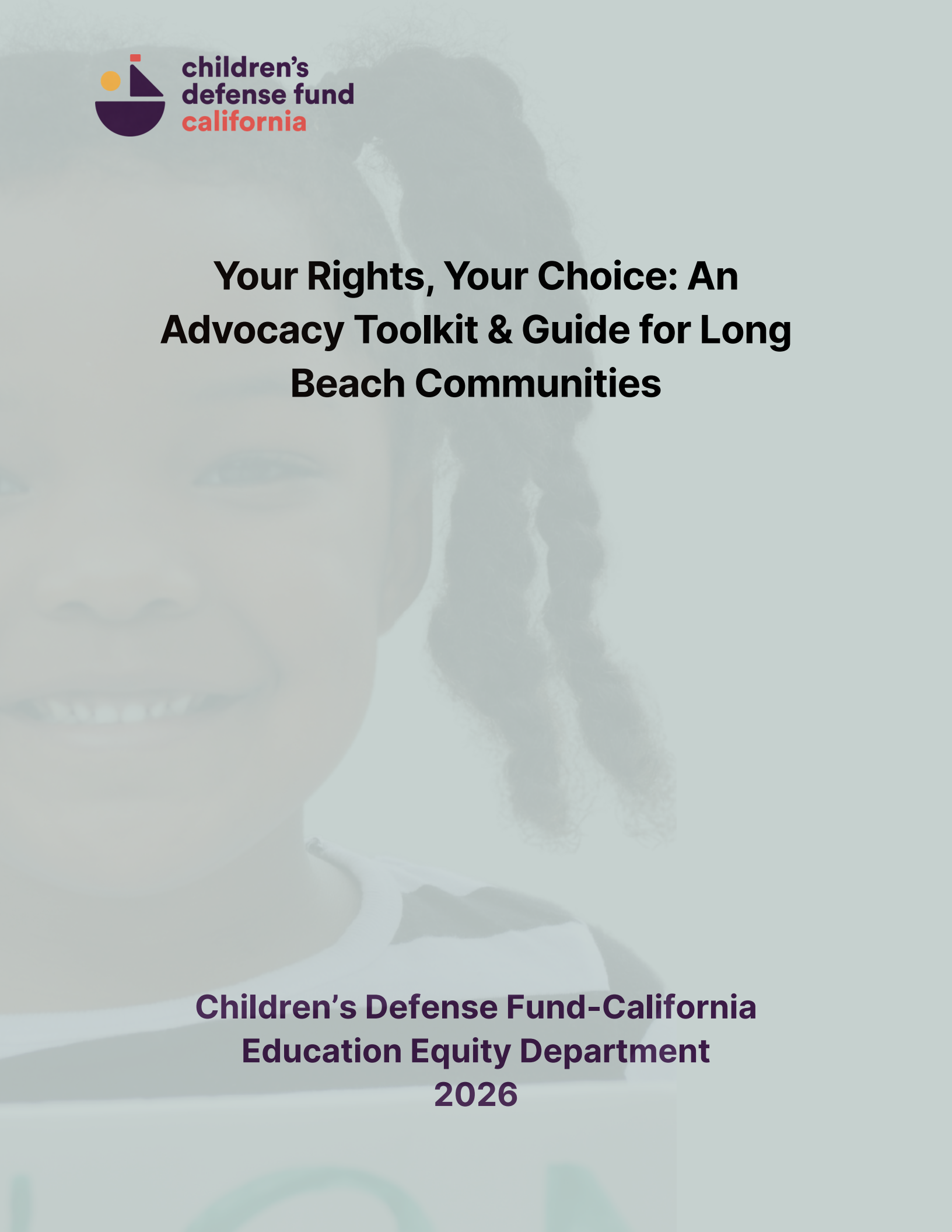
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Your Rights, Your Choice: An Advocacy Toolkit & Guide for Long Beach Communities



Children's Defense Fund-California
Education Equity Department
2026

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Children's Defense Fund-California: Education Equity

The purpose of this toolkit is to support community engagement and advocacy that helps protect the human rights of all youth in Long Beach. Published by CDFCA, we aim to connect existing frameworks related to legal and human rights with school, district, and state procedures. While this information has been tailored to meet the needs of families in Long Beach, California, some information can be generalized for other contexts.

In this toolkit, we'll share information to help you grow as an advocate in Long Beach. We will cover some commonly known issues within schools and communities across Long Beach. Some of those include (but are definitely not limited to) parent participation and access to information; right to supportive school discipline; right to language access; and addressing bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Don't be afraid to call out the gaps in the systems. Doing so is the first step in growing solutions for short and long-term change. We must do it. Communities have always healed themselves.

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A letter to Communities about the Toolkit

Dear Long Beach Communities,

Every student and parent should have a strong, healthy connection to their school and an educational experience that is welcoming, positive, and meaningful to families. For those who have had this positive experience, let's celebrate and learn from those school communities. For those who have experienced injustice, discrimination, retaliation, or continued bullying tactics, we will present you with some useful tools to exercise your family's legal rights in the Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD). We also included some tips for you to advocate for the human rights of knowledge and a quality education for students in the district. We aim to make this vision a reality in our communities.

We dedicate this toolkit to all students and families for whom the education system is not designed to serve-Black, Indigenous, and people of color; students with disabilities; English learners; students and families impacted by criminalization; foster families; immigrant communities; and all families who have had to fight to be heard. To the grandmothers, aunties, uncles, godparents, organizers, teachers, school staff, and community members who stand with students for humane treatment and a quality education: You are the most valuable asset to students who are marginalized and underserved. You all are at the center of this resource. To the mothers who lie awake at night carrying the weight of their child's struggles at school. To the fathers rushing to catch the bus so they can be there when their child needs them. To the parents who have signed school documents they could not fully understand because they were not provided in their language. To the families who have not yet felt safe or welcomed enough to walk through their child's school doors. To the parents who have been dismissed, disrespected, overlooked, or labeled "problematic" simply for advocating for their children.

We see your commitment, your courage, and your love. Thank you for continuing to show up and speak up for your children.

This toolkit is inspired by your persistence and your belief that every child deserves to learn in an environment where they are seen, supported, and valued.

Most importantly, to the students of Long Beach: We see you. We believe in you. Your voice matters, your experiences matter, and you deserve schools where you can learn, belong, and thrive.

With gratitude,

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Acknowledgements

This toolkit was created to help families learn advocacy tactics and strategies related to their child's educational needs. The authors drew upon their experience with families, community organizations, and school district staff to guide the information included in this toolkit.

We would like to thank everyone who has welcomed us into the Long Beach community over the past few years. We hope this toolkit will be a useful resource for any parent interested in making their local school and school district a better place for the community's children.

Finally, we would like to thank the organizations, the state of California, and others who produce and share resources that we referenced to develop this toolkit. That list of resources can be found on the last page.

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Your rights to participation and information

PARENT PARTICIPATION

Parents have the legal rights to visit their child's school and observe their classes, meet with school staff, volunteer to improve the school or assist in class, receive interpretation services when communicating with staff, and ensure your child's school has a safe and supportive learning environment.

School sites are legally responsible for the following parent engagement activities: outreach efforts that reflect the needs of the families they serve, comprehensive parent involvement training to help their student meet state standards, written parent involvement policies, and parent engagement in the school's budgeting committee and school decision-making.

School districts are legally responsible for the following parent engagement activities: open parent participation in parent stakeholder groups like the District Community Advisory Committee, open and public school board meetings, and the ability for parents to provide public comment in school board meetings.

WHAT CAN I DO WITH THESE LEGAL RIGHTS?

