

U.S. Department of Justice
Civil Rights Division
Educational Opportunities Section



The Educational Opportunities Section enforces federal laws that protect students from harassment and other forms of discrimination. The Section is responsible for enforcing Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, and religion in public schools and institutions of higher learning; the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 which, among other things, requires states and school districts to provide English Language Learner (ELL) students with appropriate services to overcome language barriers; and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Section also plays a significant role in enforcing Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, and national origin by recipients of federal funds), Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex by recipients of federal funds), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of federal funds). The following are examples of harassment and other forms of discrimination that could violate these federal laws:

- ✚ Asian-American students are hit and called names if they attempt to use certain hallways in their high school. They are forced to walk around the building to get to their classrooms. When they report the problem to the school, they are told to avoid the hallways where the harassment occurred.
- ✚ A Muslim student wears her hijab to school. School officials inform her that she cannot wear a hijab because of the “no hats” policy, but the school has allowed other exceptions for secular purposes. When the student refuses to remove her hijab, she is suspended.
- ✚ Comments are made to Bangladeshi-American students mocking Bangladeshi accents, culture, and religious practices. A fight breaks out between Bangladeshi-American students and the offending students. In the course of the discipline, the targets report that they have been complaining about harassment all school year. The school suspends all the students for the altercation but fails to investigate the allegations of harassment.
- ✚ A Sikh elementary school student is called “terrorist” and “Osama” and is told to go back to his country. When classroom teachers overhear the harassment, they move the Sikh student to the front of the class so they can “keep an eye on him.” No other action is taken to end the harassment and address the school climate.
- ✚ A high school principal provides ELL services only to ELLs who speak Spanish. When Punjabi-speaking students inquire about services, he tells them that they are better off in mainstream classes. He tells them that students cannot participate in both the ELL program and advanced placement classes.
- ✚ An Arabic-speaking ELL student is suspended for violating a school’s code of conduct. The school sends home a suspension notice with the details of a due process hearing to the student’s parents in English, even though the parents previously informed the school they prefer to communicate in Arabic. When the parents complain, the school says they do not have any Arabic speakers to translate or interpret documents.

To file a complaint about harassment or other forms of discrimination in your school, please contact:

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division
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Telephone: (202) 514-4092 or (877) 292-3804
Email: education@usdoj.gov

For more information, please visit the Section’s website at www.justice.gov/crt/edo.