:

School personnel may consider any unique circumstances on a case-by-case basis, when determining whether a change in placement, made in accordance with the following requirements related to the discipline, is appropriate for a child with a disability who violates a school code of conduct.<sup>7</sup>

School personnel may remove a child with a disability from his or her current placement to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting, another setting, or suspension, for not more than 10 school days at a time for violation of a school code of conduct, to the extent they take such action for children without disabilities, and for additional removals of not more than 10 consecutive school days in that same school year for separate incidents of misconduct (as long as those removals do not constitute a change in placement under §300.536).<sup>8</sup>

If the behavior that violated the student code of conduct was not a manifestation of the child’s disability (see Manifestation Determination below), and the disciplinary change in placement would exceed 10 school days in a row, school personnel may apply the disciplinary procedures to such child with a disability in the same manner and for the same duration as it would to children without disabilities, except that the school must provide services to the child as described below in the Services provision.<sup>9</sup> The child’s IEP Team determines the interim educational setting for such services.<sup>10</sup>

After a child with a disability has been removed from his or her current placement for 10 school days in the same school year, during any subsequent days of removal the public agency must provide services to the extent required under the services provision described below.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(a).

<sup>8</sup> 34 CFR § 300.536 (b)(1).

<sup>9</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(c).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(b)(2).

In accordance with the discipline policy required for all children, those in public prekindergarten programs, kindergarten, first grade or second grade may be disciplinarily removed only if the school administration, in consultation with a school psychologist or other mental health professional, determines that there is an imminent threat of serious harm to other students or staff that cannot be reduced or eliminated through interventions and supports. In such a case, the principal or school administration must promptly contact the parent or guardian of the student. In addition, the child may not be removed for more than five school days per incident. Children in public prekindergarten programs, kindergarten, first grade or second grade may be disciplinarily removed for forty-five school days or longer only when consistent with federal law (COMAR 13A.08.01.11).

### **Services:**

A child with a disability who is removed from the child's current placement for 10 school days or less in a school year is only entitled to services if the public agency provides services to a child without disabilities who is similarly removed.

A child with a disability who is removed from the child's current placement for more than 10 school days and the behavior is not a manifestation of the child's disability (*see Manifestation Determination*), or who is removed under special circumstances (*see Special Circumstances*) must:<sup>12</sup>

- 1) Continue to receive education services (have available FAPE), so as to enable the child to continue to participate in the general education curriculum, although in another setting (that may be an interim alternative educational setting), and to progress toward meeting the goals set out in the child's IEP; and
- 2) Receive, as appropriate, a functional behavioral assessment, and behavioral intervention services and modifications, which are designed to address the behavior violation so that it does not happen again.

After a child with a disability has been removed from his or her current placement for 10 school days in the same school year, and if the current removal is for 10 school days in a row or less and if the removal is not a change in placement (see definition below), then school personnel, in consultation with at least one of the child's teachers, determine the extent to which services are needed to enable the child to continue to participate in the general education curriculum, although in another setting, and to progress toward meeting the goals set out in the child's IEP. If the removal is a change of placement (*see Change of Placement Because of Disciplinary Removal*), the child's IEP Team determines the appropriate services to enable the child to continue to participate in the general education curriculum, although in another setting (that may be an interim alternative educational setting), and to progress toward meeting the goals set out in the child's IEP.

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<sup>12</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(d).

## **Manifestation Determination:**

Within 10 school days of any decision to change the placement because of a violation of the code of conduct, the parent and the child’s IFSP team or IEP team must review all relevant information in the child’s file, including his/her IFSP or IEP, any teacher observations and any relevant information provided by the parent, to determine if the conduct in question was:

- Caused by or had a direct and substantial relationship to the child’s disability; or
- The direct result of the public agency’s failure to implement the child’s IFSP or IEP.<sup>13</sup>

If the IEP team determines that either of the above statements is applicable, the conduct shall be determined to be a manifestation of the child’s disability.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, if the IEP team determines that the child’s conduct in question was a direct result of the LEA’s failure to implement the child’s IEP, the LEA must take immediate steps to remedy those deficiencies.<sup>15</sup>

If the conduct was a manifestation of the child’s disability, the IFSP team or IEP team must either:<sup>16</sup>

- Conduct a functional behavioral assessment and implement a behavioral intervention plan for the child, if the public agency had not previously done so, and implement a behavioral intervention plan for the child;
- Review the child’s behavior intervention plan if he/she already has such plan and modify it, as necessary to address the behavior;<sup>17</sup> and
- Return the child to the placement from which he/she was removed, unless the parents and the public agency agree to a change of placement as part of modifying the child’s behavioral intervention plan, except when the child has been removed to an interim alternative educational setting for drugs, weapons or serious bodily injury.<sup>18</sup>

## **Special Circumstances:**

School personnel may remove a child to an interim alternative educational setting for up to 45 school days without regard to whether the behavior is determined to be a manifestation of the child’s disability, in cases where the child:

- Carries or possesses a weapon to or at school, on school premises, or to or at a school function under the jurisdiction of a State or local public agency;<sup>19</sup>
- Knowingly possesses or uses illegal drugs, or sells or solicits the sale of a controlled substance, while at school, on school premises, or at a school function under the jurisdiction of a State or local public agency;<sup>20</sup> or

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<sup>13</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(e)(1)(i-ii).

<sup>14</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(e)(2).

<sup>15</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(e)(3).

<sup>16</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(f)(1).

<sup>17</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(f)(1)(ii).

<sup>18</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(f)(2).

<sup>19</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(g)(1).

<sup>20</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(g)(2).

- Has inflicted serious bodily injury upon another person while at a school, on school premises, or at school function under the jurisdiction of a State or local public agency.<sup>21</sup>

The IEP Team determines the interim alternative educational setting for removals that are changes of placement, and removals under the subheadings Additional Authority and Special Circumstances.

### **Change of Placement:**

For purposes of removals of a child with a disability from the child's current educational placement, a change of placement occurs if:

- The removal is for more than 10 consecutive school days in a school year; or
- The child has been subjected to a series of removals that constitute a pattern because the removals total more than 10 school days in a school year; the child's behavior is substantially similar to the child's behavior in previous incidents that resulted in the series of removals; and because of such additional factors as the length of each removal, the total amount of time the child has been removed, and the proximity of the removals to one another.

The public agency determines on a case-by-case basis whether a pattern of removals constitutes a change of placement. This determination is subject to review through due process and judicial proceedings. When a child is removed for more than 10 school days, that results in a change in placement, whether or not the behavior is a manifestation of the disability, or when a child is removed to interim alternative educational setting (IAES) for drugs, weapons or serious bodily injury, the child continues to receive services to enable him/her to continue to participate in the general education curriculum although in another setting and to progress toward meeting the goals set out in his/her IEP. The child must also receive, as appropriate, a functional behavioral assessment and behavior intervention services and modifications designed to address the behavioral violation so that it does not recur. The IEP team determines appropriate services and the location in which the services will be provided.

### **Appeal of Disciplinary Action:**

If the parents of a child with a disability disagree with a decision regarding a manifestation determination or with any decision regarding placement for disciplinary reasons, the parents may file a due process complaint with the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) and the public agency.<sup>22</sup> If the public agency believes that maintaining the current placement of the child is substantially likely to result in injury to the child or others, the public agency may file a due process complaint with OAH and the parents. When a hearing is requested under this section, unless the parents and the LEA agree in writing to waive the resolution meeting or to use the mediation process, a resolution meeting must occur within seven days of receiving notice of the due process complaint, and the due process hearing may proceed unless the matter has been resolved to the satisfaction of both parties within 15 days of the receipt of the due process complaint.

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<sup>21</sup> 34 CFR § 300.530(g)(3).

<sup>22</sup> 34 CFR § 300.532(a).



An Administrative Law Judge (ALJ), conducts the due process hearing. Whenever a hearing is requested with regards to any decisions made above, the hearing must be expedited and consistent with 34 CFR § 300.532(c); the hearing must occur within 20 school days of the date the due process complaint is filed, and the hearing officer must make a determination within 10 school days after the hearing.

In making a determination in a disciplinary appeal, the ALJ may:

- Return the child to the placement from which he/she was removed; or
- Order a change in placement of the child to an appropriate interim alternative educational setting for not more than 45 school days if the ALJ determines that maintaining the current placement of the child is substantially likely to result in injury to the child or others.
- Any decision made on an expedited due process hearing subject to this section, is appealable consistent with 34 CFR § 300.514.<sup>23</sup>

**Note:** The procedures above may be repeated, if the LEA believes that returning the child to the original placement is substantially likely to result in injury to the child or to others.<sup>24</sup>

When a due process complaint is requested by either the parents or the public agency, the child remains in the interim alternative educational setting pending the decision of the ALJ or until the expiration of the time period provided (no more than 45 school days), whichever comes first, unless the parents and the public agency agree otherwise.

### **Child Not Yet Determined Eligible**

Children who have not been determined eligible for special education and who have engaged in a behavior that violates any rule or code of conduct may assert any of the protections provided, if the public agency had knowledge that the child had a disability before the behavior occurred.

The public agency has knowledge if, before the behavior resulting in the disciplinary action occurred:

- The parents expressed concern in writing, that their child needs special education and related services, to supervisory or administrative personnel of the public agency, or a teacher of the child;
- The parents requested an evaluation; or
- The child's teacher or other school personnel have expressed specific concern about a pattern of behavior demonstrated by the child, directly to the director of special education or other supervisory personnel of the public agency.

The public agency is not considered to have knowledge if:

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<sup>23</sup> 34 CFR § 300.532(c)(5).

<sup>24</sup> 34 CFR § 300.532(b)(3).

- The parents refused to allow the public agency to evaluate their child;
- The parents refused to allow the public agency to provide special education services; or
- The child has been evaluated and it was determined that he/she was not a child with a disability under IDEA.

If the public agency does not have knowledge that a child has a disability prior to taking disciplinary action, the child may be subject to the same disciplinary measures as a child without disabilities who engages in comparable behaviors.

If a parent made a request for an evaluation, during the timeframe in which their child is subject to disciplinary measures, the evaluation must be expedited. Pending the results, the child remains in the educational placement determined by school authorities. If, based on the public agency's evaluation and information provided by parents, the child is determined to be a child with a disability, the public agency must provide special education and related services and all procedural safeguards regarding discipline of children with disabilities apply.