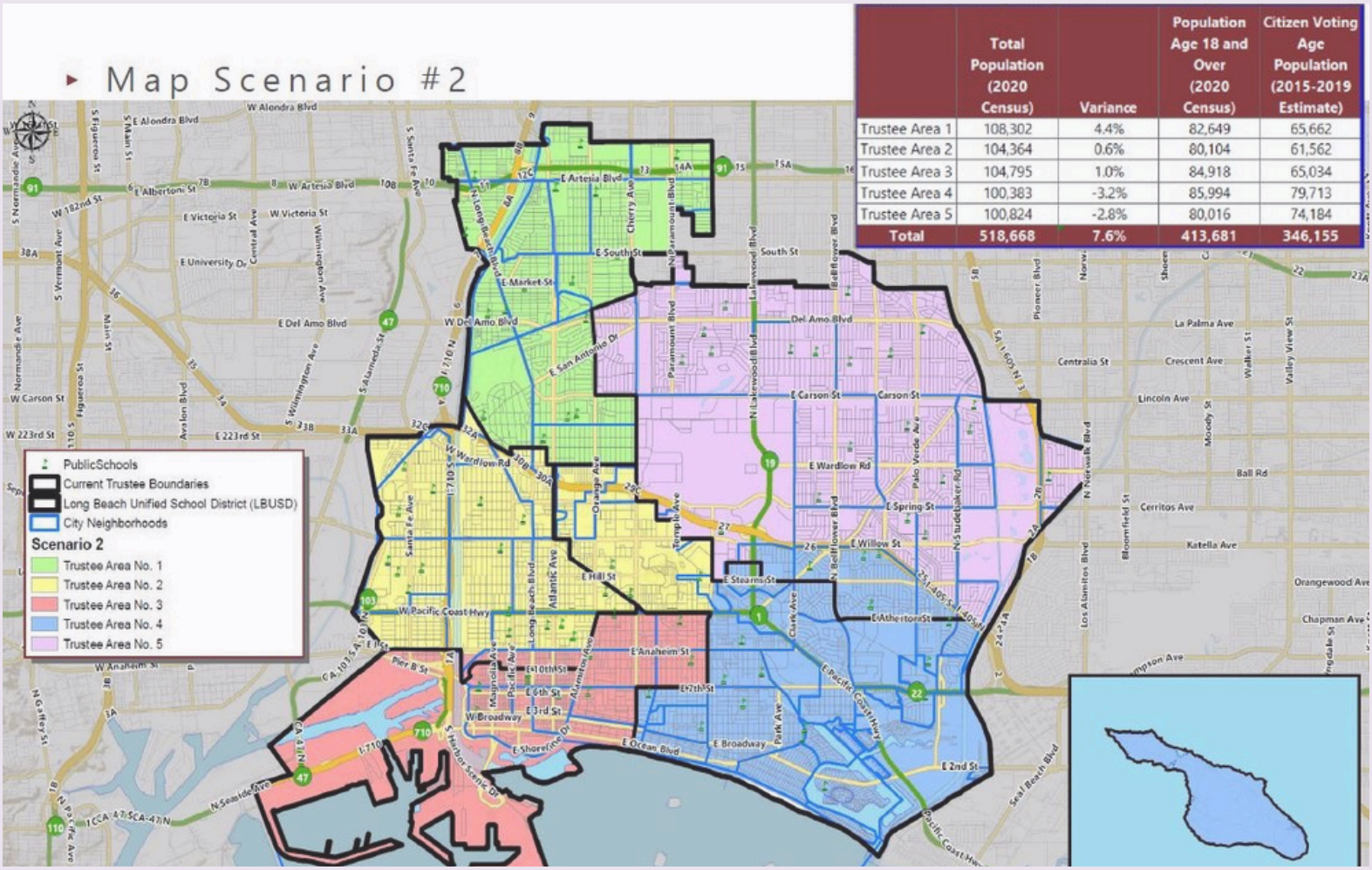
Visit your child's school to observe how they are doing. You can send an email or note or make an in-person request at the main office of the school to set up a time with your child's teacher and/or administrator 48 hours before you'd like to visit or meet. There is no minimum time requirement, as long as you give a reasonable notice. If your request is denied, ask them to put their reason in writing, and request another day that works for you and the school.

Meet with your school board representative when you have a concern about your school or if you want to recognize something positive. You can also meet to develop a relationship with one of your local elected officials who can have the biggest direct impact on your lives by governing your child's schools.

Find your district representative here (https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/lbusd/Board.nsf/Public)

You can find your local elementary, middle and high schools here by typing in your home address (https://www.lbschools.net/Schools/finder.cfm)

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	Total Population (2020 Census)	Variance	Population Age 18 and Over (2020 Census)	Citizen Voting Age Population (2015-2019 Estimate)
Trustee Area 1	108,302	4.4%	82,649	65,662
Trustee Area 2	104,364	0.6%	80,104	61,562
Trustee Area 3	104,795	1.0%	84,918	65,034
Trustee Area 4	100,383	-3.2%	85,994	79,713
Trustee Area 5	100,824	-2.8%	80,016	74,184
Total	518,668	7.6%	413,681	346,155

(approved by LBUSD's Board of Education of Dec. 1, 2021)

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Parents have legal rights to access information about standardized test results and academic performance, teachers' qualifications, school rules including attendance and discipline policies, and any psychological testing involving their child, including the right to deny permission to give that test.

What if my English isn't strong?: You have the right to receive notices, reports, statements, records and information in your primary language and to respond to the school in that language (see Language Access section).

My child has a disability. Does this make a difference? If you have a child with disabilities, you have specific education rights that you can exercise from 3 years old until they graduate high school.
You may:
Request that your school district evaluate your child for special education services
Dispute the results of the district's assessment and request a free Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) if you disagree with the school's assessment
The district can
Provide an evaluation without unnecessary delay
Request a hearing if the district believes its assessment was appropriate and disagrees that another IEE at public expense is necessary
If a hearing establishes that you do not qualify for a free IEE, you may still pay for one
Help develop the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) used to support your child's learning
Refuse to consent to an assessment for special education services

For more information about your rights in California special education, click here (https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/qa/pssummary.asp). For more resources on IEPs in California, click here (https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/sr/iepresources.asp).

In Long Beach, you may:
Audio record your IEP meeting by emailing or sending a note to the teacher or staff 24 hours before the meeting
Object to or refuse to attend the IEP meeting if school officials choose to audio record the meeting without your consent
Inspect, review, and sometimes, modify audio recordings
Cancel your IEP meeting if there is no interpreter available or if available translation is inadequate

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WHAT CAN I DO WITH THESE LEGAL RIGHTS?

Sign up for Parent University and ParentVUE to receive updates from Long Beach Unified and to see information about your student's academics, school engagement, discipline record, and more.

Request hard copies of all documents and reports if you cannot access them online.

Request a meeting with your student's teacher or staff to make sure you understand your child's progress and the school's policies.

Ask the school psychologist to evaluate your child if you think they have a disability or health need that impacts their learning. **PUT THIS REQUEST IN WRITING, DATE IT AND MAKE A COPY**.

Ask for the parent handbook every year so you can reference policies and procedures. This and additional information are often also on the district's and/or school's websites. You can find written notices and policies and more information about who the appropriate person is to contact when you need. And if you don't have a laptop or feel more comfortable talking to someone, visit or call your school's main office.

Advocate for your child's special education rights using the steps outlined above.

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Your rights to language access

Parents have the legal right to be notified of your rights and opportunities in your home language and to receive all notices, reports, statements, and records in your non-English home language if it is widely spoken in your district. In Long Beach, those languages are Spanish and Khmer.

Some parents have complained about how it is extremely difficult to make an informed decision about their child's education when they cannot comfortably understand the information being presented. If you are having difficulty understanding information about your child's education, you are not alone.

All parents should have an equal opportunity to make informed decisions about their child's education and to not be excluded from important conversations due to language barriers. If the language you speak is spoken by at least 15% of the district's population, your district should have an interpreter available for key meetings related to your child's education. If you speak a language that is not spoken by at least 15% of your district's population, be sure to reach out to your district immediately to request translation and interpretation of all important information.

Do NOT feel pressured to verbally agree with or sign anything that you do not understand. You have all the same rights to participation and access in your home language. If you do not understand something because of a language barrier or the quality of the interpretation, you can ask your principal or any school staff member for (improved) interpretation or translation of anything written AND/OR for an interpreter for any meeting involving your child. If you are denied participation due to language access, you should consider submitting a complaint to the district or state (see Right to Be Free from Bullying, Harassment, and Discrimination section).

My child has a disability! Does this make a difference?

School districts must ensure you have a meaningful opportunity to participate in IEP meetings. So, if you request a translated copy of your student's IEP, the district has an obligation to assist you in obtaining a translated copy. However, your district's translation unit may not be responsible for translating the IEP. For example, in Long Beach, the Translation Unit does not generally translate IEPs, but it does translate related assessment reports like psychological and speech/language assessments.

