



Racial discrimination can take many forms at school. Sometimes it can be obvious, like racial harassment and bullying, and sometimes it's subtle, like certain groups of students not receiving supports at school to help them learn where other groups of students are adequately served (This is particularly prevalent with students of color who also require IEP and 504 modifications). Wherever it is found and whatever form it takes, if appropriate action is not taken by the school to address racial discrimination, that school or district is in violation of Title VI. Hopefully, the student's school wants to resolve any issues of racial discrimination, and will work with designated personnel to ensure the school resolves these issues in compliance with

Title VI. In order to do that, they must first hear your complaint and gather pertinent information. During that discussion, as outlined Step 5 of "Addressing Racial Discrimination," we suggest taking along an advocate for this meeting.

Here's why:

Meeting with school/district administration about your child can be an emotionally charged experience and it's good to have the moral support. Advocating for yourself or your student when they have faced racial discrimination is emotionally taxing, especially if you've already been struggling with the school to get your concerns addressed. You may find it all coming to a head when you're seated across from school authority figures who are asking you to repeat what has now become a long and complicated chronology of events. It's nice to have someone with you holding the tissues in case you become frustrated or upset; and also to observe the administrator's response to your concerns.

It is important to bring someone with you to a meeting with school/district administration who is knowledgeable about school policies and options for support. Sometimes a school or district will offer only the options they want the parent/caregiver/student to choose, either out of expediency, economy, or simply being unaware that other options exist (which is a district training issue). If the student qualifies for other services that the district can provide in order to ensure the student receives their Free and Appropriate Public Education, those services should be discussed as options. A timeline for getting the student back on track with school so that they will not suffer any further obstacles to their education should be agreed upon at this meeting, or it should at least be discussed and finalized soon after.

School district policy and procedure purposefully lacks transparency. Or at least that's what we've found, considering that so few districts make them easy to access via their websites, handbooks, and posted office information. School district policies, including policies that address discrimination in school, are written and approved by your school district's school board. These policies lay out their grievance procedure in the event that a complaint is received. The district is also responsible for training all of their employees on Title VI (and other) regulations. Don't know what those regulations are? You or your student may attend a school where the



administration and faculty don't know either, but if your school receives federal funds they are legally required to know and to comply with these regulations. They are also required to make sure that you know these protections exist, and what to do if they violate these regulations. An advocate will be able to attend a meeting with you and an administrator already having briefed themselves on the district's policies on racial harassment and discrimination. This allows you to concentrate on your student's immediate and long term needs rather than making sure the administrator is in line with district and federal policy. Later, and in private, you and your advocate can discuss whether the district looks to be following its own policies.

Having an advocate with you when meeting with school administration can keep you/your student from being re-victimized.

Sometimes when addressing the parent/caregiver/student's concerns, the administrator will make suggestions for "solutions" that they may or may not violate the student's Title VI protections. Having someone with you who is well versed on Title VI regulations is very important if you're meeting with the school regarding racial harassment and discrimination. For example, having an aide follow the victimized student around to make sure no one bothers them at school places an undue burden on the student by making them feel like even more of an outsider and/or making them feel like they're being punished for speaking out. Another example is if the district decides to have the victimized student eat lunch away from the rest of the student body because the cafeteria is where the student has been receiving most of the racial harassment. Again, this messages to the student speaking out about your mistreatment only cause negative attention and further isolation from your peer group. These are not solutions and that is not a good message to send marginalized students. They do nothing more than re-victimize the student while ignoring the problem and taking the responsibility off the person perpetrating the racial harassment or discrimination.

You have more control than you think.

Often, administrators will tell a parent/caregiver/student what they are "allowed" to do within their position. What the administrator may leave out is what YOU'RE allowed to do. An administrator may lay out a plan of what can be done to rectify the situation for the student. They may ask to be allowed time to do their own investigation into the faculty and staff in question. In doing this, an administrator may omit some of the options for the parent/caregiver/student, such as possibly disciplinary actions for the perpetrator outlined by district policy. In these meetings, an advocate can note all of this. If the school/district has already failed to appropriately respond to complaints about discrimination, you may initiate your district's formal complaint process (if your complaint is recent enough as determined by reasonable district policy. You can skip the formal complaint process altogether and complain straight to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR), which is a federal complaint process (within 180 days). You can even go through the formal complaint process, and then file an OCR complaint afterwards. You have choices! If you are discouraged by how the school/district has handled your complaint you can go through the OCR which may enforce the justice and accountability you seek for yourself or your student if the complaint is received in a timely manner.

You're not in this alone. We know it feels like you're fighting an uphill battle with very few weapons at your disposal. Schools and districts may act like your complaint is the first they've ever heard of its kind. It's not. Your student is suffering, but the school wants the student back in school, as attendance is a high priority for district funding. We get it. You're not alone. We are a community of parents, caregivers, and students of color who understand the intersecting marginalization that we experience in the school system.

To connect and learn more about how to advocate for a racial harassment and discrimination-free education, visit www.saveyourvi.org.