### **Referral to and Action by Law Enforcement and Judicial Authorities**

IDEA does not prohibit public agencies from reporting a crime to appropriate authorities, and law enforcement. Judicial authorities may exercise their responsibilities in applying federal and State law to crimes committed by a child with a disability. Any agency reporting a crime shall supply copies of the child's special education and disciplinary records to the appropriate authorities to the extent allowed by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

### **PARENTAL UNILATERAL PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS AT PUBLIC EXPENSE**

**IEP  
34 CFR § 300.148**

**IDEA does not require a public agency to pay for the cost of education, including early intervention or special education and related services, of a child with a disability at a private school if the public agency made a free appropriate public education (FAPE) available and the parent chose to place their child in a private school.**

IDEA does not require a public agency to pay for the cost of education, including special education and related services, of a child with a disability at a private school if the public agency made a free appropriate public education (FAPE) available and the parents chose to place their child in a private school. However, the public agency shall include the child in the population of children placed in private schools by their parents, in accordance with the federal regulations. Disagreements between the parents and the public agency regarding the availability of FAPE and financial responsibility are subject to due process complaint procedures under IDEA. Please refer to "Resolving Disagreements" for more specific information.

If a child with a disability had previously received special education and related services under the authority of a public agency, and the parents enroll their child in a private preschool,

elementary, or secondary school without the consent or referral of the public agency, an ALJ or a court, may require the public agency to reimburse parents for the cost of that enrollment if an ALJ or a court finds that the public agency had not made FAPE available to the child in a timely manner prior to that enrollment, and that the private placement is appropriate. An ALJ or a court may find your parental placement to be appropriate even if it does not meet the State standards that apply to education provided by public agencies.

### **Limitation on Reimbursement:**

Reimbursement may be reduced or denied by an ALJ or a court if:

- At the most recent IEP team meeting parents attended prior to removing their child from the public school, parents did not inform the IEP team that they were rejecting the placement proposed by the public agency to provide FAPE, including stating their concerns and their intent to enroll their child in a private school at public expense; or
- At least ten (10) business days (including any business days that occur on a holiday) prior to the parents removal of their child from the public school, parents did not give the public agency written notice of their intent to remove their child, including their concerns regarding their child’s public placement; or
- If prior to the parents removal of their child from the public school, the public agency informed the parents, through the prior written notice requirements of its intent to evaluate their child (including a statement of the purpose of the evaluation that was appropriate and reasonable), but the parents did not make their child available for the evaluation; or
- Upon a judicial finding of unreasonableness with respect to the parents actions.

Notwithstanding the notice requirements described above, the cost of reimbursement:

- Shall not be reduced or denied for the parents failure to provide such notice, if:
  - The public agency prevented the parents from providing notice,
  - The parents had not received written notice, under the IDEA notice requirements described above,
  - Compliance with the notice requirements would likely result in physical harm to the child, and
- May, at the discretion of a court or an ALJ, not be reduced or denied for failure to provide such notice if:
  - The parents are not literate and cannot write in English, or
  - Compliance with the notice as described above would likely result in serious emotional harm to the child.

## **TRANSFER OF PARENTAL RIGHTS** **AT AGE OF MAJORITY**

**IEP**  
**34 CFR § 300.520**

**In Maryland, parental rights do not transfer to children with disabilities on reaching the age of majority, except under limited circumstances.**

Under Maryland law, in certain limited circumstances, all rights accorded to the parents under IDEA shall transfer to a child with a disability. This transfer occurs when the child reaches the age of 18 years, if the child has not been adjudged incompetent under State law and there is documentation that:

- The parents are unavailable or unknown, and the child requests that the parental rights be transferred to the child rather than have a parent surrogate appointed;
- The parents have not participated in the special education decision making process for the child after repeated attempts by the public agency to involve the parents over the previous year;
- The parents have affirmatively rejected participation in the special education decision making process;
- The parents cannot participate in the special education decision making process due to prolonged hospitalization, institutionalization, or serious illness or infirmity of one or both of the parents and the parents have consented to the transfer of rights to the child;
- The parents cannot participate in the special education decision making process due to extraordinary circumstances beyond their control, and the parents have consented to the transfer of rights to the child; or
- The child is living outside of the parents' home and is not in the care or custody of another public agency.

If the parents of a child with a disability, with whom the child resides, do not consent to the transfer of rights to the child at the age of 18, and the child has not been adjudged incompetent under State law, either party may file a due process complaint to determine whether the rights should be transferred.

If a child with a disability has been represented by a parent surrogate in accordance with federal and State laws and regulations, the public agency shall provide any written notice required under federal and State laws and regulations to both the child and parent surrogate. All other rights afforded the parent surrogate under IDEA shall transfer to the child if the child has not been adjudged incompetent under State law and the child requests that the rights transfer.

## **RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS**

**IEP and IFSP**

**34 CFR §§ 300.506-300.516 and 34 CFR §§ 303.430-303.434 and §§ 303.440-303.449**

**The following procedures describe the processes available to parents and public agencies for resolving disagreements regarding a child's early intervention or special education**

**program and related services, including eligibility. These options include mediation, State complaint, and due process complaint.**

### **Mediation:**

Mediation is a voluntary process for all parties that may be used at any time by the parents of a child with a disability and the public agency responsible for the education of the child to resolved disagreements involving any matter under Part B of the IDEA, including matters arising prior to the filing of a due process complaint.<sup>25</sup> Mediation may be requested by parents or the public agency.<sup>26</sup>

If during an IEP/IFSP team meeting a parent disagrees with a child’s IEP/IFSP or the special education services provided to the child, the IEP/IFSP team shall provide the parent, in plain language:

- An oral and written explanation of the parent’s right to request mediation;
- Contact information, including a telephone number, that a parent may use to receive more information about the mediation process; and
- Information regarding pro bono representation and other free or low-cost legal and related services available in the area.

Parents may request the information about mediation to be translated into the parents’ native language. If the native language spoken by the parents is spoken by more than 1 percent of the student population in the local school system, the IEP/IFSP team shall provide the parent with the translated document within 30 days after the date of the request.

An employee of the Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH) who is qualified and trained in effective mediation techniques will conduct the mediation. OAH is an impartial entity that is not part of MSDE. OAH has a list of qualified employees who have no personal or professional conflict of interest, are not employees of a State agency or the LEA that is involved in the education or care of the child and are selected in an impartial manner to conduct the mediation. A qualified mediator as described above is not an employee of MSDE or an LEA solely because he or she serves as the mediator.

- Mediation is at no cost to the parent or public agency responsible for the child's early intervention or education, including the cost of a meeting with parents to encourage mediation.
- A request for mediation is made to the public agency responsible for the early intervention or education of the child and the OAH. To assist parents with filing a request for mediation a form is available from the public agency and on the MSDE website at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org). For further assistance, contact the public agency’s Special Education Office or the MSDE, Division of Early Intervention/Special Education Services, 410-767-7770.

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<sup>25</sup> 34 CFR § 300.506(b)(1)(i).

<sup>26</sup> 34 CFR § 303.431(a).

- Parents or the public agency may be accompanied and advised by counsel during mediation.
- A mediation session will generally occur within 20 days of the receipt of a written request, but must be scheduled in a timely manner and at a location convenient to the parties to the dispute.<sup>27</sup>
- Mediation sessions are closed proceedings. Discussions that occur during mediation must be confidential and cannot be used as evidence in any subsequent due process hearing or civil action of any Federal or State court of a State receiving assistance under Part B of IDEA. Parents or the public agency may be asked to sign a confidentiality pledge before the start of the mediation.
- An agreement reached by the parties in the mediation must be set forth in a written agreement that is enforceable in any State Court that has the authority to hear this type of case, or in a federal district court. This agreement must be signed by the parent and a representative of the agency with authority to bind the agency.
- Mediation is available to resolve disputes whether a parent has filed a due process complaint to request a due process hearing, but a public agency may not use mediation to deny or delay the parent's right to a hearing on the parent's due process complaint.

### **Meeting to Encourage Mediation:**

A public agency may offer to parents, who elect not to use the mediation process, to meet at a time and location convenient to the parents, to explain the benefits of the mediation process and encourage parents to use the process.

### **Difference Between a State Complaint and a Due Process Complaint:**

**In addition to mediation, parents have the right to use the State complaint process or the due process complaint process to resolve disagreements with the public agency. These options have different rules and procedures.**

The IDEA regulations have separate procedures for State complaints and for due process complaints. As explained below, any individual or organization may file a State complaint alleging a violation of any IDEA requirement by a public agency. Only a parent or a public agency may file a due process complaint on any matter relating to the identification, evaluation, early intervention services or educational placement of a child with a disability, or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the child.

MSDE staff generally must resolve a State complaint within 60 calendar days, unless the timeline is properly extended. An ALJ must hear a due process complaint (if not resolved through a resolution meeting or through mediation) and issue a written decision within 45 calendar days after the end of the resolution period or the adjusted resolution period, unless the ALJ grants a specific extension of the timeline at the parent's request or the public agency's request.

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<sup>27</sup> 34 CFR § 303.431(b)(4).

For an overview and comparison of these options, see the Attachment to this document.

## **State Complaint:**

**An organization or individual, including one from another State, has the right to file a State Complaint with the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). In order for the State to conduct an investigation, the written complaint must meet specific criteria as required in the IDEA regulations. The MSDE is responsible for disseminating widely the State Complaint procedures to parents and other interested individuals, including parent training and information centers, protection and advocacy agencies, independent living centers, and other appropriate entities.**

If an organization or individual, including one from another State believes a public agency has violated a federal or State law or regulation concerning an early intervention or special education requirement, or that a public agency has not implemented a due process hearing decision, a State complaint may be filed in order to resolve the matter. The complaint must be filed with the MSDE and should be address to the Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services, Maryland State Department of Education, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201. The person or organization that files a State complaint with MSDE must also send a copy of the complaint to the public agency at the same time. To assist with filing the complaint, detailed procedures and a form are available on the MSDE [website at www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org), or by calling the Division's Complaint Investigation and Due Process Branch at 410-767-7770.

### **The State complaint must include:**

- A statement that the public agency has violated a requirement of federal or State law or regulation, or that the public agency failed to implement a due process hearing decision;
- The facts upon which the statement is based;
- The signature and contact information for the person/organization filing the State complaint; and
- If the State complaint is alleging a violation with respect to a specific child:
  - The name and address of residence of the child;
  - The name of the school the child is attending;
  - In the case of a homeless child or youth, available contact information for the child, and the name of the school the child is attending;
  - A description of the nature of the problem of the child, including facts relating to the problem; and
  - A proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to the party at the time the State complaint is filed.

**NOTE:** MSDE has model forms to assist parents and public agencies in filing a State complaint. Parents, public agencies and other parties may use the model form, or they may use any other form as long as it meets the requirements above.