WHAT CAN I DO WITH THESE LEGAL RIGHTS?

If you don't understand a document or something someone is saying, ask for translation or interpretation at your child's school (to either the teacher or at the front desk) and/or contact the translation unit. Anytime you are told you will be receiving important paperwork, be sure to request translation or interpretation immediately!

You can contact LBUSD's Translation Unit at (562) 997-8322 with your requests, questions, or concerns. They note on the LBUSD website (https://www.lbschools.net/Departments/EEP/translation-unit.cfm) that they could take up to two weeks to provide what you need.

Ask that your school get into the practice of offering translation of official documents. If they know parents need translated copies, they are more likely to offer it more often.

Ask for a trained interpreter who speaks your home language at meetings with school staff. Sometimes bilingual staff will get pulled into meetings; however, if they are not trained interpreters, the quality could compromise your access to information and participation.

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Your student's rights to supportive school discipline

Your child has the right to go to a school with a welcoming environment.

Yet, in California, it is legal for students to be suspended upon the first incident for some behaviors like endangering another person's safety, damaging school property, and (if in grades 9-12) "willfully defying valid authority" even if the student has a disability. This can be very confusing. Despite a lot of progress over the last several years, the law can still be weak in this area, and implementation of good laws has not been uniform. School climate is hard to improve quickly and, in the meantime, being removed from the classroom/school is quite harmful to the student's learning, relationships, and school connection.

Denying children and youth access to education on the basis of behavior is inherently very subjective, so here is where a human rights framework is much more helpful to protect a student's right to learn (see When your legal rights do not go far enough). Discipline can and should be positive and built on the assets of and relationships with students. A positive school climate is vital to ensuring students learn in a supportive environment and are not pushed out of school or left to fail. Below are some legal protections to prevent harsh and exclusionary school discipline, but, again, educators ultimately have a lot of discretion to remove students from the class. Your family still has the human right to ask for a fair and just process when laws do not guarantee that.

State law encourages a progressive approach to discipline and behavioral consequences by requiring that alternative methods are used before exclusionary policies like suspension. Ultimately, schools should engage in the following four elements of supportive discipline that you can ask about!

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Elimination of zero-tolerance policies
Zero-tolerance policies result in automatic disciplinary penalties if a person does a specifically prohibited act. Even if an administrator has authority to modify the consequence, the policy may still be considered zero-tolerance if students always face some disciplinary penalty.

Culturally-affirming social-emotional learning
This type of learning is focused on developing collaborative and supportive relationships to prevent and reduce conflict. It builds on learners' strength and culture to acknowledge that a variety of social and emotional skills can be positively used to achieve conflict-related goals.

Trauma-informed practices
These practices are alternatives to discipline that emphasize physical, psychological, and emotional safety for trauma survivors. Advocating for this framework usually requires an evaluation of policies, practices, and the culture of an environment to determine if the necessary supports for trauma survivors are available.

Strict limitations on exclusionary tactics like suspension, expulsion, and forced transfer
Schools should use suspension, expulsion, and forced transfer as "last resort" remedies due to the loss of instructional time for students transitioning between schools. Schools that use the other elements of supportive discipline will ideally use exclusionary tactics less often. Strong investments into identifying and addressing the root causes of disciplinary issues will allow for more opportunities to notify parents and guardians and intervene at an early stage.

Who should I talk to about developing alternatives to exclusionary tactics?
Although teachers can remove students from classrooms, principals and superintendents have the final say on whether or not a student is suspended or expelled. Principals can use their discretion to provide alternatives for suspension and expulsion (and school transfer) that help students reconnect to their school environment and address the students' needs. So if the teacher has not found an effective intervention for your child, set up a meeting to discuss with the principal or assistant principal, who should also hear your side of the story.

What other legal protections does my family have?
Your school cannot use "willful defiance" or disruption as a reason to recommend a student for expulsion, and if your student is in K-8, they cannot be suspended for this reason either. Willful defiance is disruption of school activities, or willfully defying the valid authority of supervisors, teachers, administrators, school officials, or other school personnel engaged in the performance of their duties. If your student is homeless and facing discretionary expulsion, the school district must notify and invite the educational liaisons for homeless students to provide support and resources.

If your student is a foster youth with special needs and is in danger of suspension or expulsion, the child's attorney or welfare representative must be notified and invited to a hearing before removal.
If your student does not have an attorney or a welfare representative, contact your district's educational liaison for foster children for more resources

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If your student is a foster child and is in danger of suspension or non-mandatory expulsion, their attorney or welfare agency representative must be notified. If your student is a foster child, their education rights holder must be notified and invited to all discipline-related meetings.
The district's educational liaison for foster children must facilitate placement and enrollment and assist if the student transfers schools or districts.

What if nobody is listening to me at my child's school?
Don't be afraid to ask for what your students need! Submit a letter (can be handwritten in your home language) that states clearly what your student is going through, what you've documented, what you've asked for already (if applicable), and what you need now. Get support (letters, advice, etc.) from other parents, organizations, or community groups in your advocacy

What is implicit and explicit racial bias and how does it impact my child?
Implicit racial bias is the unconscious association of certain racial groups with positive or negative traits. Explicit bias is when people know they are treating a person differently than another based on race.

For example, a teacher may suspend a Black student for interrupting class by talking out of turn too much, and turn around and issue a warning to a white student for the same behavior. The teacher may be unaware that they are treating the two students from different racial groups differently (implicit bias), or they may be aware (explicit bias).

Unfortunately, this means that students of color are more likely to face negative outcomes related to school discipline. Ask for data to collect and analyze it for implicit and explicit racial bias. Ask for:
Records of disciplinary warnings, suspensions, expulsions, and forced transfer broken down by race
Policies authorizing staff to issue warnings and other exclusionary tactics
Policies that encourage or require alternative disciplinary remedies before exclusionary tactics are used

You can also do some analysis yourself at your school by comparing the racial groups in enrollment and disciplinary action to see if there is any difference. If your child's racial group is overrepresented in any school discipline statistic compared to its enrollment percentage, implicit and explicit racial bias could be a factor.

For example, in 2019-20 (the last school year for which we have data and when schools remained in-person), Black students made up about 13% of enrollment and almost 30% of all suspensions in Long Beach Unified. Comparatively, white students also made up around 13% of enrollment and only about 7% of total suspensions. That is a large difference, and we believe it exists because educators generally respond differently (more harshly) to Black students compared to how they respond to white students (more leniently).

If you want to find academic data, enrollment data, and staffing data relevant to your student's school or school district, click here (https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/). Discussing race is critical for educators and the school community to accept the presence of racial bias and its impact. Once the community is aware of its effects on different racial groups, it can work together to develop remedies and solutions.

