

# Special Education State Complaints

Resolving disputes through informal and formal processes

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# Overview

## **Governance and Guidance**

Federal regulations and state rules about resolving disputes and complaints through informal and formal processes

## **Options For Resolving Special Education Disagreements**

## **State Complaint Process and Procedures**

Process, Procedures and Timelines

What, Who, Why, When, Where, How

# Governance and Guidance

## **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**

34 CFR §300.506 (Mediation)

34 CFR §300.153 (Filing a state complaint)

34 CFR §300.610-627 (Confidentiality of Information)

## **Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education (MARSE)**

R 340.1851 – R 340.1855 (State complaints)

## **Michigan Department of Education-Office of Special Education (MDE-OSE)**

Special Education State Complaints: Procedures and Model Forms (June 2022)

Special Education Dispute Resolution Options (June 2021)

# Acronyms and Symbols

**MDE-OSE** – Michigan Department of Education-Office of Special Education

**IDEA** – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

**MARSE** – Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education

**IEP** – Individualized Education Program

**FAPE** – Free Appropriate Public Education

**MDR** – Manifestation Determination Review

**ALJ** – Administrative Law Judge

**§** - Section (IDEA)

**R** – Rule (MARSE)

# Options for resolving special education disagreements

- 1 Informal Meetings, Review and Revise IEP
- 2 Facilitated IEP
- 3 Mediation
- 4 State Complaint
- 5 Due Process Complaint/Hearing



# Informal Complaint Resolution

## Federal regulations and state rules encourage informal resolution of disputes

- ✓ Parents and school/district staff meet and talk to try and resolve the issue
- ✓ Review, revise, amend the IEP
- ✓ Written agreements between district and parent
- ✓ Mediation services (no cost to parent or district)

## Benefits of Informal Resolution

- ✓ Parents and school/district have control of the process and outcomes
- ✓ Disagreements can be resolved more quickly
- ✓ Preserve positive, collaborative relationship between school and parent
- ✓ Less costly (time, resources and money)

# Meeting Facilitation



Neutral Facilitator

Any special education meeting

Voluntary process

Facilitator coordinates discussion

No cost to parent or school district

## **When to use Facilitation**

Participants uneasy about a meeting

Parent/school relations strained

Participants need to focus on student issues

# Role of the Facilitator



## A Facilitator will:

- Create an agenda based on input from the parties
- Stay neutral
- Facilitate the meeting process, if asked to.
- Keep meeting centered on student needs
- Help negotiate disagreements
- Keep meeting on track and on time
- Makes sure everyone adheres to ground rules

## A Facilitator will not:

- Be a part of the team
- Give legal advice
- Advocate for a position
- Make decisions



# Mediation

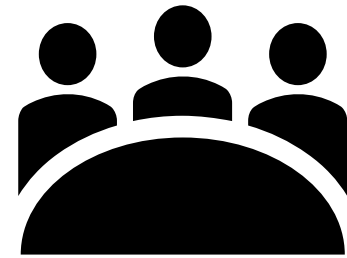
- ✓ Mediation offers a safe, neutral environment for parties who disagree in order to resolve a specific dispute.
- ✓ Mediation does not delay a parent's right to file a state complaint or due process complaint/hearing.
- ✓ Voluntary process-parties must agree to mediation.
- ✓ A trained, neutral mediator guides parties through the mediation process, assisting in negotiation to resolve differences.
- ✓ Conversations are confidential, can't be used in other court proceedings and the agreement is a legally enforceable document.
- ✓ No cost to parent or school district.

# When to use Mediation

Any dispute (eligibility for programs/services, Transition issues, etc.)

Communication, relationship issues

Working towards resolving disagreements any time during the state complaint process



# Role of the Mediator

## A Mediator will

- Remain neutral
- Conduct the mediation
- Ensure all participants have equal opportunity to express their thoughts
- Make sure everyone abides by the rules for appropriate conduct
- Help parties remain on topic
- Guide participants towards creating an agreement
- Take notes
- Record the agreement

## A Mediator will not

- Make decisions
- Give legal advice
- Take sides



# Special Education Mediation Services (SEMS) Requesting **FREE** Services



Call 833-KIDS-1ST (833-453-7178)  
Mikids1st.org (fill out Request for Services form)



Intake Process



SEMS contacts parties, arranges schedules, and processes paperwork



Parties Meet

# What is a state complaint?

**A state complaint is a written, signed statement that alleges a public agency has violated**

- ✓ state or federal special education rules or regulations related to special education programs and services (MARSE or IDEA)