A State complaint must allege a violation that has occurred not more than one year prior to the State receiving the complaint. MSDE must issue a written decision that contains findings of fact

and conclusions within 60 calendar days of receipt of the State complaint, and may extend the 60-day timeline only if:

- Exceptional circumstances exist regarding a particular complaint;<sup>28</sup> or
- The parent and the public agency involved voluntarily agree to extend the time to try to mediation or alternative means of dispute resolution.<sup>29</sup>

At a minimum, MSDE shall:

- Conduct an independent on-site investigation, if it is determined necessary;
- Provide the complainant the opportunity to submit additional information, either orally or in writing, about the allegations in the State complaint;
- Provide the public agency with the opportunity to submit a proposal to resolve the complaint and provide the parties with the opportunity to voluntarily engage in mediation consistent with 34 CFR § 300.506.<sup>30</sup>
- Review all relevant information and make an independent determination as to whether a public agency has violated requirements of federal and State laws; and
- Issue a written decision to the complainant and the public agency that addresses each allegation in the complaint and contains findings of fact and conclusions and the reasons for MSDE’s final decision.

The decision will also include procedures for the effective implementation of the final decision, if needed, including technical assistance activities, negotiations, and corrective actions to achieve compliance. If MSDE determines a public agency has failed to provide appropriate services, the final written decision shall address how a public agency is to remediate the denial of those services appropriate to the needs of the child, including corrective action appropriate to address the needs of the child (such as compensatory services or monetary reimbursement), and appropriate future services for all children with disabilities.

### **Resolving a State Complaint:**

Mediation and other less formal methods to resolve the disagreement may be available and are encouraged. If the parties resolve the complaint, MSDE does not conduct an investigation under the federal regulations.

### **Resolving a State Complaint that is the Subject of a Due Process Hearing:**

If MSDE receives a State complaint that is also part of a due process hearing, or if a State complaint contains multiple issues of which one or more are part of a hearing, MSDE must set aside any part of the State complaint that is being addressed in the due process hearing until the conclusion of that due process hearing. However, any issue in the State complaint that is not part of the due process hearing must be resolved using the timeline and procedures described above.

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<sup>28</sup> 34 CFR § 300.152(b)(1)(i).

<sup>29</sup> 34 CFR § 300.152(b)(1)(ii).

<sup>30</sup> 34 CFR § 300.152(a)(3).



If an issue is raised in a State complaint that has previously been decided in a due process hearing, involving the same parties, the hearing decision is binding, and MSDE shall inform the complainant to that effect.

## **Due Process Complaint:**

**The parent, early intervention services provider, local lead agency, or a public agency may file a due process complaint on any matter relating to the identification, evaluation, or placement of a child, or the provision of early intervention services or educational placement, or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to a child.<sup>31</sup>**

The due process complaint must allege a violation that occurred within two years of the date the parent or agency knew or should have known about the alleged action that forms the basis of the due process complaint, or if the State has an explicit time limitation for requesting such a due process hearing under this part, in the time allowed by that State law.<sup>32</sup>

This timeline does not apply to a parent if the parent was prevented from filing a due process complaint within the timeline because the public agency specifically misrepresented that it had resolved the issues identified in the due process complaint, or the public agency withheld information from the parent that it was required to provide under IDEA.<sup>33</sup>

To file a due process complaint, the parent or the public agency (or the parent's attorney or the public agency's attorney) must submit a due process complaint to the other party and the OAH. The complaint must contain all of the content listed below and must be kept confidential.

To assist parents in filing a due process complaint, a Request for Mediation and Due Process Complaint Form is available from the public agency from which the early intervention services are provided, where the child attends school, and on the MSDE website at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org). Information is also available about any potential free or low-cost legal resources at a parent's request or if the parent or agency files a due process complaint. For further assistance, contact the public agency's early intervention office, special education office, or the MSDE Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services at (410) 767-7770.

## **Content of the Due Process Complaint:**

The due process complaint must include:

- The name of the child;
- Address of the child's residence (or, for a homeless child, available contact information);
- Name of the school the child is attending;
- Name of the public agency responsible for the education of the child (i.e., local school system);

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<sup>31</sup> 34 CFR § 303.440(a).

<sup>32</sup> 34 CFR § 300.511(e).

<sup>33</sup> 34 CFR § 300.511(f).

- A description of the problem of the child relating to the proposed or refused initiation or change, including facts relating to the problem; and
- A proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to the party at the time of the complaint.

The parent or the public agency may not have a due process hearing until the parent or the public agency (or the parent's attorney or the public agency's attorney), files a due process complaint that includes this information. MSDE has available model forms to assist parents and public agencies in filing a due process complaint. Parents, public agencies and other parties may use the model form, or they may use any other form as long as it meets the requirements above.

### **Response to the Due Process Complaint:**

When a party files a due process complaint, the public agency responsible for the child's early intervention and education shall:

- Inform the parent of free or low cost legal and other relevant services available;
- Provide the parent with a copy of the procedural safeguards document; and
- Inform the parent of the availability of mediation.

If the public agency has not sent a prior written notice to the parents regarding the issues raised by the parent in the due process complaint, the public agency shall send the parent a response, within 10 days of receiving the due process complaint, containing:

- An explanation of why the public agency proposes or refuses to take the action(s);
- A description of any other options that the public agency considered and the reasons why those options were rejected;
- A description of each evaluation procedure, assessment, record or report which was used as the basis for the proposed or refused action;
- A description of other factors that were relevant and used as the basis for the proposed or refused action;
- A statement that the parents of a child with a disability have protections under the procedural safeguards of this part and, if this notice is not an initial referral for evaluation, the means by which a copy of the procedural safeguards can be obtained; and
- Sources for parents to contact to obtain assistance in understanding the provisions of the IDEA.

This response does not preclude the public agency from asserting that the parent's due process complaint was insufficient, where appropriate.

The other party to a due process complaint (parent or public agency) must send the other party a response that specifically addresses the issues in the due process complaint, within 10 calendar days of receiving the due process complaint.

### **Sufficiency of Notice:**

The due process complaint is considered sufficient unless the party receiving the complaint notifies OAH and the other party in writing within 15 days of receiving it that the receiving party

believes the due process complaint does not meet the content requirements. Within five (5) days of receiving notice of the deficiency, OAH will determine whether the due process complaint meets the content requirements and immediately notify the parties in writing.

A party may amend its due process complaint only if the other party consents in writing and is given the opportunity to resolve the issues through a resolution meeting as noted below; or OAH grants permission not later than five (5) days before a due process hearing occurs. The timeline for the resolution meeting and the due process hearing begins again with the filing of the amended due process complaint.

### **Child’s Status During Proceedings:**

During the pendency of any administrative or judicial proceeding (except as provided under the discipline section), unless the parent and public agency agree otherwise, the child must remain in his or her current early intervention or educational placement. If the proceeding involves an initial application for early intervention services, the child must receive those services that are not in dispute.<sup>34</sup> If the proceeding involves an initial application for initial admission to public school, the child, with parental consent, must be placed in the public program until the completion of all proceedings. If the decision of the ALJ agrees with the parents that a change of early intervention services or education placement is appropriate, that placement becomes the child’s current placement during the pendency of subsequent appeals.

However, if the complaint involves an application for initial services under this part from a child who is transitioning from Part C (ISFP) of the Act to Part B (IEP) and is no longer eligible for Part C services because the child has turned three, the public agency is not required to provide the Part C services that the child had been receiving. If the child is found eligible for special education and related services under Part B and the parent consents to the initial provision of special education and related services under § 300.300(b), then the public agency must provide those special education and related services that are not in dispute between the parent and the public agency.<sup>35</sup>

### **Resolution Process:**

Within 15 calendar days of receiving a parent's due process complaint, and before the due process hearing begins, the public agency must hold a meeting with the parent and the relevant member or members of the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team or Individualized Education Program (IEP) team who have specific knowledge of the facts identified in the parent's due process complaint. The meeting:

- Must include a representative of the public agency who has decision-making authority on behalf of the public agency; and
- May not include an attorney representing the public agency unless the parent brings an attorney.

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<sup>34</sup> 34 CFR § 303.430(e)(2).

<sup>35</sup> 34 CFR § 300.518(c).

The parent and the public agency determine the relevant members of the IFSP or IEP team to attend the meeting. The purpose of the meeting is for the parent to discuss the due process complaint, and the facts that form the basis of the complaint, so that the public agency has the opportunity to resolve the dispute. The resolution meeting is not necessary if:

- The parent and the public agency agree in writing to waive the meeting;
- The parent and the public agency agree to try mediation; or
- The public agency initiated the due process complaint.

If the public agency has not resolved the due process complaint to the parent's satisfaction within 30 calendar days of receiving the complaint (the resolution period), the due process hearing may occur.

The 45-day timeline for issuing a final decision begins at the end of the 30-day resolution period, unless one of the following circumstances described below in the *Adjustments to the 30 Calendar Day Resolution Period* or the *Expedited Timelines* sections applies.

### **Adjustments to the 30 Calendar Day Resolution Period:**

Except when the parent and the public agency have agreed to extend the resolution process, waive the resolution process, or to use mediation, a parent's failure to participate in the resolution meeting will delay the timelines for the resolution process and due process hearing until the meeting is held.

If, after making reasonable efforts and documenting such efforts, the public agency is not able to obtain the parent's participation in the resolution meeting, the public agency may, at the end of the 30-day resolution period, request that the ALJ dismiss the due process complaint. Documentation of the public agency's efforts must include a record of attempts to arrange a mutually agreed upon time and place, such as:

- Detailed records of telephone calls made or attempted and the results of those calls;
- Copies of correspondence sent to the parent and any responses received; and
- Detailed records of visits made to the parent's home or place of employment and the results of those visits.

If the public agency does not hold the resolution meeting within 15 calendar days of receiving notice of a parent's due process complaint or does not participate in the resolution meeting, the parent may request that the hearing commence and the decision be issued within 45 calendar days.

If the parent and the public agency agree in writing to waive the resolution meeting, then the 45-day timeline for the due process hearing starts the next day.

After the start of mediation or the resolution meeting and before the end of the 30-day resolution period, if the parent and the public agency agree in writing that no agreement is possible, then the 45-day timeline for the due process hearing starts the next day.

If the parent and the public agency agree to try mediation, at the end of the 30-day resolution period, both parties can agree in writing to continue the mediation process until an agreement is reached. However, if either the parent or the public agency withdraws from the mediation process, then the 45-day timeline for the due process hearing starts the next day.