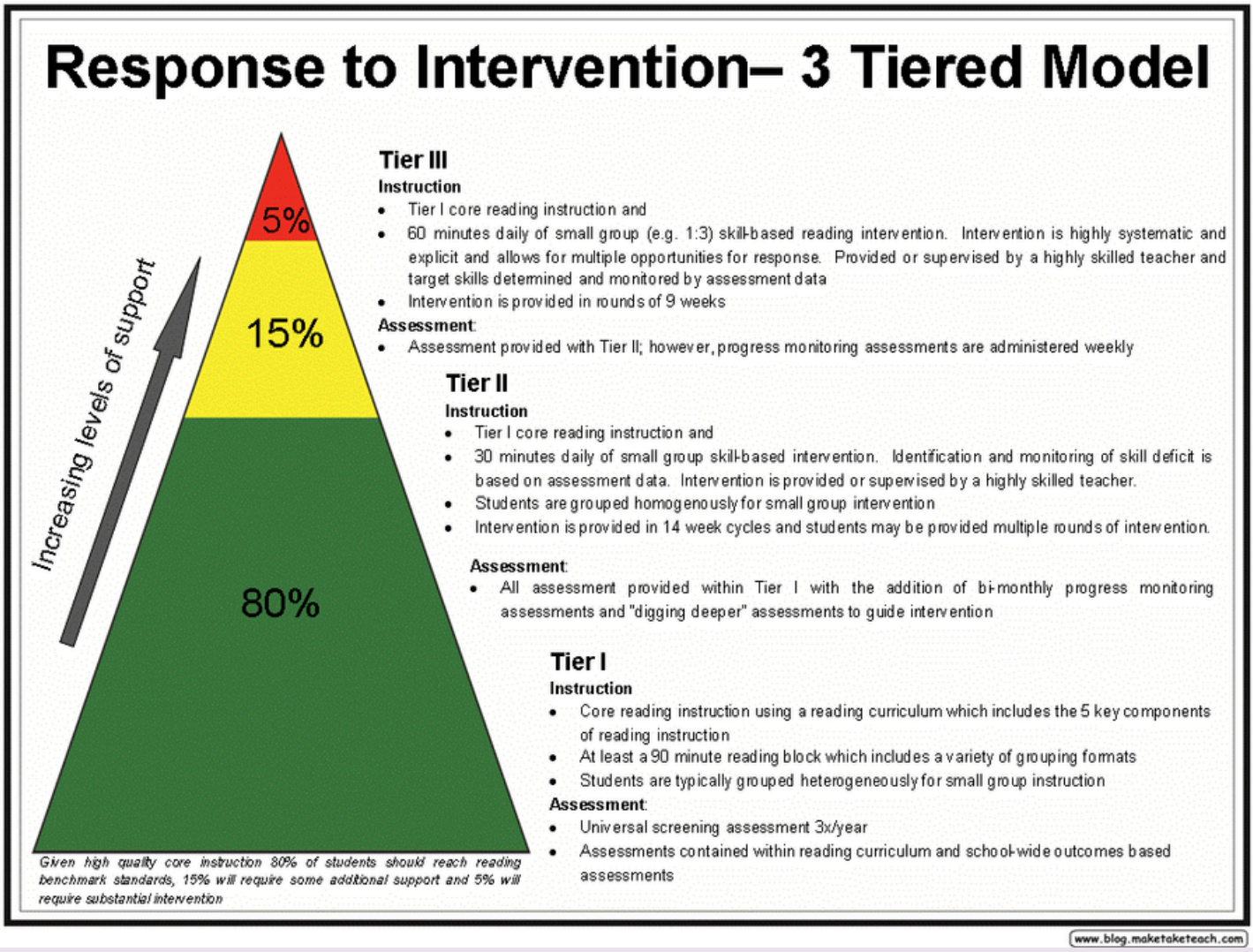
WHAT CAN I DO WITH THESE LEGAL RIGHTS?

DOCUMENT EVERYTHING. If you are not given documentation after an incident, you can request it, and you can also make notes yourself. The school must provide written documentation when students are issued in-school or out-of-school suspensions. If the student was removed from class (not a formal suspension), you should still ask for the school to document the day, time, duration, and reason. Do not take your child home if the school suspends them and provides you with no official notification (an official district form). Ask for a copy of the district's policy and the school's policy on school discipline and removal from class.

Ask about the process for appealing a suspension or expulsion

Long Beach families should contact Long Beach Unified's Office of Student Placement Services at (562) 985-3237. Request any of the following alternatives to suspension and removal: A parent-teacher conference to talk to the teacher, counselor, and/or school administrator to address the root cause if there is a pattern of removal or suspension; restorative justice or community-building circle interventions for the student, like behavioral or mental health support with staff like counselors or psychologists. A trauma-informed strategy based on the student's needs designed to address the specific behavior. (Refer to the documentation your school gave you about the incident.)

LBUSD has adopted a response to intervention (RTI) approach to offer support based on need. You can ask how this model is being implemented to support your children at their schools.



Check the following websites for data where school districts are required to publicly report some key statistics related to school discipline (suspensions, expulsions, arrests, citations). You can find data at the school level, district level, and disaggregated by race/ethnicity) and by other student subgroups.
California School Dashboard: https://www.caschooldashboard.org/
U.S. Office of Civil Rights: https://ocrdata.ed.gov/

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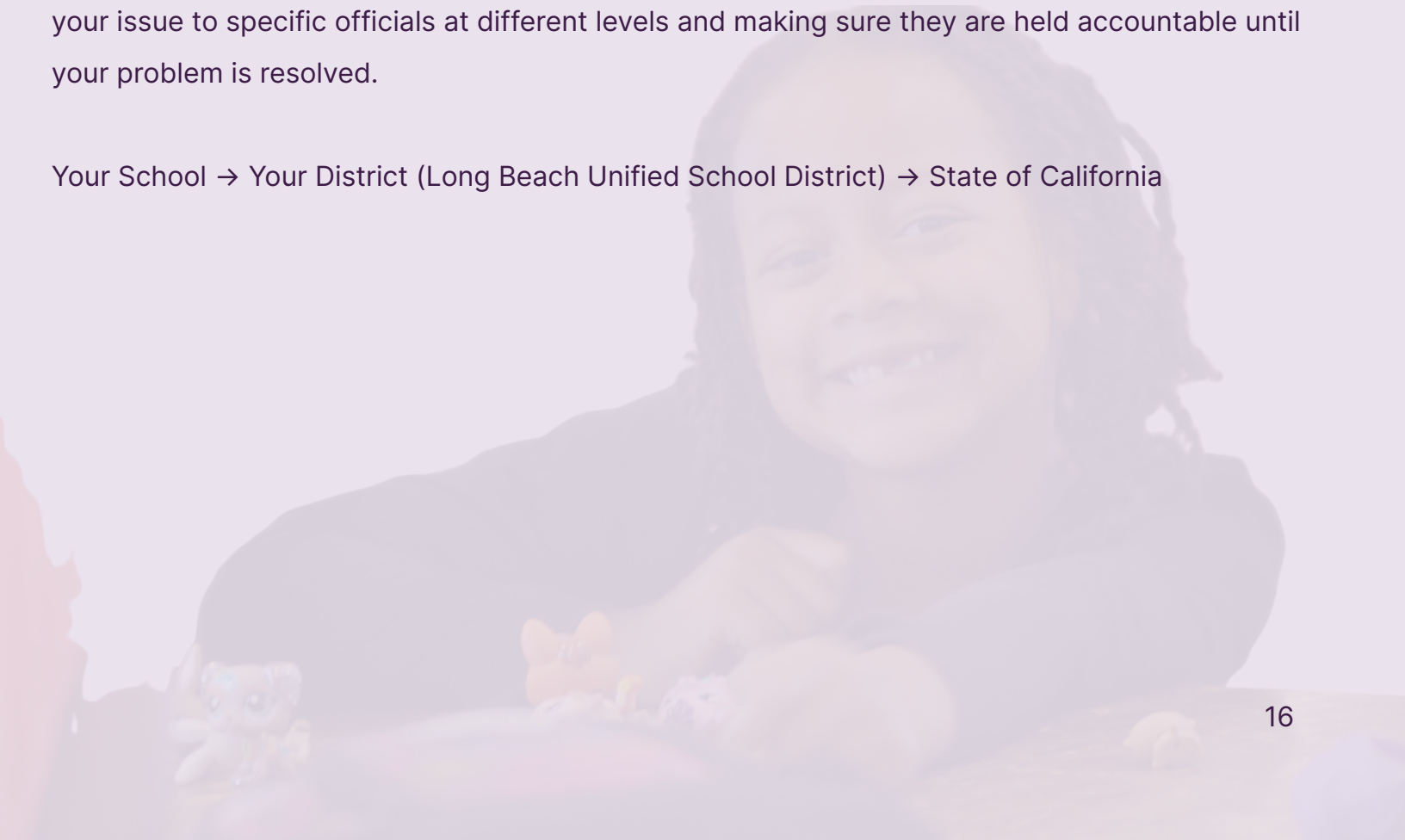
4. Your student's right to be free from bullying, harassment, and discrimination

As stated in the previous section, your child has the right to go to a school with a welcoming environment. School districts and county offices of education are legally responsible for making their policies about bullying, harassment, and discrimination, sexual harassment, suicide prevention, and violence publicly available and easily accessible.

Unfortunately, students are bullied, harassed, and discriminated against at school, where they should be safe. No one should have to suffer in an unwelcoming environment. If your student is being bullied, harassed, or discriminated against, know your rights and stand up for them!

First, you can attempt to resolve the matter at the school site level, and if it is not adequately addressed there, then you can escalate to the district and the state as needed. This means taking your issue to specific officials at different levels and making sure they are held accountable until your problem is resolved.

