



## Free Special Education Resources, Consultation, Trainings

# Your Arizona Parent School Connection

### Fundamentals of Letter Writing

#### A Tool for Effective Communication

Effective communication with school personnel is an important skill for parents to learn. Maintaining a collaborative relationship with your Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team is essential.

Knowing your rights and being assertive in your communication will help to ensure that your child receives the supports and services necessary to benefit from his education.

Some letters are simple requests such as the *Sample Letters* (SE11–16) in the Parent Information Network Clearinghouse (PINC). The follow-up letter is an excellent tool to help clarify issues and express your concerns to assist in the problem solving process. Therefore, the contents of each follow-up letter will vary. Some common times or reasons to write a follow-up letter would be to:

- document an event
- document a conversation of concern
- document your understanding of a formal or informal meeting
- document what services or supports the school has agreed to provide
- inquire why requested supports or services were refused
- share additional information that will help negotiate for services
- brainstorm ideas for possible solutions to current issues or concerns

It is especially important to communicate if you have questions, concerns or disagree with decisions that have transpired.

Always address your concerns in a courteous and respectful manner. The art of letter writing is an acquired skill that takes practice and patience. Your letter should be professional and effective.

Start by writing a draft of your thoughts and ideas or concerns. Be sure to tell your story in chronological order. Include dates and times as appropriate.

Do not be surprised by the emotion you might see in this first draft. As parents, we are emotionally vested in our children; so take the time to calm down, and then begin the revision process.

When revising the letter try to keep emotions and accusations out of the letter, this will only put the reader on the defensive. Include only the pertinent facts. Never threaten. The more concise and direct you are the easier it is to ascertain the issues involved. Assume your concerns will be resolved by individuals outside the school system who are not familiar with you or your child; this will help you clarify the issues and concerns.

Be sure to write your letter to the person in a position most able to help resolve the issues or concerns. For example, if the IEP Team were unable to come to a consensus, writing a letter to the Special Education Coordinator or Director would be an appropriate next step.

If you are unable to resolve your issues or concerns proceed to the next step in following the chain of command and begin again. See PINC document SA04 *Solving Problems Informally*.

Be sure you keep a log of all communication including conversations, phone calls, and meetings. See PINC documents SE17 *Phone Log: Documenting Your Contacts* and SE18 *Meeting Documentation*. Always keep copies of any written communication from or to the school for your records.

Documentation should include who, what, where, when and why. Written communication provides all parties involved with a record of your requests and/or concerns.

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