### **Resolution Settlement Agreement:**

If a resolution to the dispute is reached at the resolution meeting, the parent and the public agency must enter into a written, legally binding agreement that is:<sup>36</sup>

- Signed by the parent and a representative of the public agency who has the authority to hold the public agency to the agreement; and
- Enforceable in any State court of competent jurisdiction (a state court that has authority to hear this type of case) or in a federal district court.

If the parent and the public agency enter into an agreement as a result of a resolution meeting, either party may void the agreement within three (3) business days.

### **Due Process Hearing:**

The parent or the public agency involved in a dispute has the opportunity for an impartial due process hearing when filing a due process complaint. A parent or the public agency must request the hearing within two years of the date the parent or public agency knew about the alleged action that forms the basis of the due process complaint. The only exceptions to the two year requirement are: (1) if a parent was prevented from filing a due process complaint due to specific misrepresentations by the LEA that it had resolved the problem forming the basis of the due process complaint, or (2) if a parent was prevented from filing a due process complaint due to the LEA's withholding of information that is required to be provided to a parent.

### **An Administrative Law Judge (ALJ):**

- Is an employee of the Office of Administrative Hearings, and not of MSDE;
- Does not have a personal or professional interest that conflicts with their objectivity in the hearing;
- Is knowledgeable and understands the provisions of the IDEA, and federal and State regulations pertaining to the IDEA, and legal interpretations of the IDEA; and
- Has the knowledge and ability to conduct hearings, and to make and write decisions, consistent with appropriate, standard legal practice.
- A person who otherwise qualifies to conduct a hearing, is not an employee of MSDE solely because he or she is paid by MSDE to serve as a hearing officer.<sup>37</sup>
- MSDE will keep a list of persons who serve as hearing officers, to include a statement of the qualifications of each of those persons. This information is available on the OAH website.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> 34 CFR § 300.510(d).

<sup>37</sup> 34 CFR § 303.443(c)(2); 34 CFR § 300.511(c)(1-2).

<sup>38</sup> 34 CFR § 303.443(c)(3); 34 CFR § 300.511(c)(3).

## **Subject Matter of a Due Process Complaint:**

The party (the parent or the public agency) that files the due process complaint may not raise issues at the due process hearing that were not addressed in the due process complaint, unless the other party agrees.

## **Hearing Rights:**

Either party to any due process hearing (including a hearing on IDEA disciplinary procedures) has the right to:

- Represent yourself or be represented by an attorney at due process hearings in accordance with State Government Article §9-1607.1, Annotated Code of Maryland;
- Be accompanied and advised by a lawyer and persons with special knowledge or training with respect to the problems of children with disabilities;
- Present evidence and confront, cross-examine, and require the attendance of witnesses;
- Prohibit the introduction of any evidence at the hearing that has not been disclosed to that party at least 5 business days before the hearing;
- Obtain a written, or, at the parent's option, electronic, word-for-word record of the hearing; and
- Obtain written, or, at the parent's option, electronic findings of fact and decisions.

## **Additional Disclosure of Information:**

At least five (5) business days before a due process hearing, the parent and the public agency must disclose to each other all evaluations completed by that date and recommendations based on those evaluations that the parent or the public agency intend to use at the hearing. An ALJ may prevent any party that does not comply with this requirement from introducing the relevant evaluation or recommendation at the hearing without the consent of the other party.

## **Parent's Rights:**

The parent has the right to:

- Have the child present;
- Open the hearing to the public; and
- Have the record of the hearing, the findings of fact, and decisions provided to you at no cost.

## **Hearing Decision:**

The ALJ decision on whether a child received a free appropriate public education (FAPE) must be based on substantive grounds. In matters alleging a procedural violation, an ALJ may find that the child did not receive FAPE only if the procedural inadequacies:

- Interfered with the child's right to a FAPE;
- Significantly interfered with the parent's opportunity to participate in the decision-making process regarding the provision of a FAPE to the child; or
- Caused a deprivation of an educational benefit.

None of the provisions described above can be interpreted to prevent an ALJ from ordering a public agency to comply with the requirements in the procedural safeguards section of the federal regulations under Part B of the IDEA (34 CFR 300.500 through 300.536).

The ALJ decision on whether a child was appropriately identified, evaluated, or placed, or whether the child was appropriately provided early intervention services must be based on substantive grounds. In matters alleging a procedural violation, an ALJ may find that the child was not appropriately identified, evaluated, placed, or provided early intervention services only if the procedural inadequacies:

- Impeded the child's right to identification, evaluation, and placement or provision of early intervention services for the child and that child's family;
- Significantly impeded the parent's opportunity to participate in the decision-making process regarding identification, evaluation, placement or provision of early intervention services for the child and that child's family; or
- Caused a deprivation of an educational or developmental benefit.

### **Separate Due Process Complaint:**

Nothing in the procedural safeguards section of IDEA prevents a parent from filing a separate due process complaint on an issue separate from a due process complaint already filed.

### **Timelines and Convenience of a Hearing:**

Not later than 45 calendar days after the end of the 30 calendar day period for resolution meetings or, as described under *Adjustments to the 30 Calendar Day Resolution Period*, not later than 45 calendar days after the end of the adjusted time period:

- A final decision is reached in the hearing; and
- A copy of the decision is mailed to each of the parties.

An ALJ may grant specific extensions of time beyond the 45-day time period at the request of either party. Each hearing must occur at a time and place that is reasonably convenient to the parent and the child.

### **Expedited Due Process Hearing (IEP ONLY):**

A public agency is responsible for arranging an expedited due process hearing when a due process complaint is filed on behalf of a child with a disability, regarding:

- A child with a disability who is not currently enrolled and attending school;
- The placement of a child with a disability in an interim alternative education setting; or
- A manifestation determination.

The due process hearing must occur within 20 school days of the date the complaint is filed. The ALJ must make a determination within 10 school days after the hearing. A resolution meeting must occur within seven (7) calendar days of receiving notice of the due process

complaint and the due process hearing may proceed unless the matter has been resolved to the satisfaction of both parties within 15 calendar days of receiving the due process complaint.

### **Hearing Decisions:**

After deleting any personally identifiable information, the public agency is responsible for transmitting the findings and decisions to the State advisory panel and also must make those findings and decisions available to the public.<sup>39</sup>

### **Finality of Hearing Decision:**

An ALJ decision is final unless appealed by either the parents or the public agency. Any party aggrieved by the findings and decisions has the right to bring a civil action with respect to the complaint presented in the due process hearing.

### **Appeal:**

Any party to the hearing who does not agree with the findings and decision has the right to appeal by bringing a civil action in any State court of competent jurisdiction or in a district court of the United States without regard to the amount in controversy within 120 days of the date of the ALJ decision.

In any civil action, the court will:

- Receive the records of the administrative proceedings;
- Hear additional evidence at the parent's request or at the public agency's request;
- Base its decision on the preponderance of the evidence; and
- Grant the relief that the court determines to be appropriate.

Nothing in Part B of the IDEA restricts or limits the rights, procedures, and remedies available under the U. S. Constitution, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Title V of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section 504), or other federal laws protecting the rights of children with disabilities. Except that before the filing of a civil action under these laws seeking relief that is also available under Part B of IDEA, the due process procedures described above must be exhausted to the same extent as would be required had the parent or public agency filed the action under Part B of the IDEA. This means that parents may have remedies available under other laws that overlap with those available under the IDEA, but in general, to obtain relief under those other laws, parents must first use the available administrative remedies under the IDEA (i.e., the due process complaint, resolution meeting, and impartial due process hearing procedures) before going directly into court.

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<sup>39</sup> 34 CFR § 300.513(d).



## **ATTORNEYS' FEES**

### **IEP and IFSP 34 C.F.R. § 300.517**

In any action or proceeding brought under IDEA, the court in its discretion may award reasonable attorneys' fees to:

- The parents or guardians of a child with a disability who is the prevailing party;
- To a prevailing party who is MSDE or any other public agency against the attorney of the parent who files a complaint or subsequent cause of action that is frivolous, unreasonable, or without foundation, or against the attorney of the parent who continued to litigate after the litigation clearly became frivolous, unreasonable, or without foundation; or
- To a prevailing party who is MSDE or any other public agency against the attorney of the parent, or against the parent, if the parent's complaint or subsequent cause of action was presented for any improper purpose, such as to harass, to cause unnecessary delay, or to needlessly increase the cost of litigation.

Fees awarded must be based on rates prevailing in the community in which the action arose for the kind and quality of services furnished. No bonus or multiplier may be used in calculating the fees awarded. Funds available under the IDEA shall not be used to support legal fees, court costs, or other costs associated with a cause of action brought on behalf of a child with a disability to ensure FAPE.

Fees may not be awarded under the following circumstances:

- For any IFSP or IEP team meeting unless it is convened as a result of a due process hearing or judicial action;
- For mediation conducted prior to filing a due process complaint;
- For resolution meetings; and
- For services following a written settlement offer to the parent if:
  - The offer is made within the timelines under Rule 68, Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, or in an administrative proceeding, more than ten days before the proceeding begins;
  - The offer is not accepted within ten days; and
  - The court finds the relief obtained by the parent in the hearing is not more favorable to the parent than the offer of settlement. Fees and costs may be awarded if the parent was substantially justified in rejecting the settlement offer.

Fees may be reduced under the following circumstances:

- The parent or the parent's attorney unreasonably prolonged resolving the dispute;
- The amount of fees unreasonably exceeds the hourly rate prevailing in the community for similar services by attorneys of reasonably comparable skill, reputation and experience;
- The time and services were excessive considering the nature of the proceeding; or
- The attorney did not provide the appropriate information in filing the due process hearing request notice.

Fees will not be reduced if:

The public agency prolonged the resolution; or

There was a violation of the procedural safeguard requirements.

Because the parent’s right to recover attorneys’ fees depends upon meeting certain conditions set out in the IDEA, parents should discuss this matter with their attorneys.

