

OMBUDSMAN FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

The Ombudsman for Special Education is a confidential informal resource for addressing concerns brought forth by parents regarding the special education processes and/or their child's special education programming. The Ombudsman serves to facilitate the engagement of parents and school division personnel in collaborative communication that may lead to early resolution of disputes and/or clarification of misunderstandings. The Ombudsman is not a mediator and serves as a resource to parents in non-legal special education matters.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS:

What does an Ombudsman do?

An Ombudsman serves as a 'designated neutral' who advocates for a fair process. The Ombudsman acts as a source of information and referral, aids in answering individuals' questions, and assists in the resolution of concerns and issues. The Ombudsman serves as a resource to parents in non-legal special education matters.

Does the Ombudsman represent the parents in issues with local educational agencies?

No, the Ombudsman is not an advocate for any individual or organization and takes into account the interests and rights of all parties.

How is the Ombudsman different from a mediator?

The role of the Ombudsman is an informal one. The Ombudsman's role is focused on listening, providing information, and a discussing issues and options, as well as referring other services; including mediation.

What are the key features of an Ombudsman's position?

The four key features of the Ombudsman position are confidentiality, neutrality, informality, and independence.

What are the skills of the Ombudsman?

The Ombudsman is skilled in communication, decision making, problem solving, conflict resolution, and agency organization.

Will contacting the Ombudsman lead to resolution of a dispute?

The Ombudsman seeks to encourage parties in a dispute to resolve issues at the lowest level of intervention by fostering collaborative communication and providing guidance on special education laws and regulations.

What other options are available for addressing disputes in special education?

The Ombudsman supplements, but does not replace the formal dispute resolution processes of mediation, state complaints, or due process hearings.

How do I contact the Ombudsman?

There is no formal form or documentation required to seek assistance from the Ombudsman. Rather, you may reach out directly to the Ombudsman via telephone or email.

Parent Ombudsman

Toll Free: (800) 422-2083

Email: SpecialEducationOmbudsman@doe.virginia.gov