



# The 3 Cs of Communication with Schools:

BEGINNERS' GUIDE TO CALM, CLEAR, AND CONCISE LETTER WRITING

**Presented by: Attorney Kimona Hogan of Hogan Law Firm, LLC  
in partnership with  
Pyramid Community Parent Resource Center**

# The 3 Cs of Communication with Schools: Beginners' Guide to Calm, Clear, and Concise Letter Writing

**Beginner's**

Belonging to one beginner

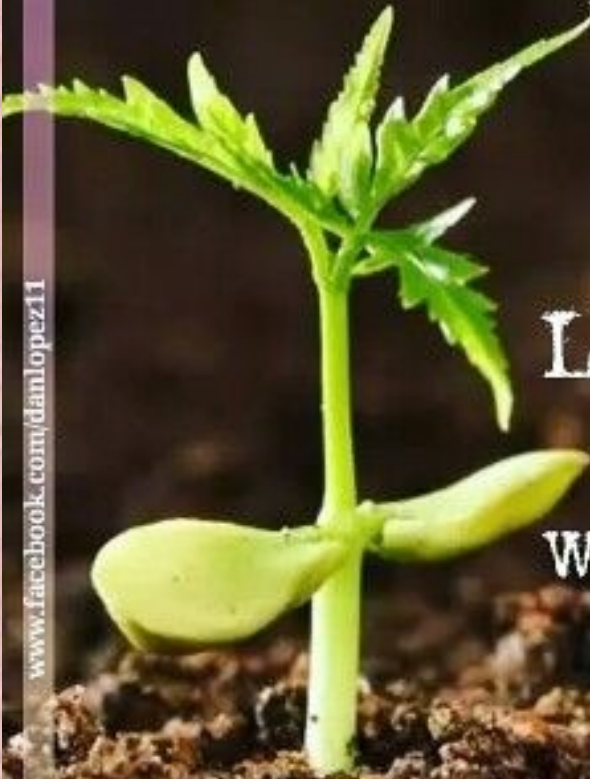


**versus**

**Beginners'**

Belonging to more than one beginner





Do not despise  
these small  
beginnings,  
for the  
Lord rejoices  
to see the  
work begin...

Zechariah 4:10 NLT



# DISCLAIMER:

**All materials are intended for general information and educational purposes. The information presented is NOT actual legal advice, is not to be acted on as such, may not be current, and is subject to change without notice.**

**Consult with a qualified attorney for such advice.**



# What to expect



Identifying the importance of calm, clear, and concise communication

**This session will provide parents with suggestions on how to have more effective communication with schools by:**

Sharing examples of calm, clear, and concise letters

Exploring best practices that parents should use when sending written communications to schools



SENDER



MESSAGE



RECEIVER

Communication occurs when the sender speaks or writes a message that is received by the receiver



# True communication



Words used by the sender



Message intended by the sender



Message understood by the receiver



“Communication with others takes place when they understand what you are trying to get across to them. If they don’t understand then you are not communicating regardless of words, pictures, or anything else.”

- Saul D. Alinsky



# Why is COMMUNICATION important?

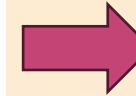
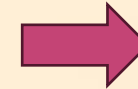
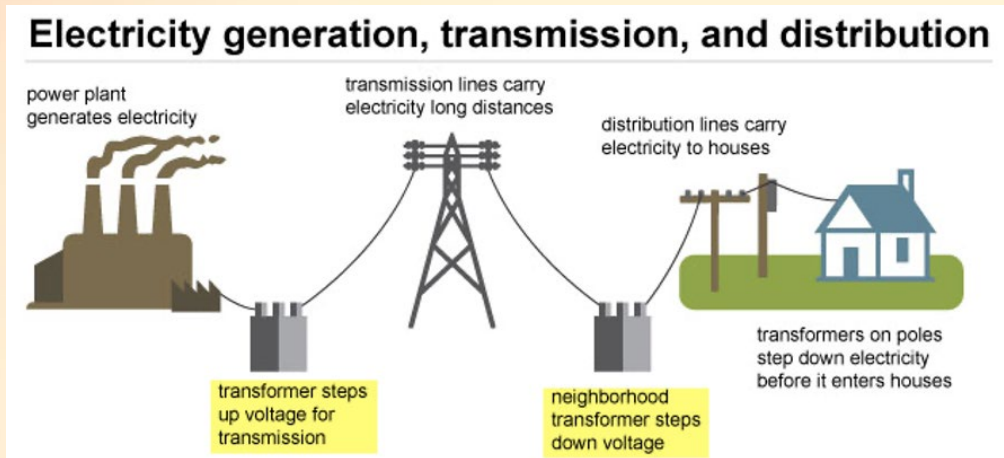
“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter – ‘tis the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.”

- Mark Twain

- Helps us understand each other
- Makes it easier to share thoughts, feelings, and needs
- Builds relationships and connections



# Communication can be a SUPER POWER!



Just as a transformer converts high-voltage energy into a safer, low-voltage form for household use, effective communication often involves adapting the message to suit the appropriate “voltage” level of the audience.