## ATTACHMENT

### IDEA DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESSES COMPARISON CHART

<b>Comparison</b>	<b>MEDIATION</b>	<b>DUE PROCESS COMPLAINT</b>	<b>RESOLUTION PROCESS</b>	<b>STATE COMPLAINT</b>
Who can initiate the process?	Parent or public agency, but must be voluntary for both	Parent or public agency	Public agency schedules the resolution meeting upon receipt of a due process complaint unless the parties agree to waive or use mediation	Any individual or organization including those from out of state
What is the time limit for filing?	None Specified	2 years of when the party knew or should have known of the problem with limited expectations <sup>1</sup>	Triggered by a parent’s due process complaint	1 year from the date of the alleged violation
What issues can be resolved?	Any matter under Part 300, including matters arising prior to the filing of a due process complaint (there are exceptions) <sup>2</sup>	Any matter relating to the identification, evaluation or educational placement or provision of a free appropriate public education (there are exceptions)	Same as the issues raised in the parent’s due process complaint	Alleged violations of Part B of IDEA or Part 300
What is the timeline for resolving the issues?	None specified	45 days from the end of the resolution period unless a specific extension to the timeline is granted <sup>3, 4</sup>	Public agency must convene a resolution meeting within 15 days of receipt of the parent’s due process complaint, unless the parties agree in writing to waive the meeting or agree to use mediation  Resolution period is 30 days from receipt of the parent’s due process complaint unless the parties agree otherwise or the parent or public agency fails to participate in the resolution meeting or the public agency fails to convene the resolution meeting within 15 days of receipt of the parent’s due process complaint <sup>3, 5, 6, 7</sup>	60 days from receipt of the complaint unless an extension is permitted <sup>8</sup>
Who resolves the issues?	Parent and public agency with a mediator  The process is voluntary and both parties must agree to any resolution	Hearing Officer/ Administrative Law Judge (ALJ)	Parent and public agency  Both parties must agree to any resolution	Maryland State Department of Education <sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The time limit does not apply to a parent if the parent was prevented from filing a due process complaint due to: (1) specific misrepresentations by the public agency that it had resolved the problem forming the basis of the due process complaint; or (2) the public agency’s withholding of information from the parent that was required under Part 300 of IDEA to be provided to the parent (34 C.F.R. §300.511(f)).

<sup>2</sup> Such exceptions include: the public agency may not file a due process complaint or use mediation to override a parent’s refusal to consent to the initial provision of special education services (34 C.F.R. §300.300(b)(3)); the public agency may not file a due process complaint or use mediation to override a parent’s refusal to consent to an initial evaluation or reevaluation of a parentally-placed private school child or home schooled child; (34 C.F.R. §300.300(c)(4)(i)); the right of parents of parentally placed private school children to file a due process complaint is limited to the public agency’s failure to meet the child find requirements (34 C.F.R. §300.140); the public agency’s failure to provide a highly qualified teacher is not an issue subject to due process, but a State complaint could be filed with the State Education Agency (SEA) (34 C.F.R. §300.156(e)).

<sup>3</sup> If the due process complaint is filed for an expedited hearing pursuant to discipline procedures, or the child is not currently enrolled and attending school, the resolution period is 15 calendar days (with the meeting being held within 7 days). If the matter has not been resolved to the satisfaction of both parties, the hearing must occur within 20 school days of the date the hearing is requested and a decision must be issued within 10 school days after the hearing. (34 C.F.R. §300.532(c) and COMAR 13A.05.01.15).

<sup>4</sup> A hearing officer/ALJ may grant specific extension of time at the request of either party. (34 C.F.R. §300.516(c)).

<sup>5</sup> The regulations allow for adjustments to the 30-day resolution period. The 45 day timeline for the due process hearing starts the day after one of the following events: (1) both parties agree in writing to waive the resolution meeting; (2) after either the mediation or resolution meeting starts but before the end of the 30-day period, the parties agree in writing that no agreement is possible; (3) if both parties agree in writing to continue the mediation at the end of the 30-day resolution period, but later, the parent or public agency withdraws from the mediation process. (34 C.F.R. §300.510 (c)).

<sup>6</sup> Parent failure to participate in the resolution meeting delays the timelines for the resolution process and due process hearing until the meeting is held. (34 C.F.R. §300.510(b)(3)).

<sup>7</sup> If the public agency fails to hold the resolution meeting within 15 days of receiving the parent’s due process complaint or fails to participate in the resolution meeting, the parent may seek the intervention of an ALJ to begin the due process hearing timeline (34 C.F.R. §300.510(b)(5)).

<sup>8</sup> The timeline for resolving the State complaint may be extended if exceptional circumstances exist with respect to a particular complaint, or the parent (or individual or organization, if mediation or other alternative means of dispute resolution, is available to the individual or organization under State procedures) and the public agency agree to extend the time to engage in mediation or to engage in other alternative means of dispute resolution, if available in the State (34 C.F.R. §300.152(b)(1)).

<sup>9</sup> The MSDE complaint procedures provides the public agency with the opportunity to respond to the complaint, including, at the discretion of the public agency, a proposal to resolve the complaint; and an opportunity for the parent who files a complaint and the public agency to voluntarily engage in mediation. (34 C.F.R. §300.152(a)(3)). In some cases, the complainant and public agency may be able to resolve the dispute without the need for MSDE to resolve the matter.

Maryland State Department of Education  
Division of Early Intervention & Special Education Services  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201  
410-767-0249 (phone)  
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[MarylandPublicSchools.org](http://MarylandPublicSchools.org)

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# Additional Resources

***REQUEST FOR MEDIATION and DUE PROCESS COMPLAINT  
Form***

~

***FREE OR LOW-COST ASSISTANCE FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION  
DISPUTES***

~

***MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION PARENT'S  
GUIDES TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT:***

*~ Special Education Mediation*

*~ Special Education Due Process Complaints*

*~ Special Education State Complaints*

*~ Facilitated IEP Team Meetings in Maryland*







**Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.**  
**State Superintendent of Schools**

200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 2120  
410-767-0100 • 410-333-6442 TTY/TDD  
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## **REQUEST FOR MEDIATION and DUE PROCESS COMPLAINT**

**This dispute regards:**

- INFANTS & TODDLERS EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICES** (PART C OF IDEA AND COMAR 13A.13.01.11 and .12)
- SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES** (PART B of IDEA and COMAR 13A.05.01.15)

**Check one:**

**I am requesting mediation.**

- I understand that the Office of Administrative Hearings will schedule the mediation within approximately 20 days from receipt of this request if the other party agrees to mediate.

**I am filing a due process complaint.**

- I do not want to try to resolve the dispute through mediation and I understand that the public agency is required to schedule and convene a resolution meeting within 15 days of receipt of this complaint, unless both parties agree, in writing, to waive the session.

I am willing to waive the resolution session. I understand that if the public agency does not also agree to waive the session, I will be required to attend.

- Upon written notification from the public agency that the resolution session has been held or waived, the Office of Administrative Hearings will schedule a telephone prehearing conference (COMAR 28.02.17) within seven (7) days.

**I am requesting mediation and filing a due process complaint.**

- I understand that if the other party does not want to attend mediation, the public agency is required to schedule and convene a resolution meeting within 15 days of receipt of this complaint, unless both parties agree, in writing, to waive the session.

If the other party does not want to attend mediation, I am willing to waive the resolution session. I understand that if the public agency does not also agree to waive the session, I will be required to attend.

- If both parties agree to mediate, the mediation and prehearing conference (COMAR 28.02.17) will be scheduled within approximately 20 days of receipt of this request. Parties have the option to:

Schedule both the mediation and prehearing conference on the same day. The mediation will be scheduled first. The prehearing conference will follow the conclusion of the mediation if the matter is not resolved through the mediation process.

Schedule the mediation on a given day. The telephone prehearing conference will automatically be scheduled on the next business day and will be cancelled if mediation is successful.

**NOTE:** If a due process complaint is filed on behalf of a child with a disability who is not currently receiving educational services, or regarding placement in an interim alternative education setting or a manifestation determination, the Office of Administrative Hearings is responsible for scheduling an expedited due process hearing upon proper notice. This hearing must occur within 20 school days of the date the complaint requesting the hearing is filed. A resolution meeting must occur within seven (7) days of receiving notice of the due process complaint unless it is waived by both parties (34 CFR §300.532 and COMAR 13A.05.01.15(C)).

**CHILD'S INFORMATION:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Public Agency or Local Infants and Toddlers Program currently providing services (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Public Agency or Local Infants and Toddlers Program against which the allegations are made (if different): \_\_\_\_\_

**Check one, if applicable:**

- The child is not currently receiving services OR
- The dispute is over a manifestation determination, or a change in placement due to behaviors resulting in disciplinary actions.

**PERSON FILING THE REQUEST:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address (if different from child's): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (W) \_\_\_\_\_ (H) \_\_\_\_\_ (Cell) \_\_\_\_\_

Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to student:  Parent  Legal Guardian  Public Agency  Self  Parent Surrogate

**ATTORNEY/REPRESENTATIVE (if applicable):**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Accommodations are required as follows (please be specific):

- Foreign Language Interpreter: \_\_\_\_\_  Special Communication: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(specify)* *(specify)*
- Sign Language Interpreter  Special Accommodations for Disability: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(specify)*
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(specify)*

**Please Provide ALL of the Additional Required Information:**

In accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), if you are filing a due process complaint you must provide a description of the problem(s) to be reviewed at the hearing, including relevant facts and a proposed resolution to the problem(s) (attach additional paper, if necessary).

If the due process complaint does not meet the content requirements identified in the IDEA, the receiving party may challenge the sufficiency of the complaint. If you are requesting mediation, providing this information will help the mediator.

If additional space is needed to respond to the following, please attach additional paper.

**Description of the problem(s) and relevant facts:**

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**Description of proposed resolution:**

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If you need additional information regarding mediation and due process hearings, please refer to the procedural safeguards document provided to you by either the public agency or the local infants and toddlers program. You may wish to review *A Parent's Guide to Frequently Asked Questions about Mediation*, *A Parent's Guide to Frequently Asked Questions about Due Process*, and relevant federal and State law and regulations, which can be obtained from the MSDE website at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org). You may also contact the Office of the Director of Special Education in your local school system, the Infants and Toddlers Program Director of the program responsible for the child's early intervention services, or the MSDE Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services.

**You must forward a completed copy of this *Request for Mediation and Due Process Complaint* form to BOTH:**

- Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Attn: Alison Barmat, Program Manager, Compliance/Legal Issues  
2644 Riva Road, Annapolis, MD 21401 Phone: (410) 222-5422 FAX: (410) 222-5640;  
AND
- The Office of Administrative Hearings, 11101 Gilroy Road, Hunt Valley, Maryland 21031  
Phone: (410) 229-4281 FAX: (410) 229-4277 www.oah.maryland.gov.



FREE OR LOW-COST ASSISTANCE FOR  
SPECIAL EDUCATION DISPUTES

Following is a list of attorneys and advocacy organizations that may provide legal and other services to individuals in special education disputes.

