

Student Advocacy Handbook



**Center for Equity
+ Social Justice**

Office of the Organizational Ombuds
ATLANTA PUBLIC SCHOOLS | CENTER FOR EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Office of the Organizational Ombuds

Student Advocacy Handbook

The Student Advocacy Handbook is a resource for students to better understand resources and supports that have been developed by Atlanta Public schools to enrich the academic experience and school communities.

Information provided within the handbook has been designed for the purpose of aiding students in:

- Understanding rights, responsibilities, and expectations.
- Enhancing knowledge of policies, procedures, and communication strategies used by schools.
- Developing a knowledge of resources and best practices for navigating within school and the larger district community.
- Gaining skills to promote self-advocacy and communication.

The handbook contains answers to frequently addressed topics and provides information to assist students in connecting with the school district to enhance their academic experiences.

Section I- Understanding Self-Advocacy

Self-Advocacy is defined as the ability to communicate one’s individual needs to others. Atlanta Public Schools encourages students to seek support and ask questions while also communicating their individual learning needs.

Section II- Examples of Self-Advocacy for Students

Common strategies for self-advocacy for different education levels include but are not limited to:

Elementary School Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Asking for help with a task or assignment• Being able to appreciate personal differences and attributes• Expressing a desire for independence on tasks and assignments• Identifying a problem or concern and how it impacts feelings• Using positive statements when talking about themselves and their needs• Being aware of daily schedule and routines
Middle School Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informing teachers of needs and questions• Requesting assistance from teachers in obtaining support resources (e.g., tutoring, counseling, etc.)• Knowing the names and descriptions of medical diagnoses• Actively using problem solving skills• Understanding classroom accommodations needed to be successful• Sharing positive and negative experiences• Keeping track of belongings and assignments

<p>High School Students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being able to provide a description of personal assets and strengths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ex: “I am unique because...”; “I am good at...”; “My positive attributes are...” • Participation in the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) process • Developing and discussing individual and academic goals • Learning about the laws that protect student and rights • Self-evaluation and reminding teachers and staff of the learning accommodations and strategies that work best • Knowing their rights as a person with a disability • Implementing self-care when needed
<p><i>Sources:</i></p>	<p>“Self-Advocacy.” <i>Wright’s Law</i>, https://www.wrightslaw.com/info/self-advocacy.htm. “Student Self-Advocacy.” <i>Center for Parent Information and Resources</i>, https://www.parentcenterhub.org/?s=Self-advoc. “4 Steps for Stronger Self-Advocacy.” <i>Center for Parent Information and Resources</i>, https://prntexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/YOUTH-4-steps-for-stronger-self-advocacy.pdf.</p>

Section III: Navigating Your School Community: Who to Contact?



Teacher	Contact your teacher(s) for questions about assignments, grades, academic needs, or classroom schedules.
Assistant Principal	Contact the Assistant Principal assigned to your grade level with questions related to school policies, procedures, discipline, or other matters that your teacher is unable to answer.
Front Office	Contact your schools' front office staff with questions about school procedures, personal emergencies that require you to contact your parent or guardian, attendance concerns, or other questions.
Guidance Counselor	Contact your schools' Guidance Counselor to discuss personal issues related to emotional well-being, decision-making, or concerns such as bullying. Guidance counselors are also a point of contact for academic, college, and career planning assistance.

Section IV- Communicating with Your Teachers

Strategies for expressing concerns, asking questions, and obtaining teacher feedback

Make an appointment to meet and talk with your teacher.
If you know of other students who have similar questions or concerns, consider scheduling an appointment as a group.
Plan what you would like to say before you go to your meeting. Write down your questions and concerns to create a list of important points to discuss with your teacher.
Think of solutions and ideas that may be helpful to solve problems being discussed with your teacher.
Be tactful and respectful. Choose your words to ensure that the meeting is a cordial conversation.
Don't forget to listen.

If your meeting is not satisfactory, or does not meet your needs, consider speaking with another adult or your parent to assist with future discussions.

Section V: APS Student Code of Conduct

Atlanta Public Schools has developed a Student Code of Conduct aimed at creating positive school climates and supporting the academic and social and emotional development of students. The Student Code of Conduct outlines the following focus areas related to student expectations and responsibilities.

