What is the parent concern protocol?

Advocacy in School · https://inclusionactionontario.ca/docs/what-is-the-parent-concern-protocol/

Boards all have, or should have, a protocol to resolve conflicts between the home and school. Frequently, this is called a Parent Concern Protocol.

Generally, they look something like this: Step 1, Classroom Teacher; Step 2, School Principal; Step 3, School Superintendents; Step 4, Trustees. We provide a link here to the Toronto District School Board's Parent Concern Protocol, with a link to a more detailed protocol the board has adopted. Another example is the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board's protocol, which they entitled "Guidelines for Resolving Conflict Between Home and School".

If your concern is classroom level, it is appropriate to start with the teacher and work through any concerns you may have. If you are unable to resolve your concern at the classroom level, it may then become appropriate to escalate it to the principal or higher levels of administration.

However, addressing a concern may not start with a teacher. For example, if your concern is a school policy or procedure, it might make most sense to start with the central school administration. Alternatively, you might want to bring your concern to the attention of the Special Education Advisory Committee, which is not generally referred to in parent concern protocols. But SEACs have, as part of their mandate, the ability to make recommendations about special education programming and services. This can include making recommendations to update policies and protocols or making recommendation for new ones where they affect special education. Similarly, Trustees approve policies and it would be appropriate to reach out to a trustee to ask about a particular policy the board may have in place.

Conflict or diagreements can arise the in the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs). In our experience, the best way to ensure the IEP is the best it can be, is to ask for a meeting with the IEP team during its development. Regarding implementation, keeping open lines of communication, perhaps even regularly scheduled short check-ins, may help to avoid disputes or misunderstandings. For more detail on what an IEP is and does, and who should be involved in its development, you can review our post, What is an Individual Education Plan?

The Ministry of Education also has a guide for parents, educators and students to prevent and resolve conflicts.

On November 13, 2025, the Ministry also announced that it would be requiring every school board to establish Student and Family Support Offices. These offices must be established by September 1, 2026. There are currently five school boards under provincial supervision: Toronto District School Board, Toronto Catholic District School Board, Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, and Thames Valley District School Board. Those boards must have such offices in place by January 19, 2026. IAO has yet to have any experience with these, but will be monitoring this and all supervised boards closely.

As with any conversation intended to resolve a conflict, it's important to be as clear as you can about what the concern is and offer some suggested resolutions or solutions if you are able. If you need some legal help understanding your rights, you can contact ARCH Disability Law Centre, the Human Rights Legal Support Centre, or Justice for Children and Youth for some free advice and guidance. For some basic information on the law in education and disability, you can review our post, What law does a parent need to know to support inclusion goals?