**Legal Aid Bureau, Inc.**

229 Hanover Street  
P.O. Box 907  
Annapolis, MD 21404  
410-972-2700  
800-666-8330

500 East Lexington Street  
Baltimore, MD 21202  
410-951-7777  
800-999-8904

103 S. Hickory Avenue  
Bel Air, MD 21014  
Northeastern MD  
(Cecil & Harford Counties)  
410-836-8202  
800-444-9529

110 Greene Street  
Cumberland, MD 21502  
Western MD  
(Allegany & Garrett Counties)  
301-777-7474  
866-389-5243

106 N. Washington Street  
Suite 101  
Easton, MD 21601  
Upper Eastern Shore  
(Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne's &  
Talbot Counties)  
410-763-9676  
800-477-2543

22 South Market Street  
Suite 11  
Frederick, MD 21701  
Midwestern MD  
(Carroll, Frederick & Washington  
Counties)  
301-694-7414  
800-679-8813

P.O. Box 249  
Route 231  
Hughesville, MD 20637  
Southern MD  
(Calvert, Charles & St. Mary's  
Counties)  
301-932-6661  
877-310-1810

8401 Corporate Drive, Suite 200  
Landover, MD 20785  
Metropolitan MD  
(Prince George's & Howard  
Counties)  
301-560-2101  
888-215-5316

600 Jefferson Plaza, Suite 430  
Rockville, MD 20852  
(Montgomery County)  
240-314-0373  
855-880-9487

111 High Street  
P.O. Box 4116  
Salisbury, MD 21801  
Lower Eastern Shore  
(Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico  
& Worcester Counties)  
410-546-5511  
800-444-4099

29 West Susquehanna Ave.  
Suite 305  
Towson, MD 21204  
(Baltimore County)  
410-427-1800  
877-878-5920  
[www.mdlab.org](http://www.mdlab.org)

**Disability Rights Maryland**

1500 Union Avenue  
Suite 2000  
Baltimore, MD 21211  
410-727-6352  
410-235-5387 TTY  
800-233-7201  
[disabilityrightsmd.org](http://disabilityrightsmd.org)

**Kennedy Krieger Institute**

Maureen van Stone, Esq., M.S.  
Director, Project HEAL  
716 N. Broadway, Office 106  
Baltimore, MD 21205  
(443) 923-4416  
(443) 923-4414 (Intake line)  
[vanstone@kennedykrieger.org](mailto:vanstone@kennedykrieger.org)

Mallory Finn, Esq.  
Staff Attorney, Project HEAL  
716 N. Broadway, Office 111  
Baltimore, MD 21205  
(443) 923-9571  
(443) 923-4414 (Intake line)  
[finnm@kennedykrieger.org](mailto:finnm@kennedykrieger.org)

**Parents' Place of Maryland**

(provides parent support and  
training)

802 Cromwell Park Drive  
Suite Q  
Glen Burnie, MD 21061  
410-768-9100  
800-394-5694  
[www.ppmmd.org](http://www.ppmmd.org)

**University of Maryland Clinical  
Law Office**

500 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
410-706-7214  
410-706-7714 TDD  
<http://www.law.umaryland.edu>

**Family Support Services /  
Partners for Success**

You may wish to contact the  
special education office for your  
local school system to find out  
about Family Support Services,  
Partners for Success, or similar  
services that may be available to  
provide assistance.





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## **A PARENT'S GUIDE TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION MEDIATION**

### **1. What is mediation?**

Mediation is a voluntary process that can be used to resolve disagreements between the parents of a student with a disability, or a student suspected of having a disability, and the public agency<sup>1</sup> responsible for the student's education.

### **2. Who conducts the mediation?**

The person serving as the mediator is an employee of the Maryland Office of Administrative Hearings who is trained in mediation skills and techniques.

### **3. What role does the mediator have in trying to resolve the disagreement?**

The role of the mediator is to help people reach an agreement. The mediator is neutral and will not take sides, but assists the parties in finding common ground and exploring possible solutions regarding the dispute.

### **4. If I request mediation does the public agency have to participate?**

No. Mediation is voluntary; both parties to the dispute have to agree to use mediation. Although the public agency is not required to agree to mediate, under most circumstances it will.

### **5. If the public agency requests mediation do I have to participate?**

No. As indicated in question #4 mediation is voluntary.

### **6. Can I request mediation without filing a due process complaint?**

Yes. You may request mediation anytime to help resolve a dispute. In fact it is preferable to try to resolve a disagreement as early as possible and prior to filing a due process complaint.

### **7. Who can I bring with me to mediation?**

You may bring anyone you believe will be helpful in resolving the dispute. This may include a trusted friend, relative, advocate, or an attorney. For a list of organizations that provide free or low-cost legal or other services please refer to the *Request for Mediation and Due Process Complaint* form, or the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services web site at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org) (choose Divisions, Special Education Early Intervention, then choose Complaint Investigation and Due Process Branch).

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<sup>1</sup> The term, public agency, in this document refers to the local school systems or other public agencies responsible for the provision of a free appropriate public education to a student.

**8. What is the cost for mediation?**

Mediation is at no cost to you or the public agency. The cost of mediation is paid for by the State.

**9. What happens when we reach an agreement at mediation?**

The mediator will draft an agreement for you and the public agency to sign and you will receive a copy.

**10. What happens if we go to mediation and we can not reach an agreement?**

If you participate in mediation and do not reach an agreement with the public agency you may: (1) attempt mediation again at a later date; (2) proceed with a hearing (if you initially filed a sufficient due process complaint); (3) file a due process complaint; or (4) seek some other means of resolving the dispute.

If you proceed to a due process hearing and your mediator was an administrative law judge, that same judge will not be assigned to your due process hearing.

**11. How soon after requesting mediation can I expect it to occur?**

The Office of Administrative Hearings will attempt to schedule the mediation as soon as possible, but mediation may not deny or delay your right to a due process hearing.

**12. What happens if the public agency refuses to honor the agreement reached at mediation?**

The written, signed mediation agreement is legally binding and enforceable in any State court of competent jurisdiction or in a district court of the United States.

**13. May I or the public agency use discussions held and offers made at the mediation in future proceedings?**

No. Mediation sessions are closed proceedings. Discussions that occur during mediation must be confidential and cannot be used as evidence in any subsequent due process hearing or civil action. Parents or the public agency may be asked to sign a confidentiality pledge before the start of the mediation.

**14. How do I request mediation?**

It is preferred that the request be submitted on the Office of Administrative Hearing's *Request for Mediation and Due Process Complaint* form. However, any written request that includes all the required information shall initiate the mediation process. You may obtain a form by calling or writing to the public agency responsible for the student's education or the Office of Administrative Hearings. The form is also available on the websites for the Office of Administrative Hearings at [www.oah.state.md.us](http://www.oah.state.md.us) and the Maryland State Department of Education at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org).



**15. Where do I send my request for mediation?**

Your request must be sent to the public agency responsible for the student's educational program **and** to the Office of Administrative Hearings. The form may be sent by mail, fax, or hand-delivery. The Office of Administrative Hearings does not accept requests for mediation by email; its address is 11101 Gilroy Road, Unit E/Clerk's Office, Hunt Valley, MD 21031, the fax number is 410-229-4277.

**16. What if I want to withdraw my request for mediation or change my mind about participating in mediation requested by the public agency?**

Mail, fax, or hand-deliver a signed letter stating that you wish to withdraw your request to the Office of Administrative Hearings, and the public agency, as soon as possible. The letter may include information as to why the request is being withdrawn.

Again, mediation is voluntary; therefore, if you decide that you no longer wish to try to resolve the dispute by mediation, or do not want to participate in a request by the public agency you need not do so.

**17. You have not answered all of my questions. Where do I go for help?**

First, please refer to the procedural safeguards document provided to you by the public agency. Other questions you have may be addressed to the appropriate personnel from the public agency responsible for the student's education, your Partners for Success or Family Support Services Center, the Maryland State Department of Education's Family Support Services Office (410-767-0267 or 1-800-535-0182, ext. 0267), or the Office of Administrative Hearings Clerk's Office (410-229-4294). You may also wish to consult one of the organizations that provide free or low-cost assistance in special education matters (a list of these organizations is attached to the *Request for Mediation and Due Process Complaint* form).

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## **A PARENT'S GUIDE TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION DUE PROCESS COMPLAINTS**

### **1. What is a due process complaint?**

A due process complaint is a formal complaint regarding the identification, evaluation, educational placement, or the provision of a free appropriate public education for a student with a disability or suspected of having a disability, which may result in a due process hearing.

### **2. Who can file a due process complaint?**

A parent or a public agency<sup>1</sup> may file a due process complaint.

### **3. How do I file a due process complaint?**

It is preferred that you file your due process complaint using the *Request for Mediation and Due Process Complaint* form, however, any written request that includes all the required information shall initiate the due process complaint process. You may obtain a form by calling or writing to the public agency responsible for the student's education; the Office of Administrative Hearings (410-229-4294); or the Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services (410-767-7770). The form is also available on the websites for the Office of Administrative Hearings at [www.oah.state.md.us](http://www.oah.state.md.us) and the Maryland State Department of Education at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org) (go to the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services page, then the Complaint Investigation and Due Process Branch page).

### **4. Where do I send my due process complaint?**

Your due process complaint must be sent to the public agency responsible for the student's educational program **and** to the Office of Administrative Hearings. The form may be sent by mail, fax, or hand-delivery. The Office of Administrative Hearings does not accept due process complaints by email; its address is 11101 Gilroy Road, Unit E/Clerk's Office, Hunt Valley, MD 21031; the fax number is 410-229-4277. The Maryland State Department of Education will not forward a due process complaint to the Office of Administrative Hearings or the public agency.

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<sup>1</sup> The term, public agency, in this document refers to the local school systems or other public agencies responsible for the provision of a free appropriate public education to a student.

**5. What is the time limit for filing a due process complaint?**

A due process complaint must be filed within two (2) years of the date you knew, or should have known, about the alleged action that is the reason for the complaint. There are limited exceptions to this timeline; please refer to the procedural safeguards document you received from the public agency for additional information.

**6. Before having the opportunity for a due process hearing, what steps must be taken to try to resolve the complaint?**

Before having the opportunity for a due process hearing there is a 30 day resolution period. This time period allows you and the public agency time to try to resolve the dispute. Either you or the public agency may agree to attempt to resolve the dispute using mediation, or the public agency must schedule a resolution meeting, unless both parties agree to waive the meeting.

For more information regarding the mediation process, please refer to the procedural safeguards document, or the *Parent's Guide to Frequently Asked Questions about Special Education Mediation*.

**7. What is a Resolution Meeting?**

The resolution meeting provides an opportunity for you and the public agency to resolve the disagreement prior to the initiation of a due process hearing by discussing the facts that form the basis of the complaint and possible solutions.