Your School → Your District (Long Beach Unified School District) → State of California



NOTE: It is very important that you document the details of what has happened to you and/or your child and make copies of all your requests to meet or for services through hard copy, picture, or by email (collect your receipts!). This helps keep track of your efforts and hold people accountable for supporting your child.

WHAT CAN I DO WHEN I HAVE BEEN HARMED?

LEVEL 1: ADDRESS THE HARM AT THE SCHOOL

Talk to your child to better understand any issues and document all details in a journal.
Students should talk to people they trust when experiencing a traumatic incident like bullying, harassment, and discrimination, such as parents, administrators, and other trusted adults or friends who can provide support. Documenting your child's experience in writing is very important.
It is also useful and important to track dates in case you have to resort to a legal complaint. You will need this information to save yourself a headache.

Communicate with trusted school staff about the incident.

An email can be helpful because it provides an automatic “receipt” that stamps the date and time you reached out (keep a hard copy or email). This allows you to hold school accountable and move things along in a timely manner. If you are not comfortable with using email, take a handwritten note to the school, ask the office clerk to make a copy for you, and make a note of whom you gave the note to, as well as the date and time you delivered it.

Ask for your school's anti-bullying policies and formal complaint process.

Request a meeting at the school to discuss what teachers/school staff are doing to encourage a safe and inclusive environment in the classroom or other areas in the school. Talk to other parents who can contribute ideas toward creating a “safety plan” for and with your student. This will benefit their children too, and chances are that other parents have faced similar circumstances.

Request to meet with the school counselor to report the incident and create a plan.

A school should NOT automatically suspend or expel the bullying student, since that is often not the most effective way to stop or prevent bullying and harassment from occurring again in the future. Schools should refer students who have been bullied, who have engaged in bullying, and who observe bullying to counselors and should resolve conflict through restorative justice and positive behavior interventions. Report to the LBUSD deputy superintendent in charge of your school if this is not happening.

Write to the principal if you are not seeing results, and also to ensure they are aware of your issue. (Refer to Hand templates)

Talk with school administrators about what happened. Make sure the story is documented in writing by school staff and ask for a copy. Ask the school for its plan to address the bullying and a timeline for next steps.

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LEVEL 2: FILE A FORMAL COMPLAINT WITH THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OR CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Consider filing a formal complaint with the school district if the school does not adequately resolve the bullying/harassment/discrimination incident(s) in a timely manner. Contact LBUSD Human Resource Services (HRS) to report an incident or receive a copy of the district's anti-bullying policies. (562)-997-8214 or https://www.lbschools.net/Departments/Human_Resource_Services/.

FILE A COMPLAINT AT THE DISTRICT

There are two types of formal complaints that you can use if your student's rights are violated. You can use the Uniform Complaint Procedure (UCP) if your school district, county office of education, or charter school violated certain rights like discrimination, harassment, and bullying; educational and graduation requirements for homeless or foster youth; or other issues related to district funding and accountability.
If your issue is not covered by the Uniform Complaint Procedure, you can use your district's local complaint procedures to file a complaint.

No matter what type of complaint you file, always attach all of your documented communication with school staff (including emails) to demonstrate your efforts and the school's responses.

What complaints can I file at LBUSD that are not covered by the UCP process?

In Long Beach, you can file complaints about a principal or office administrator, sex discrimination, and instructional materials directly to the District or its Board of Education. You can check this website (https://www.lbschools.net/District/complaint_forms.cfm) to download copies of complaint forms in English, Spanish, and Khmer. The website also informs you where you should submit your complaint within the district.

Below are examples of how to file complaints to the superintendent or the Board of Education.

LBUSD Parent/Guardian Complaint Concerning District Personnel Form:
https://www.lbschools.net/Asset/files/District/Complaints/PersonnelComplaintForm_EN.pdf

Submit this form to:
Office of the Assistant Superintendent
Elementary Schools, Middle/K-8 Schools, High Schools (indicate level)
Long Beach Unified School District
1515 Hughes Way
Long Beach, CA 90810

Formal complaints against the superintendent should be submitted, in writing, to the Board of Education.

Submit a formal complaint to:
Human Resource Services, Director
District Compliance Officer, Title IX Coordinator
Long Beach, California
1515 Hughes Way
Long Beach, CA 90810

IF YOUR COMPLAINT IS NOT RESOLVED BY THE DISTRICT, APPEAL THE DISTRICT'S DECISION WITH THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (CDE).

You can only file an appeal to the CDE for UCP complaints. You can appeal the district's decision if they do not respond to or resolve your complaint, or if you disagree with the district's conclusion. If the school district fails to follow either of the following rules, you can file a complaint directly with the CDE. Within 60 days from the date of receipt of the complaint, the district must conduct and complete an investigation of the complaint and prepare a written decision.
The district decision should include a notice of your right to appeal the district's decision to the California Department of Education (CDE) within 15 days; and the procedures to be followed to initiate such an appeal.

Where can I learn more?:

Visit the CDE website at www.cde.ca.gov/re/cp. The CDE is responsible for holding districts accountable for providing and enforcing quality education standards in our schools.

Find out more about the Uniform Complaint Procedure process here:
https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cp/uc/documents/ucppamphlet2021.docx.

OTHER COMPLAINT PROCESSES

A formal complaint to the California Attorney General (Department of Justice) is the state's top law enforcement official responsible for protecting and serving the people of California. File a complaint with the Bureau of Children's Justice, which enforces children's rights in California. Visit the complaint process at https://oag.ca.gov/bcj/complaint.

A formal complaint to the US Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The OCR enforces Federal civil rights that prohibit discrimination in programs that receive federal financial assistance from the Department of Education. Learn more at https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html.

Information about LBUSD Complaint Regulations & Forms can be found at https://www.lbschools.net/District/complaint_forms.cfm.

Special Education CDE Complaint Form: https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/qa/documents/sedcomplaintform.pdf

For more information about parental rights for students in special education, contact the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, Procedural Safeguards Referral Service, by calling 800-926-0648 or writing to:

California Department of Education
Special Education Division
Procedural Safeguards Referral Service
1430 N Street, Suite 2401
Sacramento, CA 95814
Telephone: 800-926-0648
Fax: 916-327-3704

To file for mediation or a due process hearing, contact:

Office of Administrative Hearings
Special Education Division
2349 Gateway Oaks, Suite 200
Sacramento, CA 95833-4231
Telephone: 916-263-0880
Fax: 916-263-0890

For more specific details about the CDE Special Education complaint process, refer to: https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/qa/cmplntproc.asp.

INFORMATION FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

Immigrant families have legal and human rights that protect their access to educational programming. The American Civil Liberties Union of Northern California provides us with answers to these frequently asked questions:

Can my school district ask about my citizenship or immigration status to prove that I live within the school district's boundaries?

NO. School districts may NOT ask about a student's citizenship or immigration status as proof of a student's residency within a district. Schools may instead ask for phone bills, lease agreements, affidavits, or other documents to prove residency.

Can I withhold information on my citizenship or immigration status from my school district?

YES. You have the right to withhold information on your citizenship or immigration status from your school. Your school may NOT stop you from enrolling if you do not provide that information.

Can my school district request a birth certificate for proof of my child's age?

YES, but your school district may NOT stop you from enrolling in school because you lack a birth certificate or have a foreign place of birth.

WHEN LEGAL RIGHTS DO NOT GO FAR ENOUGH

What is a human rights framework?
A rights-based approach is a holistic one, encompassing access to education, educational quality (based on human rights values and principles), and the environment in which education is provided. And there is no age limit. We are lifelong learners and have a right to knowledge as children, youth, and adults. A human rights framework is much more complete than the existing legal framework, and it helps us imagine a more holistic and just system that serves us all.
-United Nations, A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education For All.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was originally developed by the international community almost 75 years ago, and it acknowledges a full set of basic rights we should have as human beings. (https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights). This framework includes civil, cultural, economic, social, and political rights.

Civil and Political Rights
Right to freedom from discrimination
Right to life
Right to free speech and belief
Right to assembly and association
Right to due process of law
Right to participate in government and in free elections
Right to freedom from torture
Economic, social and cultural rights
Right to health
Right to food
Right to water
Right to housing
Right to work
Right to education
Right to social security
Right to participate in cultural life

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Why should we push for the human right to education?
Students and parents know better than anyone that our legal right to an education does not go far enough to guarantee access, equity, and quality for everyone--especially in communities of color that have long been neglected or harmed by public policies for decades. Time and time again, more affluent communities with more privilege systemically access more high-quality educational opportunities.

