

TIPS FOR DISTRICT WHEN RESPONDING TO CITIZEN COMPLAINTS

The following are suggestions for organizing your response to complaints. Be advised that the timeline for citizen complaints is based on **calendar** days, not school days. Holidays, school vacations, and other time off do not affect the timeline. Also, continue to keep in mind opportunities for resolving the complaint, including mediation or IEP facilitation.

These tips will assist in our review of the issues and may reduce the need for our requests for additional information and documentation.

When responding to a complaint, please:

- Investigate the issues thoroughly and respond to each allegation, including an admission or denial of each. If you deny an allegation, provide the reasons why. Provide an explanation and the documentation that the district followed procedures or implemented the service. If you admit an allegation, propose corrective action.
- Obtain information from all staff members who can assist with responding to the allegations. Remember that all written responses are provided to the complainant. Be factual, but neutral in your response.
- Keep in mind that factual allegations create a presumption (e.g., parent states “the teacher told me...”), the weight of which depends on other facts and documents provided. The presumption can be overcome. If an allegation is not addressed in your response, it will generally be presumed to be true, unless the documentation determines otherwise.
- If the complaint is about implementation of services, be explicit about the specially designed instruction provided. How was the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction specifically adapted to meet the unique needs of the student? Documentation could include lesson plans, work samples, statements from teachers, progress monitoring data, and progress reporting, etc.
- Consider requesting an interview or inviting the investigator on-site if you think the documentation does not explain everything or everything cannot be put into writing.

When organizing the response, please:

- Organize your response letter by issue, if possible, and provide a chronology of events. Address each issue separately. If repetitive, provide a reference to relevant information.
- Provide all of the documentation listed in our opening letter that is specific to the issue(s). Provide additional documentation when necessary to address the issues and any other information that would assist in our investigation.
- When organizing your responsive documents:
 - Provide only one copy of each document, not duplicates.
 - Send copies of documents, not originals.
 - You do not need to send the complaint and/or OSPI opening letter back to OSPI.
 - Use page numbers.
 - Use paperclips, not staples, to bundle documents. Do not use binders or folders.
 - Separate the sections of your response. It is helpful for us when we copy the response if you use a separate sheet of paper identifying an exhibit or appendix, rather than notebook dividers or tabs. Do not use cover stock paper as exhibits or appendices.
 - Do not use sticky notes or flags to identify something on a page.
 - Group like-documents (ex: prior written notice, IEPs) and organize chronologically.

- For email chains, when possible, please send us the last reply or forward, if it includes all of the messages from the beginning to the end. Do not send multiple copies of emails in a chain that contain the same information in each document.
 - Organize emails chronologically and ensure that all emails include a header that clearly shows the sender, recipient, date, and time.
 - Include both internal and external emails related to the issue(s).
- Explain terms, programs, or codes that may be unique to your district (e.g., attendance and program codes)
- Include a list of the relevant staff names and titles. For example: Jane Doe, student's general education English teacher.

If you have any questions, please call the investigator assigned to the complaint.