



RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS

Tips for School Employees

A|E|A Arizona
Education
Association

arizonaaea.org/helpdesk



arizonaea.org/helpdesk
(877) 828-1983

Most parents appreciate the dedication and hard work of school employees, and most teachers enthusiastically seek parent involvement to provide the best education for their students. Occasionally, however, parents may be excessively annoying, hostile, or demanding. This booklet contains some guidelines and suggestions for dealing with these difficult parents.

Individuals who are violent or threaten physical harm are committing a crime that may require filing a police report. For those situations, refer to the AEA booklet “Violence and Threats at School,” available from AEA staff.

What Parents and Guardians Can Do

- Express their opinions about a school employee’s job performance.
- File a complaint about a school employee’s job performance. Most districts have a specific procedure which requires a written, signed complaint. For districts using the Arizona School Boards Association policy format, check KEB, KEB-R, and KEB-E.
- Express their opinions about their student’s progress.
- Review and comment about the school not following the student’s IEP or 504 plan or the inadequacy of those plans.
- Request in writing that the governing board review a high school teacher’s decision to pass or fail or an elementary teacher’s decision to promote or retain a student. The board shall consult with the teacher before making a decision. **See** A.R.S. §§ 15-341(A) (15), 15-342(11).
- Review and comment about the curriculum or materials presented in class. **See** A.R.S. § 15-102.
- Ask repeated questions about their student’s conduct, progress, and classroom instruction.
- Observe their student’s class so long as they have signed in at the office and do not disrupt instruction. Most districts have specific procedures for visiting a classroom which include approval by the principal or the principal’s authorized representative. See Policy KFA, Policy KI, and Regulations KI-RA and KI-RB.
- Obtain education records for their student, including academic, attendance, behavioral, and psychological records. **See** 20 U.S.C. § 1232g (Family Educational Rights Privacy Act).
- Request that their child be transferred to another class.

Reminder

Too Much of a Good Thing?

Most teachers encourage regular communication with parents. Occasionally, however, parent contacts become too frequent and annoying. Schedule a specific, limited time for contacts and a specific, reasonable time for response.



What Parents and Guardians Cannot Do

- Obtain education records or information about a student who is not part of their family.
- Defame a school employee by telling, with actual malice or reckless disregard for truth or falsity, provable false information to a third person that harms the employee’s reputation or integrity.
- Abuse a school employee on school grounds while the employee is working. **See** A.R.S. § 15-507. Although such “abuse” is a crime, police often prefer to charge individuals with more commonly used offenses such as assault and disorderly conduct. The term “abuse” is not defined in A.R.S. § 15-507, and offensive language and repeated profanity is not considered “abuse” under this law. However, repeated profanity directed at an employee may violate school district policies that prohibit verbal abuse and the use of offensive or inappropriate language. See Policy KFA (Public Conduct on School Property).

Reminder

In Your Face

Parents should not yell, use profanity, or threaten. Ask your supervisor to require that hostile parents have advance permission to be on campus and that they are accompanied at all times by an administrator. Try to schedule meetings with these parents in the office rather than your work area. Seek an injunction against harassment if a parent is violent or threatens physical harm.



- Threaten to cause physical injury to any employee or damage to property. **See** A.R.S. § 13-2911 (Interference With or Disruption of an Educational Institution); Policy KFA.
- Obstruct, disrupt, or interfere with instruction or other school business. A.R.S. § 13-2911; Policy KFA.
- Block the school employee so that he or she cannot leave the room.

Suggestions for School Employees

- Try to avoid problems by regularly communicating with parents. Learn and practice effective listening and communication skills.
- Be respectful and patient, and ask parents to comply with these same standards.
- Be proactive – brainstorm possible solutions for dealing with difficult parents with an administrator, special education teacher, department chair, or other experienced colleague. Ask the association site representative or leaders for some practical tips.
- Request workshops or other professional development training to deal with parent relationships.