STUDENTS MAY EXPECT:

- **TO RECEIVE A FREE HIGH-QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION**
- **TO BE SAFE AT SCHOOL**
- **TO BE TREATED COURTEOUSLY AND RESPECTFULLY**
- **TO BRING COMPLAINTS OR CONCERNS TO THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL OR STAFF FOR RESOLUTION**
- **TO TELL HIS/HER SIDE OF THE STORY BEFORE RECEIVING A CONSEQUENCE**
- **TO BE TOLD THE REASON(S) FOR ANY DISCIPLINARY ACTION VERBALLY AND IN WRITING**
- **TO BE GIVEN INFORMATION ABOUT APPEALING DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS**
- **TO EXPRESS OPINIONS, SUPPORT CAUSES, AND DISCUSS ISSUES**

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES:

- **To receive a free high-quality public education**
- **To be safe at school**
- **To be treated courteously and respectfully**
- **To bring complaints or concerns to the school principal or staff for resolution**
- **To tell his/her side of the story before receiving a consequence**
- **To be told the reason(s) for any disciplinary action verbally and in writing**
- **To be given information about appealing disciplinary actions**
- **To express opinions, support causes, and discuss issues**

Source: Atlanta Public Schools Board Policy: JCDA-R (1)

Section VI- Bullying Prevention

Bullying and other forms of intimidation will not be tolerated in any form and are strictly prohibited by the Atlanta Board of Education Policy (JDCDAG) and Georgia law (O.C.G.A. 20-2-715.1).

All reports of bullying are taken seriously. Reports of bullying or retaliation may be made by staff, students, parents or guardians, or others, and may be oral or written. The Bullying Reporting Form is available in the main office for every school, the school counseling office, and the school nurse's office. Counselors and administrators can provide assistance to students in filling out the Bullying Reporting Form.

Access the Bullying Reporting Form	
Option 1	Complete the Online Bullying Reporting Form here.
Option 2	Click Here to Download the Printable Bullying Reporting Form. (PDF Format)

Bullying Prevention Tips

If You Are Bullied
Stick with friends and other adults. Most Bullying happens when adults are not around. Avoid being alone in target areas like locker rooms, restrooms, and places where the bully hangs out.
Be assertive and confident. Stand up for yourself. Use a calm, clear voice, and body language to show you are not afraid. Stand up straight and make eye contact
If speaking up seems too hard or not safe, ignore the bully. Walk away and stay away. Do not fight back. Find an adult to stop the bullying on the spot.
If Someone Else is Being Bullied
Do not be a bystander. When no one speaks up, bullies learn they can get away with it.
Refuse to join in. Do not take part in the bullying. Refuse to even watch
Speak out. Distract the bully by changing the subject or using Stand up for the victim. Tell the bully to stop.
Give support. Talk to the person being bullied in private. Be a friend to that person. Make an effort to include others who are normally left out or rejected.
Get an adult. Report any bullying you see to teachers or other adults.
<i>Source: "How to Be and Advocate for Bullied Students.", National Education Association, https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/how-be-advocate-bullied-students</i>

Bullying Prevention Resources

Learn more about actions and strategies to prevent bullying.

- [Atlanta Public Schools Bullying and Harassment Prevention](#)
- [Stopbullying.gov](#)
- [Center of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports \(PBIS\) Bullying Prevention](#)

Section VII- Student Complaints and Grievances

The leadership and staff of Atlanta Public Schools is committed to ensuring that student complaints and grievances are addressed in accordance with Atlanta Board of Education policies and Regulations, and in an equitable manner. The Board policy on student complaints and grievances may be found within the Board Policy Manual.

[Atlanta Public Schools Student Complaints and Grievances Policy](#)

Section VIII- Resources for Student Support

APS Student Handbook	2020-2021 Student Handbook
Student Code Conduct	APS Student Code of Conduct
Student Services	Department of Special Education
	Department of Intervention and Support
	Department of Student Assignment and Records
	Department of Student Discipline
Counseling Services	Department of School Counseling
Translation Services	Office of ESOL & World Languages
College and Testing Resources	The College Board
Questions, Concerns, Feedback	Let's Talk <i>* The Let's Talk platform allows students, parents, and stakeholders to contact the district to share questions, concerns, or feedback. Submitting questions or concerns through the Let's Talk platform provides an additional avenue to connect with APS.</i>