**has failed to implement**

- ✓ An IEP
- ✓ an Intermediate School District (ISD) plan
- ✓ Michigan Revised School Code (as related to special education)
- ✓ A decision made by an Administrative Law Judge
- ✓ state application for federal funds



# Common issues addressed in a state complaint

## Related to the **IEP**

- ✓ Parent not invited to an IEP meeting
- ✓ IEP not being implemented
- ✓ Goals and objectives are not measurable
- ✓ Services (amount, description, etc.) are not clear

## Related to **Evaluation**

- ✓ District did not respond to parent's request to evaluate
- ✓ Evaluation was not completed within the timeline required

## Related to **discipline**-student suspended/expelled

- ✓ No services provided
- ✓ No Manifestation Determination Review (MDR) was done

## Related to **Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**

- ✓ Programs/services not appropriate

## Related to **Records**

- ✓ District didn't allow parent to see child's records-access to records

**Issues previously decided in a due process complaint involving the same parties, cannot be investigated through a state complaint**



## Where to get additional information about...

| Issue                                      | Addressed by   |
|--|--|
| Individual staff issues<br>School Policies | School/District Administrator<br>School Board  |
| Discrimination<br>Section 504 Plans        | Office of Civil Rights (OCR)   |
| Confidentiality<br>Student records         | Student Privacy Office- US Department of Education<br>Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)      |
| Abuse<br>Neglect                           | Local law enforcement agency<br>Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS) –<br>Child Protective Services |

## Who can file a state complaint - Complainant

Anyone can file a state complaint. It does not have to be the child's parent and the person does not have to live in Michigan.

- ✓ Parent/guardian/foster parent/surrogate parent assigned by the school
- ✓ Child's relative
- ✓ School personnel
- ✓ Doctor, therapist, community mental health supports coordinator, case worker

The person who files the state complaint is the **complainant**.

### **Complaints filed by someone who is not the parent**

- ✓ Written, signed, and dated release of information submitted to the OSE
- ✓ Allows communication between the OSE, nonparent complainant and parent



# Who can file a state complaint – Respondent

The public agency that the state complaint is filed against is the **respondent**.

Public agency includes:

- ✓ School district
- ✓ Charter school/Public School Academy (PSA)
- ✓ Intermediate School District (ISD)
- ✓ Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA)
- ✓ Michigan Department of Education (MDE)
- ✓ Other state agencies providing education to students with disabilities

# Why file a state complaint?

## Individual Complaint



Complainant believes the school, school district, or ISD violated a special education rule or regulation for an individual child, and they want a remedy (corrective action) for the child.

## Systemic Complaint



Complainant believes the school, school district, or ISD violated a special education rule or regulation for a group of students **OR** a district wide policy or a procedure violates a special education rule or regulation **AND** they want a school, district, ISD remedy (corrective action).

# What information is required to file a state complaint?

## State complaint requirements

Statement that a public agency violated the IDEA, MARSE, Michigan Revised School Code related to special education programs and services, or failed to implement an IEP, an ALJ decision, an ISD plan, or the state application for federal funds under the IDEA

Facts on which the statement is based

Allegation that the violation did not occur more than one year before the date the complaint is received

Signature and contact information of complainant

## State complaint - specific student

### State complaints about a specific student must also include

- ✓ Child's name and address
- ✓ Name of the school the child is attending
  - If child is homeless, available contact information
- ✓ Description of the nature of the problem, including facts related to the problem
- ✓ To the extent possible, a suggested solution to the problem

The Office of Special Education (OSE) has a **State Complaint Model Form**

- ✓ Not required to use Model Form
- ✓ Ensure all required information is submitted

## State complaint dates

A state complaint must be **received** by the Office of Special Education (OSE) within one year of the alleged violation.

After the complaint is filed, the OSE has 60 calendar days to complete the investigation and issue a final decision.

Extension of the state complaint timeline for

- ✓ Exceptional circumstances
- ✓ Mediation through SEMS



# Where to submit the state complaint

The OSE does not accept anonymous or verbal state complaints

A written, signed state complaint submitted to the OSE by mail, fax, email, or hand delivery

Michigan Department of Education  
Office of Special Education – State Complaints  
608 West Allegan Street  
Lansing, Michigan 48909  
Fax: 517-241-7141  
Email: [MDE-MIComplaints@michigan.gov](mailto:MDE-MIComplaints@michigan.gov)

Assistance must be offered with filling out the state complaint if allegation is made verbally to school district