However, even though California law has not guaranteed the human rights standard of education, we believe the state has a moral obligation to provide all children with high-quality educational opportunities regardless of race, class, gender, or other status

Under a human rights framework, every child receives "a quality education that respects and promotes her or his right to dignity and optimum development."

But what does this look like in our schools? Community Asset Development Redefining Education (CADRE) and Partners for Dignity & Rights (formerly NESRI) identified the following human rights standards as the most relevant in the US context:
The curricula and teaching pedagogies must adapt to meet each child's needs.
Children must be supported to reach their full potential, participate in society, enter a rewarding job for a livable wage, and continue learning. Education must foster respect for family, language, and culture. The dignity of every child must be guaranteed in an environment of respect and tolerance that develops a student's self-confidence and expression and prevents harmful and humiliating disciplinary policies and practices.

There can be no discrimination in how students are treated, in their access to opportunities, or in their learning outcomes. Resources must be distributed equitably across communities based on where they are needed. The meaningful participation of students, parents, and communities must be guaranteed in decisions that affect their schools and their right to education.

The human rights framework requires that the above conditions are universally applied to all people and are guaranteed "without discrimination on the basis of race, gender, language, class, belief, nationality, or other status." People have a right to participate in the processes where their human rights are fulfilled, which includes the creation and implementation of policies. Our agencies should also have processes for people to hold them accountable when rights are violated, and they must ensure relevant information is accessible and transparent.

Do these human rights align with our legal rights? Sometimes, but not enough.

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Under California's current laws, students have a right to an education and, as mentioned in the first section, families have a right to information about their children's education. We need nothing short of a movement to grow this basic legal right into something more substantive that also includes quality, access, and other aspects of human rights. Talk with your children's educators about realizing the relevant human rights standards listed above. These human rights should become the standard for the best practices we want to see modeled in our schools. You are on good ground to ask for the school to do more than the basic legal minimum.

WHAT DO I DO WITH THESE HUMAN RIGHTS?

We leave you with these final aspirational tips, also inspired by CADRE and Partners for Dignity & Rights (formerly NESRI).

Advocate for children based on the data and the issues! Usually, your child is not the only one suffering from bad policies or inequitable treatment. Consider how you can help improve the system through your advocacy so no children will face the same issue in your district or school site. Remember, there is power in numbers! Get involved with your district's committees, your school site's meetings, and encourage other families to join you!

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Pay attention to your child's education! Get involved with your district's committees, your school site's meetings, and attend school board meetings. Stay up to date with new policies and budget allocations to know exactly how your school site and district are supporting students.

Check the data! Check publicly available data on the internet to track attendance, academics, and more every year. If you cannot find the information that you are looking for online, reach out to your school and your district to ask for the information you want. Consider filing a Public Records Act request to retrieve data or asking a community organization to assist you with this.

Maximize resources for your school and district! Direct your advocacy efforts to your district's school board meetings and your school site's meetings to ask hard questions about what the agency is allocating to services for students.

Resist exclusionary policies and practices! If your school district handles discipline issues through suspensions, expulsions, and transfers, challenge those to ensure that students are not missing out on vital educational minutes. Ask your district to replace these policies with those that focus on problem-solving and conflict resolution.

Exercise your rights! Know the difference between the legal rights that California schools must recognize and the human rights you can use to advocate for better policies and practices. Request meetings with school staff to ask for changes you want to see.

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6. HANDY TEMPLATES

PARENT DOCUMENTATION

Keep track of incidents and who is working with your child at their school. This way, you can build a healthy relationship with school staff where, hopefully, there is mutual respect and effective communication.

Documentation helps you make your case and saves time. It can be hard to remember everything that transpired days after an incident occurs. And sometimes school/district officials have a different account of what happened, or they simply won't believe your account. Your documentation is your receipt. Write down detailed descriptions of what happened and how it has impacted your child and your family. This can make all the difference in reaching a resolution for your student in a timely manner.

You should also know who the decision-makers are at your school. Here are important school staff names you and your child should find together. Make it a family affair! Let your child help you find names on class subjects with you, and fill out below for your records.

Directory of all school/district important contacts:

Principal Name:
Assistant Principal Name(s):
Counselor Name:
Receptionist/Clerical Staff Name:
Recreational Aide Name:
Special Education Aide Name:

Elementary School
Teacher(s) Name(s):

Middle/High School
Teacher #1: _____ (Subject: _____)
Teacher #2: _____ (Subject: _____)
Teacher #3: _____ (Subject: _____)
Teacher #4: _____ (Subject: _____)
Teacher #5: _____ (Subject: _____)
Teacher #6: _____ (Subject: _____)

District Level
Superintendent of Schools:
Assistant Superintendent(s) of Elementary, Middle & K8 Schools, and High Schools:
Director of Special Education:

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Sample journal entries for your records

Journal entries help us remember important details about our issue and can help us get to a resolution quickly. When we are under stress, it is important to lean on your journal and write about your experience, including dates and times, and names and titles. Be kind to yourself and write things down. Most importantly, it also helps process emotions--something adults and kids alike need! Here are some sample journal entries--

October 5, 2021 (@2:25pm), my son arrived home with complaints about verbal bullying happening from another student (Johnny Blue) during math class. He reported this to his math teacher.

October 6, 2021 (@9am) I submitted a note to the receptionist (Ms. Sandra May) to meet with my son's counselor to meet one on one to talk about a safety plan for my child.

October 8, 2021 (@4pm), my son came home again with an injury, and no one has called me from the school yet. Sent an email to the teacher, principal, and superintendent to address this issue and start by meeting with me.

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SAMPLE FORM: PARENT MEETING REQUEST AT SCHOOL
*****MAKE ONE COPY FOR SCHOOL STAFF AND ONE COPY FOR PARENT*****

Date: _____ Time: _____

Submitted to:
School Staff (Name/Title): _____

Request to meet with (circle all that apply):
Teacher (name or class:_____) Principal Assistant Principal

Counselor School Psychologist Other: _____

Before submitting, fill out below*

PARENT/STUDENT INFORMATION

Parent Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

Reason for meeting (circle):
Parent one-on-one IEP meeting Student Safety Plan

Parent Engagement/Participation Other: _____

Request for Interpretation ___Spanish ___Khmer

Notes: _____

_____

_____

_____

Submitted by (circle): In-person Email Other: _____

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SAMPLE FORM: PARENT MEETING REQUEST AT SCHOOL
*****MAKE ONE COPY FOR SCHOOL STAFF AND ONE COPY FOR PARENT*****

Date: _____ Time: _____

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Request to meet with (circle all that apply):
Teacher (name or class:_____) Principal Assistant Principal

Counselor School Psychologist Other: _____

Before submitting, fill out
below**********

PARENT/STUDENT INFORMATION

Parent Name: _____

Email: _____

Phone Number: _____

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

Reason for meeting (circle):
Parent one-on-one IEP meeting Student Safety Plan

Parent Engagement/Participation Other: _____

Request for Interpretation ___Spanish ___Khmer

Notes: _____

_____

_____

_____

Submitted by (circle): In-person Email Other: _____

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7. Resources

California's Education Code

Education is a right at the state level, so every state does things a little differently. California's Education Code has a lot of laws that may be relevant to your family. This toolkit attempts to break down some of that information in an accessible way. If you want to check the laws about your student's K-12 education, Title 1 (General Education Code Provisions) and Title 2 (Elementary and Secondary Education) are a good place to start. (https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codesTOCSelected.xhtml?tocCode=EDC)

Data about your student's school or school district

Dataquest is a website that "provides meaningful data and statistics about California's K-12 public education system". It can be used to find data related to enrollment, attendance, academics, and more for your school site, school district, or county office of education. You can get even more detailed and check data by a student's race, sex, grade, English learner status, and more. (https://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/)

Human Rights in Education

The United Nations developed and adopted a Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This declaration states human rights such as the right to be free from discrimination, the right to have freedom of opinion and expression, and the right to education. However, no state in the United States has any requirement to follow these human rights. You can still use this Declaration as a base to argue for what you want to see in your student's education.
(https://www.ohchr.org/en/udhr/documents/udhr_translations/eng.pdf)

