

Voicing a Concern

Conflict, misunderstanding, hurt feelings, etc are experiences common to us all. We recognize the frustration and concern that parents feel when their children experience these problems in school and the difficulties that children, parents, and school staff face as they try to overcome these problems. Below is a step-by-step guideline to help successfully navigate and seek to solve problems, issues, and concerns at school.

Step One: Take Your Concern to the Person Closest to the Problem, Issue, or Concern

No matter where the problem is, take your concerns there first. Whether in the classroom, on the bus, or on the practice field, the quickest and easiest solution can usually be found with the staff member most directly involved. Sometimes this approach just isn't possible or leads to an unsatisfactory conclusion: then what?

Step Two: Present Your Concern to the Next Level

Building principals or the activities director are examples of the next level of school personnel to contact. Their interest in your problem will be increased if you share with them the steps you've already taken with the person closest to the situation, or if you will take the time to openly share with them the reasons why you feel uncomfortable dealing directly with the person who's closest to the problem.

Step Three: Talk with the Superintendent of the School

Sometimes all the best intentions can't solve a problem. When you believe you've worked hard with those closest to the problem, and you've taken the problems to the next level but still haven't achieved a satisfactory outcome, the superintendent of schools is the next place to go. Keep in mind that part of the superintendent's job requires attendance at area-wide meetings outside the district. As a consequence, a meeting with the superintendent may require some advance planning.

Step Four: Talk with your School Board Members

School board members are elected to represent the interest of all parents and district residents, and you should always feel free to tell them your point of view. School board members do not, however, have the authority in day-to-day school operations. So when should a school board member be contacted and what can they do? Contact a school board member...

- after other means to solve a problem have been attempted
- when a policy is being enforced but you believe it results in bad consequences
- when you believe a policy isn't being enforced

The individual school board member may take one or all of the following actions:

- informally discuss the issue with the superintendent, who can follow up with individual staff or other administrators
- request that the school board review the specific policies that relate to the situation

- propose new policies for the school board's consideration

The laws of the State of Iowa do not grant individual school board members any authority over the school. All authority is the result of official actions by a majority of the board at meetings open to the public.

Suggestions to Keep Communication Lines Open

Don't be a stranger – Make time to talk with school personnel regularly. Know who your children's teachers, bus drivers and coaches are and how they may be contacted.

Communicate concerns quickly and openly – Get concerns out in the open early. The problem you or your child faces may be the result of an oversight or misunderstanding that can be easily rectified once it is brought to the attention of the appropriate school personnel.

Give everyone a chance to understand your concern – If you call for an appointment to see the person involved, why not let them know in advance what the general nature of your concern is? This gives them a chance to reflect on it before the appointment and to ask other staff members for information that might relate to your problem or concern. If a personal visit isn't possible, why not call once to state the problem, and during that conversation offer to call back at a time when you can both discuss the situation in more detail?

Be careful sharing frustrations with your children – A unified team of parent and teacher provides the most effective educational experience. Use caution when sharing frustrations regarding school with your children so that a temporary problem does not permanently alter the student's perception of teamwork between school and home.