# How does the State Complaint Process work?

## State complaint investigation procedures – Things to know

- ✓ The OSE investigator assigned to the complaint = case manager
- ✓ The OSE conducts the investigation with support from the ISD when state complaint is filed against one of their school districts
- ✓ The OSE case manager and ISD representative gather relevant information used to determine facts of the case
- ✓ The OSE conducts the investigation without support from the ISD when state complaint is filed against an ISD, or when the OSE determines there is a conflict of interest involving a school district

## State Complaint Procedures Timeline (Steps 1-3)

Receipt of  
Complaint  
(Day 1)

- OSE receives state complaint
- Potential state complaint is date stamped

Intake &  
Determination  
of Sufficiency  
(Days 1-3)

- OSE reviews complaint to make sure all required information is included (sufficient)
- 60-calendar day timeline begins, OSE case manager assigned
- If not sufficient, OSE notifies complainant of missing information

Notification  
(Days 1-5)

- When complaint is determined sufficient, OSE notifies parties and other relevant individuals and sends introduction letter



## State Complaint Procedures Timeline (Steps 4-6)

Issues Letter  
(Days 3-10)

- OSE identifies issues to be investigated in the state complaint based on documentation
- OSE case manager shares identified issues with ISD representative for feedback
- Issues letter sent to all parties; public agency has 10 calendar days to send documentation

Investigation  
(Days 10-45)

- OSE gathers relevant information
- Opportunity for complainant to be interviewed, respond to questionnaires, provide additional information
- OSE reviews data

Draft of Final  
Decision  
(Days 15-50)

- OSE case manager composes a draft report

# State Complaint Procedures Timeline (Steps 7-8) and Final Decision

Administrative  
Review of Draft  
Final Decision  
(Days 45-60)

- OSE does internal review of the draft final decision
- Draft findings of fact shared with ISD representative, for review only
- OSE prepares MDE's final decision of the state complaint

MDE Issuance  
of the Final  
Decision  
(By day 60)

- OSE sends MDE final decision to the parties and other relevant individuals
- OSE notifies complainant by email/phone that MDE's final decision has been issued

Final  
Decision

- Final decision issued
- If there is no violation by public agency-case is closed
- If there is a violation by public agency-corrective action is ordered

# Options available after filing a state complaint

## Resolving the issue through mediation

- ✓ Following mediation, the state complaint (all of it or a portion of it) may be withdrawn through a specified agreement or in a separate request from the complainant

## Withdrawal

- ✓ Complainant can withdraw a state complaint at any time during the 60-calendar day investigation for any reason
- ✓ Complainant submits a written request to the OSE (mail, email, fax, or hand delivery)

## Dismissal

- ✓ A state complaint is dismissed by the OSE (all of it or a portion of it) when issues raised in the complaint are resolved through a due process complaint final order issued by an ALJ.

# Disagreement with a state complaint final decision

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A final decision issued by the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) is final.

Comprehensive state complaint investigation is completed within the 60-calendar day timeline required by the IDEA.

No administrative appeal or reconsideration requests are permitted in Michigan.

# Corrective Action

## Corrective Action

The OSE will order corrective action when a violation is identified

Specific to the violation

Intended to ensure future compliance for all students with disabilities within the public agency and to correct the non-compliance for an individual student

## School/District/ISD level

Reviewing, and if necessary, revising procedures

Providing staff training

Informing the board of education when persistent non-compliance occurs

## Student level

Conducting an evaluation

Convening an IEP Team meeting

Developing a behavior intervention plan

Awarding compensatory education

# Proof of Compliance

Identified noncompliance corrected as soon as possible, no later than 1 year from the date the final decision is issued

The OSE and ISD monitor/verify progress of completion of corrective action before closing out the state complaint

Verification of completed corrective action includes

- Review of documentation submitted
- Random selection of special education files and/or
- Staff interviews

Student-level corrective action

- Must be completed within 30 school days
- Includes plan for providing compensatory services
- Compensatory services provided as soon as possible, no later than 1 year after final decision is issued

## Additional Resources

### **Michigan Department of Education- Office of Special Education (MDE-OSE) Information Line**

888.320.8384 or email [mde-ose@michigan.gov](mailto:mde-ose@michigan.gov)

### **Family Matters** (resource page with one page fact sheets developed by the OSE for families)

<https://www.michigan.gov/mde/services/special-education/parent-resources/family-matters>

### **Special Education Mediation Service (SEMS)**

[Special Education Mediation Services – Working Together for Student Achievement](https://www.mikids1st.org/)

(<https://www.mikids1st.org/>)

833.543.7178 or email [info@mikids1st.org](mailto:info@mikids1st.org)