**8. Who can attend the Resolution Meeting?**

You and the public agency determine who is appropriate to attend the resolution meeting. You, relevant members of the IEP team, and a public agency representative who has decision-making authority must attend the resolution meeting. Other participants may include your child, your advocate, or your attorney. However, if an attorney accompanies you, the public agency's attorney may also attend.

**9. Do I need to ask for a Resolution Meeting?**

No. Whenever a due process complaint is filed by a parent, the public agency must arrange for a Resolution Meeting unless the parties agree in writing to waive the Resolution Meeting or the parties agree to attempt to resolve the disagreement through mediation. If the public agency filed the due process complaint, a Resolution Meeting is not required. The Resolution Meeting is not required when the public agency files a complaint because it is assumed that the public agency has already tried to resolve the disagreement.

**10. When must the Resolution Meeting be held?**

The public agency is required to hold the resolution meeting within 15 days of receiving the due process complaint from you (unless the complaint meets the requirements for an expedited hearing; see question #13). If the public agency fails to hold the resolution meeting within 15 days of

receiving your complaint or fails to participate in the meeting, you may contact the Office of Administrative Hearings and request the due process hearing timeline immediately begin.

**11. What if I fail to attend the Resolution Meeting?**

If the public agency is unable to obtain your participation at the resolution meeting after reasonable efforts have been made, the public agency may request that an administrative law judge dismiss your complaint. If the complaint is dismissed, no due process hearing will be conducted regarding that specific complaint.

**12. How long do we have to try to resolve the disagreement?**

Generally, you and the public agency have 30 days to resolve the disagreement. However, if you and the public agency agree that progress is being made and you wish to extend the time, it is permissible to do so. In those cases where an expedited hearing must take place, you and the public agency have 7 days to try to resolve the disagreement.

**13. What happens if we do not reach an agreement in the Resolution Meeting?**

If you and the public agency do not come to resolution, you can agree to extend the resolution period and continue to meet to reach a satisfactory resolution. If both parties agree, you can try to resolve the dispute through mediation; or you may proceed to a due process hearing.

**14. What happens at a due process hearing?**

A due process hearing is conducted by an administrative law judge from the Office of Administrative Hearings who will take evidence from both parties and make a decision about a dispute. For specific information regarding the due process hearing procedures and rights, please refer to the procedural safeguards document.

**15. Do I need an attorney?**

No, however, because of the legal nature of the proceedings parents often are represented by counsel but may go to a hearing and represent themselves.

For a list of organizations that provide free or low-cost legal or other services please refer to the *Request for Mediation and Due Process Complaint* form, or the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services web site at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org) (choose Divisions, Special Education Early Intervention, then choose Complaint Investigation and Due Process Branch).

**16. What is the due process hearing timeline?**

If the public agency has not resolved the due process complaint to your satisfaction within 30 days of receiving the complaint (the resolution period), the due process hearing may occur. The administrative law judge then has 45 days to conduct the hearing and issue a final decision. The timeline for issuing the decision can be extended at your or the public agency's request.

**17. What are the requirements for an expedited hearing, and how does the due process hearing timeline change?**

If your child is not currently enrolled and attending an approved educational program, OR the dispute is over a manifestation determination, or a change in placement due to behaviors resulting in disciplinary actions, the hearing must be held in an expedited manner. In these cases, the resolution meeting must be held within 7 days of the public agency receiving notice of the due process complaint; the hearing shall be held within 20 school days of receipt of the complaint; and the decision shall be issued no later than 10 school days from the completion of the hearing.

**18. What is a pre-hearing conference?**

A telephone pre-hearing conference is conducted by the Office of Administrative Hearings to discuss details of the dispute for the purpose of determining the number of days needed for the hearing. During this conference you should be prepared to discuss when you and your witnesses will be available for the hearing.

**19. What if I want to withdraw my Due Process Complaint?**

You may mail, fax, or hand-deliver a signed letter stating that you wish to withdraw your complaint to the Office of Administrative Hearings, and the public agency, as soon as possible. The letter may include information as to why the complaint is being withdrawn.

**20. You have not answered all of my questions. Where do I go for help?**

First, please refer to the procedural safeguards document given to you by the public agency. Other questions you have may be addressed to the appropriate personnel from the public agency responsible for the student's education, your Partners for Success or Family Support Services Center, the Maryland State Department of Education's Family Support Services Office (410-767-0267 or 1-800-535-0182, ext. 0267), or the Office of Administrative Hearings' Clerk's Office (410-229-4294). You may also wish to consult one of the organizations that provide free or low-cost assistance in special education matters (a list of these organizations is attached to the *Request for Mediation and Due Process Complaint* form).

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## **MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION STATE COMPLAINT RESOLUTION PROCEDURES**

### **PART B**

#### **I. AUTHORITY**

- A. 34 CFR §300.151 *et seq.*
- B. COMAR 13A.05.01.15A

#### **II. PURPOSE**

- A. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) adopts the following complaint investigation procedures for resolving complaints filed under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and corresponding federal and State law and regulations. It is the responsibility of MSDE to resolve all complaints that meet the requirements of 34 CFR §300.153 and are filed with MSDE in accordance with these procedures.
- B. It is the responsibility of MSDE to monitor the completion of corrective actions issued as a result of a complaint investigation, as well as to take steps necessary to ensure compliance with corrective actions, including providing technical assistance and taking additional enforcement actions, as appropriate.

#### **III. COMPLAINT REQUIREMENTS**

Any organization or individual, hereafter the “complainant(s)”, including those from outside the State of Maryland, may file a complaint with MSDE. MSDE will also resolve complaints received by other Divisions within MSDE or State or federal government officials provided that the complaint meets the requirements set forth below.

- A. The complainant may use the State Complaint Form, which may be obtained from the MSDE website at [www.marylandpublicschools.org](http://www.marylandpublicschools.org) (go to the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services page, then the Family Support and Due Process Branch page), or call us at 410-767-7770. While there is no requirement to use this form, the complaint must include all of the information requested on the form, as it meets all of the requirements as set forth below.

- B. The complaint should be addressed to the Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services, Maryland State Department of Education, 200 West Baltimore Street, Baltimore, MD 21201.
- C. At the same time that the complaint is filed with MSDE a copy must be forwarded to the public agency responsible for the student's educational program. It is recommended that the complaint be sent to the attention of the Director of Special Education or other responsible administrator for the program.
- D. The complaint must be in writing and signed by the individual making the complaint. MSDE will resolve complaints that have been received via facsimile if the complaint is signed and meets the requirements of Section III, paragraphs E through J below.
- E. The complaint must include the following:
  - 1. A statement that a public agency has violated a requirement of IDEA;
  - 2. The facts on which the statement is based (the complainant is encouraged to provide copies of any documentation that supports the allegation(s));
  - 3. The signature and contact information for the complainant;
  - 4. If alleging violations with respect to a specific student, the complainant must include:
    - a. The name and address of the residence of the student;
    - b. The name of the school the student is attending;
    - c. In the case of a homeless student, available contact information for the student and name of the school the student is attending;
    - d. A description of the nature of the problem of the student, including facts relating to the problem; and
    - e. A proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to the party at the time the complaint is filed.
- F. The complaint must allege a violation that occurred not more than one (1) year prior to the date that MSDE receives the complaint.
- G. The statement that a public agency has violated a requirement of IDEA may be related to the identification, evaluation or educational placement of a student, or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the student, as well as any other allegation that a public agency has violated IDEA and corresponding federal or State regulations. This includes the allegation that a



public agency has not implemented action required as a result of a due process hearing decision. Settlement agreements, mediation agreements, and agreements that are reached as the result of the resolution meeting are enforceable in a State court of competent jurisdiction or in the district court of the United States, but will not be resolved by MSDE through the complaint process.

- H. If the complaint does not meet the requirements outlined in Section III, paragraphs A through J of these procedures, MSDE shall provide the complainant with written notification that the complaint has been determined to be insufficient and what additional information is needed in order for the complaint to meet the requirements of the regulations and these procedures.
- I. If the complaint is filed on behalf of an individual student and the complainant is not the student's parent, a release that is signed by the parent must be submitted by the complainant in order for MSDE to provide the findings and conclusions. The release must be signed by the parent and state that consent is provided for MSDE to release information about the student to the complainant.

#### **IV. COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION PROCEDURES**

- A. Upon receipt of the complaint, MSDE shall forward the complaint, via facsimile, to the designated public agency personnel.
- B. The complainant and the public agency shall be provided with written notification that acknowledges receipt of the complaint, identifies the allegation(s) subject to an investigation, indicates the timeline for resolution, informs the parties of the right to submit additional information relevant to the allegation(s), and identifies the MSDE staff person assigned to resolve the complaint. The written notification will also include a statement that if the public agency offers the remedy to the complainant that is proposed in the letter of complaint, MSDE will consider the matter resolved. MSDE encourages the parties to take steps to resolve the complaint as early as possible, either by agreeing to mediate the disagreement, or by resolving the dispute through less formal methods.
- C. Upon receipt of the first written complaint in a given school year, the public agency against whom the complaint is filed shall forward a copy of the procedural safeguards to the complainant.
- D. The public agency subject to the complaint is encouraged to review the allegation(s) with appropriate school system personnel. If the school system responds to the allegation(s), they must address each alleged violation, provide the facts as determined by the public agency, and if a violation is identified, propose corrective actions or describe actions that have been taken to remediate any loss of services to the individual student. If the violation affected similarly situated students, the public agency shall propose corrective actions to remediate any loss of services to those students.

- E. MSDE will conduct an independent on-site visit if MSDE determines that a site visit is necessary to resolve the complaint.
- F. MSDE shall issue a written decision (Letter of Findings) to the complainant and the public agency, which includes:
  - 1. A statement of the allegation(s) investigated;
  - 2. Findings of fact and a conclusion for each allegation investigated, including a statement of whether or not a violation of State or federal law and/or regulations has occurred, and the reasons for the conclusion;
  - 3. If MSDE determines that a violation of State or federal law and/or regulations occurred, the Letter of Findings shall include the corrective actions the public agency must take to address:
    - a. how to remediate the denial of any services, including as appropriate, the awarding of monetary reimbursement or other corrective action appropriate to the needs of the student; and
    - b. appropriate future provision of services for all students with disabilities;
  - 4. Timelines for completing corrective actions;
  - 5. An MSDE contact person for technical assistance in completing the corrective actions; and
  - 6. A statement informing the parties that they maintain the right to request mediation or file a due process complaint to resolve the matter subject to the complaint if they disagree with the MSDE decision.
- G. The Letter of Findings shall be considered late if not issued within sixty (60) calendar days of the date the complaint is received by MSDE. The timeline may be extended if exceptional circumstances exist with respect to a particular complaint or the complainant and the public agency involved agree to extend the time to engage in mediation or other alternative means of dispute resolution. If an extension is necessary, the complainant and public agency shall be notified, in writing, by MSDE of the need for the extension.
- H. If either party disagrees with the conclusions in the Letter of Findings, the party has the right to submit additional information, *either not considered or not available at the time of the investigation*. This information must be submitted within fifteen (15) calendar days of the date of the Letter of Findings. Pending consideration of the request, the public agency is required to complete any corrective action within the timelines stated in the Letter of Findings.