Two organizations, CADRE & Partners for Dignity and Rights, focused on enhancing education for students, created a training manual for introducing human rights principles into public schools in 2007. This training manual provides an explanation of your human rights and tools to use these rights for social change. (http://cadre-la.org/newhome/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/CADRE_NESRI-HR-Training-Manual-Final-Apr-07.pdf)

UNICEF created a framework for understanding your student's human right to education that encourages developing policies based on this right. It also includes points for how parents, communities and teachers can support this push for an education that reflects human rights standards. (https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/A%20Human%20Rights-based%20Approach%20to%20Education%20for%20All_0.pdf)

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Implicit Bias

This fact sheet defines "implicit racial bias" on the first page and discusses how it applies to the criminal justice system. Even though this toolkit is focused on education rights for parents and students, you may want to consider how your school district's exclusionary policies and practices are used against students of different racial groups. (https://www.jrsa.org/pubs/factsheets/jrsa-factsheet-implicit-racial-bias.pdf)

This website defines "implicit bias" and discusses why it matters as we move through our everyday lives. It also links to a test one can take to determine if they have a level of implicit bias. If you do harbor some implicit bias, it's possible to overcome this by making conscious choices to counteract these perceptions. (https://perception.org/research/implicit-bias/)

Know Your Rights

Filing Complaints: The California Department of Education hosts a website dedicated to informing you how to file a complaint against your school or school district. Remember to address your complaint to the correct agency and include all relevant information. (https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cp/)

Immigrant Families: ACLU NorCal created a helpful guide for immigrant families to know their rights in education. Check it out for answers to any questions that were not answered by this toolkit. (https://www.aclunc.org/our-work/know-your-rights/know-your-rights-immigration-students)

Students' Rights: The ACLU of California hosts this website for California public school students to know their rights related to filing complaints, foster youth, health, harassment & bullying, immigration status, school discipline, etc. Most of the information is also available in Spanish. (https://www.myschoolmyrights.com/)

School District Committees: Check your local school district's website for the parent groups and committees that you can get involved in to start making a difference today.

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Long Beach Unified School District hosts a list of parent groups here. (https://www.lbschools.net/Departments/Parent_U/parent_workshops.cfm)

School District Rights and Responsibilities: Check your local school district's website for its policies, specifically related to students and their families.

Long Beach Unified School District hosts Board policies here (https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/lbusd/Board.nsf/Public) and notifies parents of their rights and responsibilities here (https://www.lbschools.net/Departments/Parent_U/guidelines.cfm).

Special Education Rights and Responsibilities: Disability Rights California hosts a list of Special Education Rights and Responsibilities targeted to parents and students. These include federal and state special education laws and explain how you can check your student's eligibility and how to advocate for the services that students with disabilities receive. (https://serr.disabilityrightsca.org/)

Public Counsel in Partnership with CADRE & Mental Health Advocacy Services (2013). "Know your rights! Right to Parental Participation."

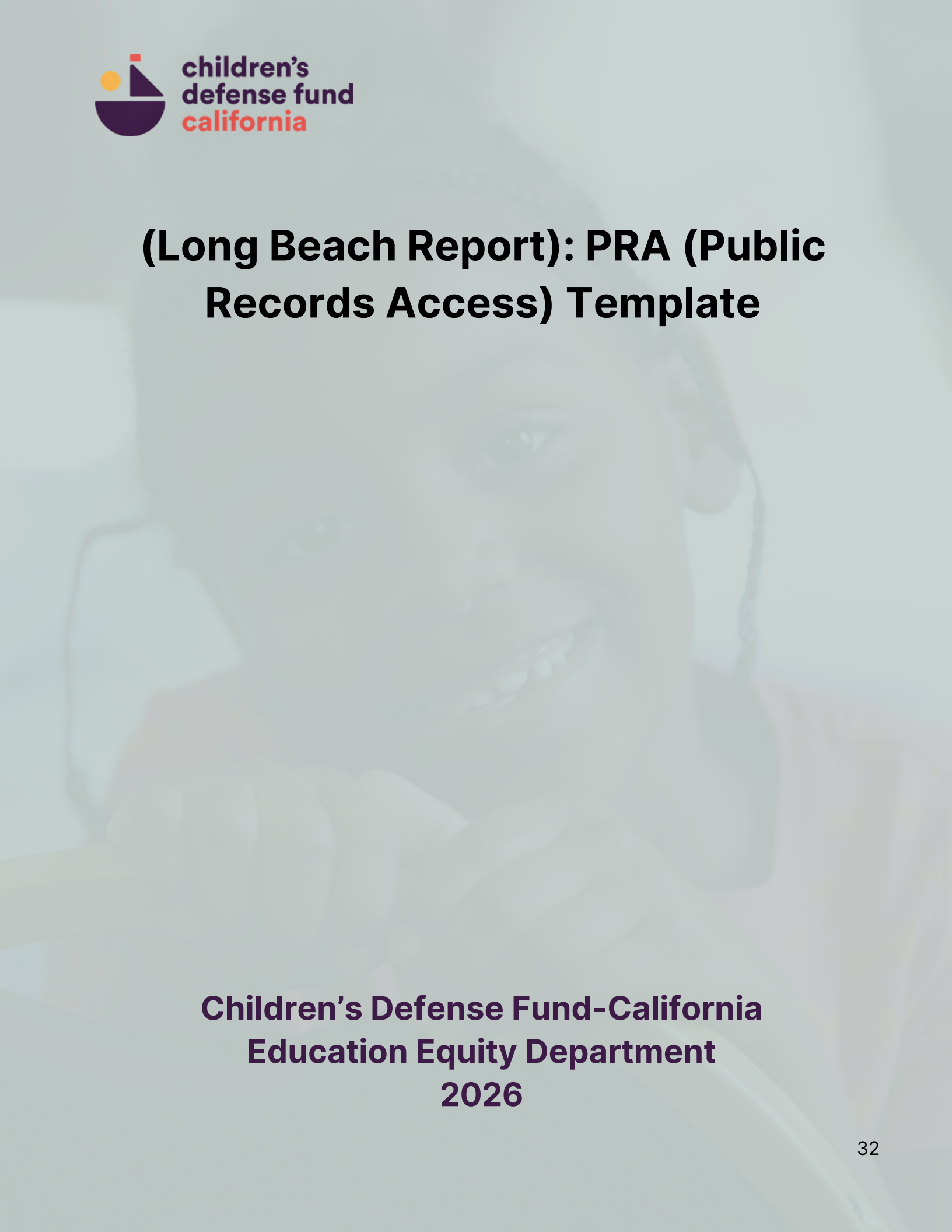
Protection & Advocacy, Inc, CASE. Special Education Rights & Responsibilities (2005). Website: https://www.healthiersf.org/FYS/Resources/caregivers/Special%20Education%20Handbook/Information%20on%20IEP%20Process.pdf

Supportive Discipline

Check out Dignity In Schools Campaign's Model Code on Education and Dignity. It provides recommended policy language and definitions for some key elements of school climate and positive discipline. (https://dignityinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ModelCodeSec3.1SchoolClimate.pdf)

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(Long Beach Report): PRA (Public Records Access) Template



Children's Defense Fund-California
Education Equity Department
2026

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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY

Month Day, Year

Superintendent _____<email address here>
Ms./Mr. _____, Communications / Public Information Contact <email address here>
_____ School District / County Office of Education
Mailing Address
City, State Zip Code

Re: Public Records Act Request

Dear Superintendent _____ and Ms./Mr. _____,

We submit this request for copies of records prepared, owned, used, or retained by the School District ("the District") / the County Office of Education ("the COE"), pursuant to the California Public Records Act, Cal. Gov't Code §§ 6250-6270.5. As you likely know, this government code requires agencies to provide a response to Public Record Act requests within ten days of receipt of a request. Pursuant to this legal requirement, we look forward to your prompt response and timely disclosure of the requested documents.