### **SEMS Online Request for Services Form**

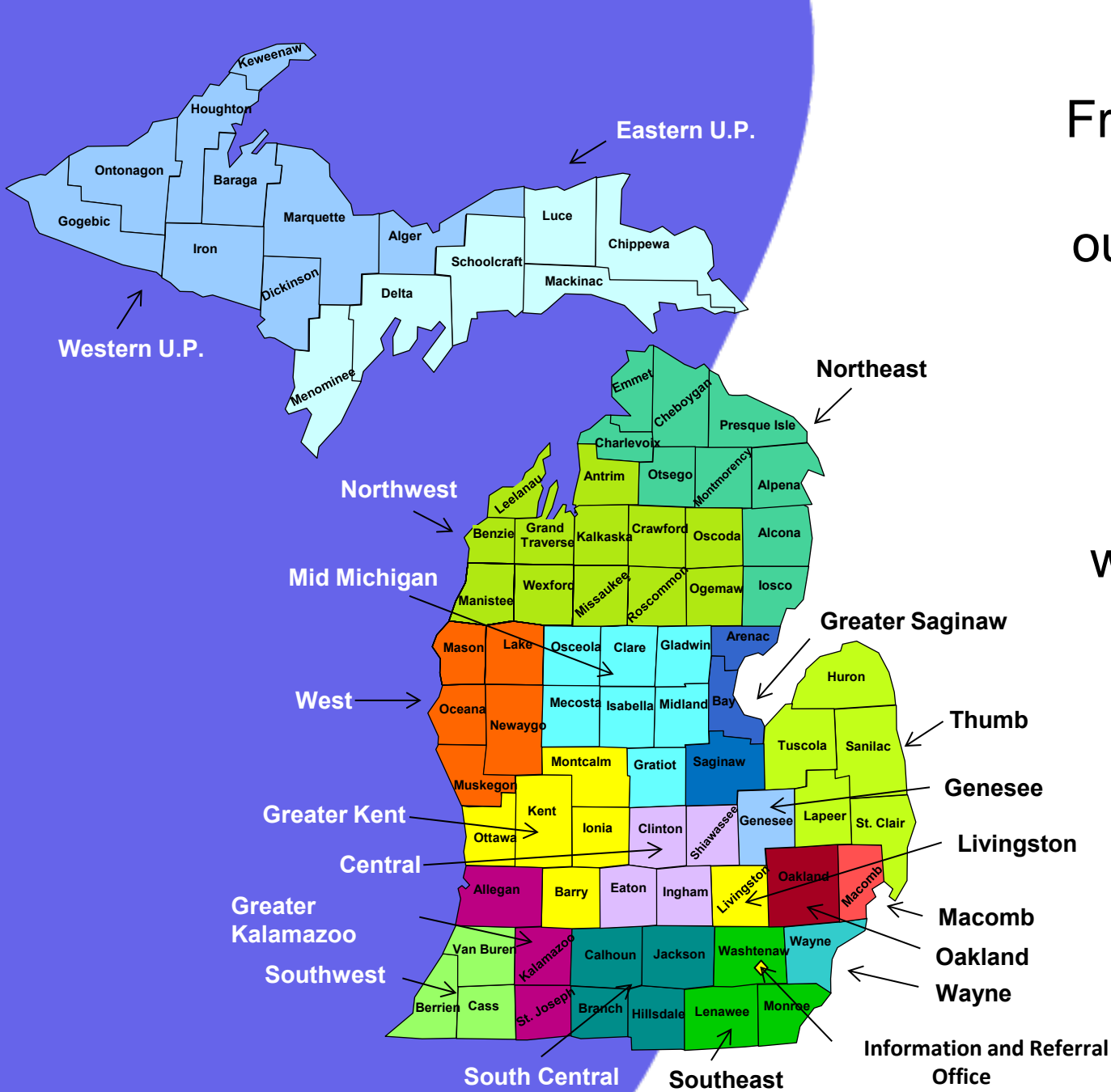
<https://www.mikids1st.org/request-services/>

### **Disability Rights Michigan**

<https://www.drmich.org/>

800.288.5923 or use the DRM Online Request Form:

<https://www.drmich.org/contact/>



Free parent training and information to improve educational services and outcomes for students with disabilities

800-552-4821

[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)





# We are here to support you!

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For more information visit:

<https://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org/>

Call: 800-552-4821

En Español 313-217-1060

Statewide Email: [info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org](mailto:info@michiganallianceforfamilies.org)



# Michigan Alliance for Families

Michigan Alliance for Families is an IDEA Grant Funded Initiative of the Michigan Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Michigan's federal Parent-Training and Information Center (PTIC) funded by U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

[www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org](http://www.michiganallianceforfamilies.org)

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