- Keep a log of parent contacts and document their conduct. If a parent communicates frequently, schedule a specific, limited time to respond. Make sure it is a reasonable amount of time, such as once every two weeks unless there is a legitimate emergency.
- Offer parents the opportunity to visit the school and observe the classroom during a typical day.
- Respond promptly to a parent's complaint. Ignoring the situation seldom helps. Ask your association site representative or other association leader to review your response before sending it. Always keep a copy of any response. Give a copy to your supervisor.
- Request in writing or e-mail that an administrator or supervisor assist in dealing with difficult parents. Always keep a copy.
- Ask that a student be removed from your classroom if the parent's behavior becomes disruptive.
- Ask a parent to leave or reschedule an appointment if the parent repeatedly yells, uses profanity directed at the employee, or calls the employee disrespectful names.
- Schedule any meeting with parents in a place where you can leave quickly if they become abusive. Consider whether your supervisor, School Resource Officer, department chair, association site representative, counselor, or other colleague also should attend the meeting.
- Deny false accusations. Admit accidental, minor errors, such as losing a student's paper or inaccurately calculating a grade, and explain any mitigating circumstances.
- Check district parent complaint procedures. Ask parents to follow those procedures, and be sure the district enforces those procedures. If there are no procedures, request that parents put complaints in writing. Then work with your association and the governing board to adopt policies for handling parent concerns.
- Write a letter to a parent who makes a provable false statement about you. Point out that the statement is false and defamatory and request that the parent stop. Consult with your AEA Organizational Consultant or go to arizonaaea.org/helpdesk.

Reminder

Constant Criticism

Parents and guardians may express their opinions about a school employee's job performance. Listen carefully to ensure that you understand the parent's concern and to mutually identify solutions. Employees should respond promptly to a parent's complaint. Be sure parents are following school district procedures for complaints and district policies on appropriate conduct.



- Immediately seek association representation if a parent alleges serious wrongdoing, such as harming a child.
- Immediately contact your supervisor and the police if a parent becomes violent or threatening.
- Immediately notify the school nurse and seek medical treatment if a parent hits or otherwise injures you at work. File a worker compensation claim.
- Ask the principal or supervisor to require hostile parents to stay off campus unless they obtain permission in advance from an administrator and are accompanied at all times by an administrator.
- Seek an injunction against harassment or ask the district to seek one if a parent engages in very severe behavior such as violence or threats of violence. Instructions for obtaining an injunction against harassment are in the AEA publication “Violence and Threats at School.”

Additional Resources

Finding Arizona Statutes Online

Go to *www.azleg.gov*.

Finding School District Policies

Go to *https://policy.azsba.org/asba/browse/allmanuals/welcome/root*

AEA Advocacy Booklets

AEA legal booklets, such as “Violence and Threats at School” are available from AEA staff.

Go to your district’s Employee Assistance Program or use the district insurance’s mental health resources.

Reminder

Threat of Lawsuit

You may be threatened by a parent with a lawsuit. Do not ignore this threat. Immediately contact your Association representative or Organizational Consultant and your Administration. Remember that you are a school employee and are covered by school insurance if your actions are within the course and scope of your employment. That is why you must immediately report these threats to your employer. Additionally, your AEA membership includes Educational Employee Insurance which also covers you while at work. Contact *www.arizonaaea.org/helpdesk* for EEL insurance information.





arizonaea.org/helpdesk
(877) 828-1983

A Final Note

For more information and assistance, contact your local association, arizonaaea.org/helpdesk, or your AEA Organizational Consultant.

arizonaaea.org/helpdesk
(877) 828-1983



This brochure is a general guide for AEA members and is not intended to provide complete information or legal advice on specific problems. Changes in laws and cases may modify the information provided. To find Arizona statutes on the Internet, go to www.azleg.gov.



345 East Palm Lane, Phoenix, AZ 85004-1532
(602) 264-1774 • (800) 352-5411
Fax (602) 240-6887
www.arizonaaea.org

9/08 (Rev. 9/1/21)