We request that you provide any public record identified in the following electronic formats to us, instead of in paper format: PDF format or all Microsoft Office formats, including Word, Excel, Access, and PowerPoint. See California Government Code § 6253.9. Please provide us with copies of the records and documents listed below. Each lettered paragraph should be considered a separate request under the California Public Records Act. For each set of records produced, please identify the paragraph to which the records are intended to respond. Specifically, we request copies of the following documents:

INSERT REQUESTS HERE
IF YOU HAVE MULTIPLE ASKS, EACH ASK SHOULD CORRESPOND TO A DIFFERENT BULLET POINT

The term "document" as used in this request has the same broad definition as is given the term "writing" in section 6252(g) of California's Government Code:

"Writing" means any handwriting, typewriting, printing, photostating, photographing, photocopying, transmitting by electronic mail or facsimile, and every other means of recording upon any tangible thing any form of communication or representation, including letters, words, pictures, sounds, or symbols, or combinations thereof, and any record thereby created, regardless of the manner in which the record has been stored.

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If any records in the above request are claimed to be exempt from disclosure, we request that: (1) you exercise your discretion to disclose some or all of the records notwithstanding the exemption; and (2) with respect to records containing both exempt and non-exempt content, you redact the exempt content and disclose the rest, consistent with California Government Code § 6253(a). Additionally, if any records are withheld or redacted, please provide a written response that describes the records being withheld or redacted and the claimed reason for exemption under the Public Records Act.
If you contend that this request does not reasonably describe identifiable public records, we request that you promptly assist us by eliciting additional information that will clarify our request and more clearly identify the records we are seeking. See California Government Code § 6253.1.

Please respond to this request in writing within 10 days with the estimate of any anticipated costs to provide the documents. Please do not hesitate to contact INSERT CONTACT INFORMATION HERE if you have any questions about the scope of our request.

Thank you in advance.
Sincerely,

SIGNATURE

NAME
ROLE / TITLE
EMAIL ADDRESS - OPTIONAL

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If any records in the above request are claimed to be exempt from disclosure, we request that: (1) you exercise your discretion to disclose some or all of the records notwithstanding the exemption; and (2) with respect to records containing both exempt and non-exempt content, you redact the exempt content and disclose the rest, consistent with California Government Code § 6253(a). Additionally, if any records are withheld or redacted, please provide a written response that describes the records being withheld or redacted and the claimed reason for exemption under the Public Records Act.
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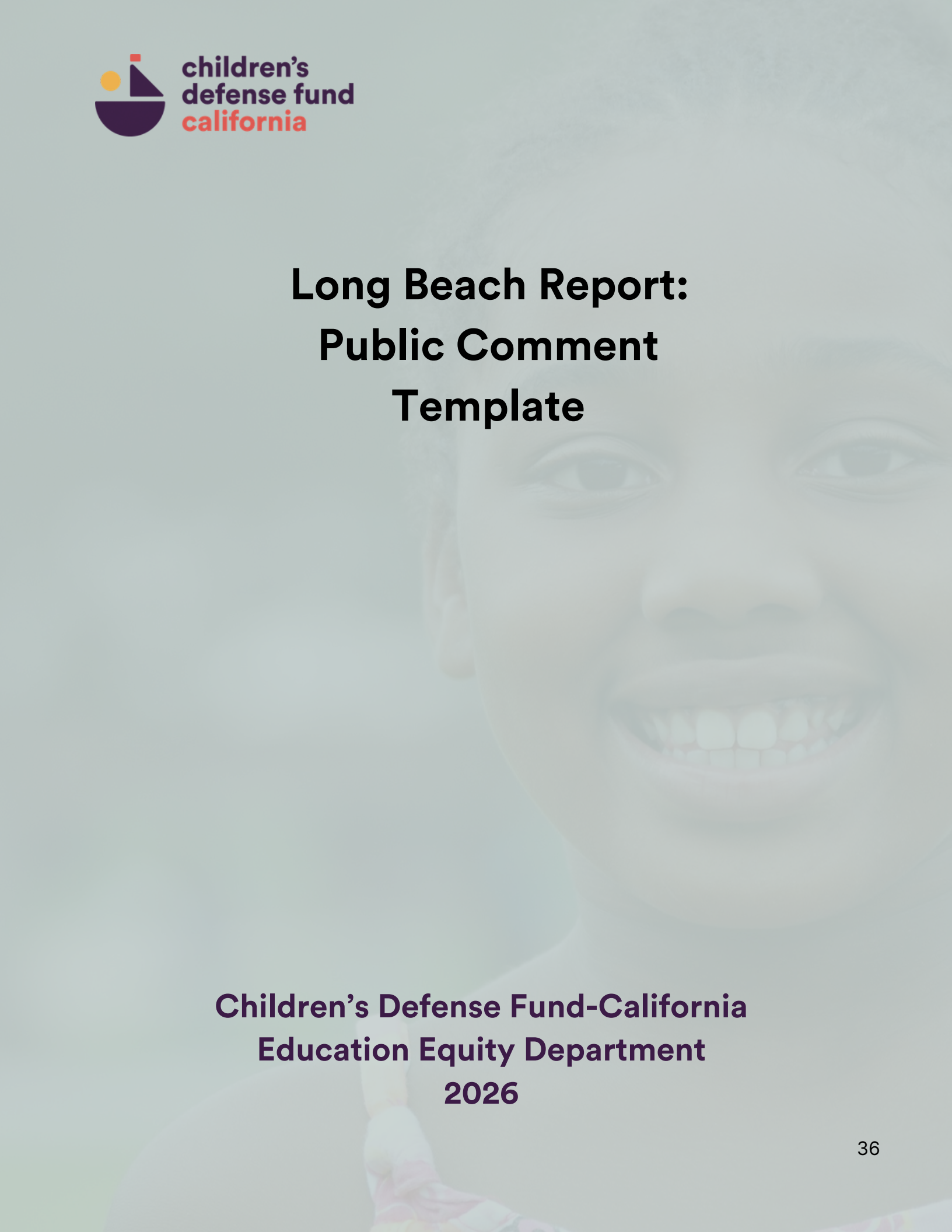
Thank you in advance.
Sincerely,

SIGNATURE

NAME
ROLE / TITLE
EMAIL ADDRESS - OPTIONAL

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Long Beach Report: Public Comment Template



Children's Defense Fund-California
Education Equity Department
2026

CALL TO ACTION - [INSERT DATE] [INSERT GOV'T BODY] Board Meeting
Make your voice heard on [INSERT TOPIC]

Background

[GOVERNMENT BODY] committed [AMOUNT OF MONEY] to invest in a new program, [PROGRAM NAME], in the [YEAR]Local Control & Accountability Plan (LCAP). This initiative was implemented due to [SHARE HISTORY]. These community members requested a program targeted to [ISSUE] for [REASON].

[SHARE AS MUCH BACKGROUND AS NECESSARY. TRY TO KEEP INFORMATION SHORT AND TO THE POINT]

This public comment guide was produced by [INSERT CAMPAIGN / COALITION'S NAME & OTHER ADVOCACY PARTNERS]

Please email [NAME & CONTACT INFO FOR QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC]. Thank you for your time and commitment to [GOV'T BODY'S] students!



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Suggestions for Public Comment

Good evening board members, superintendent _____, and staff, my name is _____, I am a

[parent/guardian/student/teacher/staff/community member] and I am providing testimony on a non-agenda item, the final approval of the 22-23 LCAP. I would like to see more investments in [PROGRAM / SERVICE THAT IS THE BASIS OF YOUR PUBLIC COMMENT]. The LCAP itself recognizes that the [PROGRAM / SERVICE] is designed to [INSERT REASON FOR PROGRAM / SERVICE]. [Add personal story, if relevant.]

The [GOVERNMENT BODY] has committed to supporting and uplifting [TARGET GROUP] through the development of [PROGRAM / SERVICE]. [REASONS FOR WHY YOU SUPPORT THE START OF INVESTMENT OR EXPANSION OF INVESTMENT]

[INSERT A COUPLE SENTENCES ABOUT GOV'T BODY'S HISTORY OF SUPPORTING THIS ISSUE, IF ANY]

[INSERT A COUPLE SENTENCES ABOUT OUTCOME OF SUPPORT FOR ISSUE]

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[INSERT A COUPLE SENTENCES TO COMPARE & CONTRAST GOV'T BODY'S SUPPORT FOR SIMILAR ISSUE / TARGET GROUP]

[INSERT A COUPLE SENTENCES TO TIE YOUR ISSUE BACK TO PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY]

[INCLUDE ANY MORE SUPPORTING DATA & COMMUNITY'S CONCERN ABOUT THIS ISSUE]

Thank you for your time.