## **V. COMPLAINTS OUTSIDE OF MSDE AUTHORITY**

- A. If the complaint includes allegations of discrimination based on race, creed, sex, age, color, national origin, marital status or physical or mental handicap or conduct addressed by regulations and laws other than the special education law or regulations, MSDE will notify the parties in writing of the allegations that are not within MSDE's authority to investigate. In that notification, MSDE will provide the complainant with the name and address of the appropriate agency with jurisdiction over those specific allegations, if known.
- B. MSDE does not investigate allegations that an agreement reached through mediation or a resolution meeting has not been implemented. Any such complaint should be filed in a court of competent jurisdiction to be resolved.
- C. If a complaint is received that is also the subject of a due process hearing or contains multiple allegations, of which one or more are part of the hearing, MSDE must set aside any part of the complaint that is being addressed in the due process hearing until the conclusion of the hearing. Any allegation in the complaint that is not part of the due process hearing complaint will be resolved in accordance with MSDE complaint procedures and applicable timelines. MSDE will notify the parties in writing of the decision to set aside allegations and which allegations, if any, will be resolved through the complaint process.
- D. If an allegation is raised in a complaint filed with MSDE that has previously been decided in a due process hearing involving the same parties, the hearing decision is binding on the parties, and MSDE will inform the complainant and public agency to that effect.

## **VI. COMPLAINT RESOLUTION**

Upon receiving notification that the complaint has been satisfactorily addressed by the public agency through mediation or other means of dispute resolution, or has been withdrawn by the complainant, MSDE will consider the complaint resolved. This includes when a public agency offers to provide the remedy proposed by the individual or organization in the letter of complaint.

## **VII. VERIFICATION ACTIVITIES/COMPLAINT FOLLOW-UP**

When MSDE issues a Letter of Findings that identifies a violation of federal or State law or regulation, MSDE shall require the public agency to submit documentation verifying the completion of the corrective action(s).

- A. Either party may request technical assistance, pursuant to the Letter of Findings. The request for technical assistance must be made in a timely manner as to not delay completion of the corrective actions.

- B. Public agencies may negotiate with MSDE other methods to effectively implement the final decision.
- C. MSDE staff shall review the steps taken and determine if they satisfy the required actions.
  - 1. If the steps taken satisfy the corrective action(s), MSDE will provide written notice of its decision to the parties and close the complaint.
  - 2. If the actions taken by the public agency do not satisfactorily correct the identified problem(s), MSDE will work closely with the public agency to determine why the actions taken did not achieve required results and determine additional strategies to attain the desired results.
  - 3. If the public agency has not made good faith efforts to complete the corrective action(s), MSDE will provide the public agency with written notice of the enforcement sanctions, as specified by these procedures.

## **VIII. ENFORCEMENT**

When a public agency has not completed the corrective action(s) by the date specified in the Letter of Findings or by the date of any extension granted in accordance with Section VII of these procedures, MSDE shall initiate enforcement actions in accordance with COMAR 15A.05.02.07.

## **IX. PUBLIC AWARENESS EFFORTS**

- A. Public agencies must ensure that the complaint procedures are explained to parents, advocates and school personnel, including providing the procedural safeguards.
- B. MSDE shall disseminate the complaint procedures through presentations to advocacy organizations, public agency personnel, and others as requested. MSDE has developed partnerships with advocacy and parent organizations, such as the Maryland Disability Law Center; Parents' Place of Maryland; Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education; Community Mediation Maryland, and ARC/Maryland, to ensure awareness of these procedures. MSDE will also ensure that these procedures appear on the MSDE website.

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## **FACILITATED IEP TEAM MEETINGS IN MARYLAND**

### **An Introduction and Frequently Asked Questions for Parents and Public Agency/School Personnel**

**Introduction to Independent Facilitated IEP Team Meetings:** Having IEP team meetings facilitated by an independent, trained “facilitator” is rapidly becoming a popular means for parents and school personnel to reach agreement in the educational decision making process for students needing or suspected of needing special education services. When the relationship between parents and school personnel become strained or better yet, before the relationship has the opportunity to fray, parents and school personnel are finding that using independent facilitators can assist the IEP team process.

An independent facilitator may help parents and school personnel avoid misunderstandings or disagreements when it is believed that discussions at the meeting may become challenging. Using a trained, independent facilitator has been found to be an effective means to keep IEP teams focused on the development of the educational program for the student while addressing some of the conflicts and disagreements that may arise from miscommunication. The independent facilitator will utilize skills that create an environment in which the IEP team members; school personnel and parents, can listen to each other and work together to develop high quality education programs for students suspected of, or identified as disabled.

#### **1. Who can request an IEP meeting be facilitated?**

An independent facilitator may be requested by either the parent or the school, in any of the participating school districts. However, both parties must agree to participate in this voluntary process.

#### **2. Who serves as an IEP meeting independent facilitator?**

The independent facilitator is a trained volunteer from a community mediation center, generally located in the jurisdiction where the student attends school, or in another community close to where the student attends school. The independent facilitator has completed a 50-hour training course in mediation skills, has experience mediating a variety of disputes, and has completed a 3-day training in IEP Team Meeting Facilitation. The independent facilitator is not a member of the IEP team and does not have a relationship with the school or the parents, other than to assist in the meeting. The independent facilitator remains neutral and focuses on the process while the team makes the decisions.

**3. How does independent facilitation differ from mediation under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?**

Independent IEP facilitation should not be confused with mediation. The independent facilitation occurs at a regular IEP team meeting, which is generally run by the school system. There is no written agreement other than an IEP, which may be developed or revised.

While independently facilitated IEP team meetings are emerging as a means to avoid conflicts and/or to resolve conflicts prior to requesting mediation or filing a due process complaint, it is not required under the IDEA. States or local school systems are not required to offer the service.

Mediation is typically used when there is a significant disagreement that the parties are otherwise unable to resolve. Mediation may be used to deal with a broader range of issues in special education than in an IEP meeting. A trained impartial mediator brings the parties together to work with each other to resolve a variety of disagreements, often including those not directly related to the student's IEP.

**4. What does the independent facilitator do at the meeting?**

The independent facilitator can be expected to:

- Talk to parents and school staff in advance of the meeting
- Assist the team with establishing an agenda
- Guide the discussion and keep the focus on the student
- Make sure everyone has a chance to speak and be heard
- Help resolve disagreements
- Use communication skills to help parents and school personnel to work together to make decisions about the program
- Help team members develop and ask clarifying questions about issues that may have occurred in the past
- Help keep the team on task and focused on the agenda topics
- Remain impartial, and not take sides, place blame, impose a decision on the group, nor offer an opinion on the appropriateness of a decision

**5. What are the benefits of an independent facilitated IEP team meeting?**

Parents and school personnel who have used independent facilitation at IEP team meetings report the following benefits:

- Focus remains on the student
- Parties are encouraged to fully participate
- Positive working relationships between parents and school staff are strengthened
- Opportunities are created for creative, win-win, solutions
- Facilitation services are free to the parties and non-confrontational
- Effective communication and listening skills are modeled
- Points of agreement and disagreement are clarified

- Parents and professionals are encouraged to identify new options to address unresolved problems
- Is part of the regular IEP meeting and, therefore, does not require a separate meeting
- All decisions are made by the team, rather than a mediator or a hearing officer

**6. How is the confidentiality of the student and family maintained?**

The parent must provide their consent to allow the school to share confidential information about the student with the independent facilitator. This is required under the Family Education Rights Privacy Act.

**7. Who pays for the independent facilitator?**

There is no cost, to the parent or the school, to have an independent facilitator assist in the IEP process.

**8. What public agencies are offering independently facilitated meetings, and how do I contact them?**

Below are the public agencies offering the services of an independent facilitator to parents and school personnel, along with the contact information for the center that is providing the service for your local school system. Or, you may contact Community Mediation Maryland at 301-270-9700, or toll free 888-826-2262.

- Anne Arundel County Public Schools  
Anne Arundel Conflict Resolution Center, 410-266-9033
- Baltimore City Public Schools  
Community Mediation, 410-467-9165
- Baltimore County Public Schools  
Conflict Resolution Center of Baltimore County, 410-780-1206
- Calvert County Public Schools
  - Community Mediation Maryland, 301-270-9700
- Cecil County Public Schools  
Community Mediation Upper Shore, 410-810-9188
- Dorchester County  
Mid-Shore Community Mediation Center, 410-820-5553
- Harford County  
Harford County Community Mediation Center, 410-638-4807
- Howard County Public Schools  
Community Mediation, 410-467-9165
- Frederick County Public Schools  
Frederick County Mediation, 301-631-2256
- Montgomery County Public Schools  
Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County, 301-625-0717
- Prince George’s County Public Schools  
Key Bridge Center for Conflict Resolution, 240-770-0401
- Queen Anne’s County Public Schools  
Community Mediation Upper Shore, 410-810-9188

- St. Mary's County  
Community Mediation Center of St. Mary's County, 301-475-9118

## 9. How far in advance do I need to request an independent facilitator?

An important component of the IEP Facilitation process is the preparation work done by the independent facilitator in conversations with the parent and school personnel and the development of a formal agenda. In general, when a request is made at least 10 days in advance of a meeting, an independent facilitator can be assigned and this preparation work can be done. If the request is made with less time, all attempts will be made to provide an independent facilitator, but the independent facilitation service cannot be provided if the independent facilitator is not able to contact the parent and school personnel in advance of the meeting.

## 10. Who do I contact, if my school system does not offer independently facilitated IEP team meetings?

If you are interested in having your school system offer independently facilitated IEP team meetings you should contact the local school system's Director for Special Education. The Maryland State Department of Education and Community Mediation Maryland are committed to expanding the service to all school system's that are interested in providing this service to parents of students with disabilities and school personnel.

**It is important to know that facilitated IEP meetings are the same as any other IEP meeting. The same expectations exist for compliance with legal regulations and any other requirements that govern the IEP process in Maryland. The only significant difference is the presence of a facilitator.**

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