# CALM Communication

Calm: not showing or feeling nervousness, anger, or other strong emotions





**Emotions** are physiological, behavioral, and/or communicative reactions to stimuli that are cognitively processed and expressed as emotional

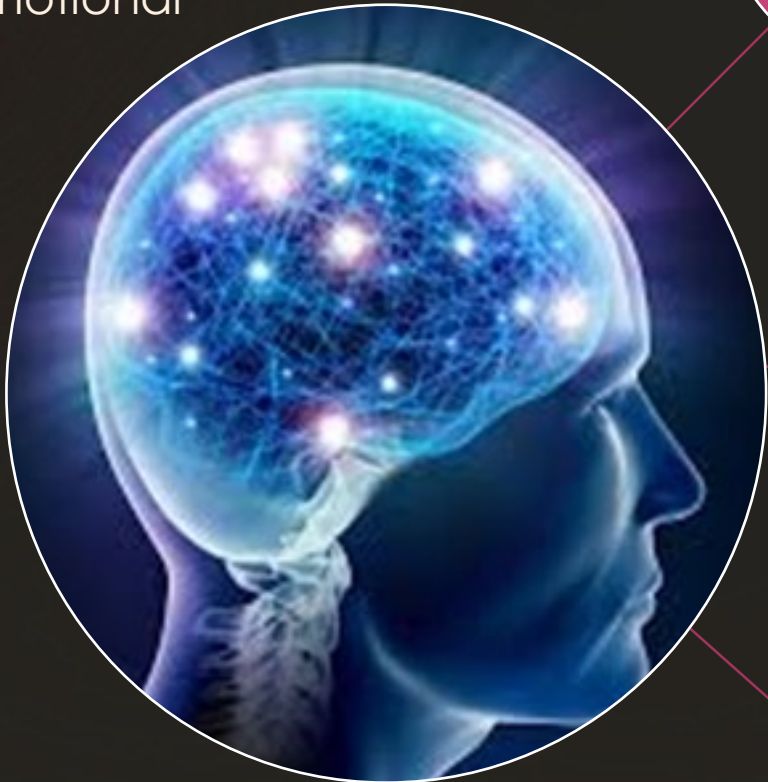
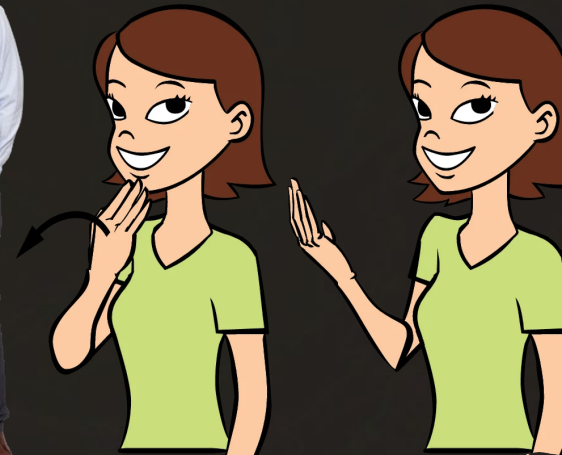
Physiological Reactions



Behavioral Reactions



Communicative Reactions



**COGNITIVE  
PROCESSING**



# Importance of CALM Communication

- 1- Accountability
- 2- Confidence
- 3- Maintain respect
- 4- Relationships



# Will the Aggravated parent or Calm parent likely have the most **effective communication**?

A

4/10/2022

Mrs. Jones,

Frist of all, I don't appreciate you calling me while I'm am on my job about Journey sleeping in class. I told you before to email me when it's not an emergency! I guess you must not like your job so you trying to get me fired off mine or at least I feel that way. Besides, you're the professional! I don't tell you how to run YOUR class so I don't know what you want me to do about Journey sleeping when she is in YOUR class, at YOUR school. So I'd appreciate if you did YOUR job and stop bothering me on mine!

-Aggravated parent

B

4/10/2022

Mrs. Jones,

I apologize for being so short when you called this afternoon. However, I have listed my email address as my preferred method of communication for non-emergency matters because I cannot receive personal calls at work. Thank you for bringing it to my attention that Journey is sleeping in class. I always make sure she goes to bed by 9pm so I am not sure why she is sleeping in your class. Do you have any suggestions on how we can get to the root of this and resolve the problem?

- Calm parent

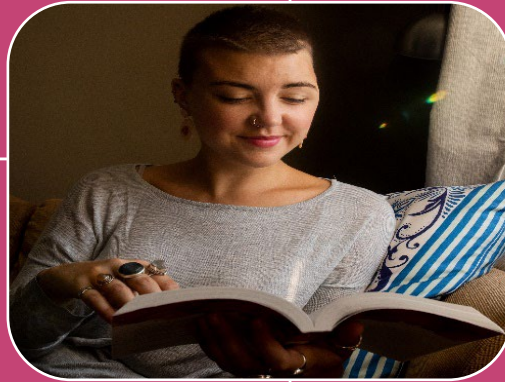
# Best practices for CALM Communication

**Acknowledge your emotions but, control your emotions**

Don't let your emotions control you

**Identify your triggers**

The better you know yourself, the more prepared you will be\*



**Give yourself space**

It is okay to unplug

**Seek professional help, when necessary**

\*"You have power over your mind – not outside events. Realize this, and you will find your strength."

- Marcus Aurelius , Meditations



# Affirm:

“Staying calm when dealing with my child’s education is a skill that can be learned and perfected”

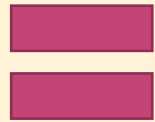


# CLEAR Communication

exists when the received message is exactly what the sender meant to say

Sender's intended message is a joke

Sender



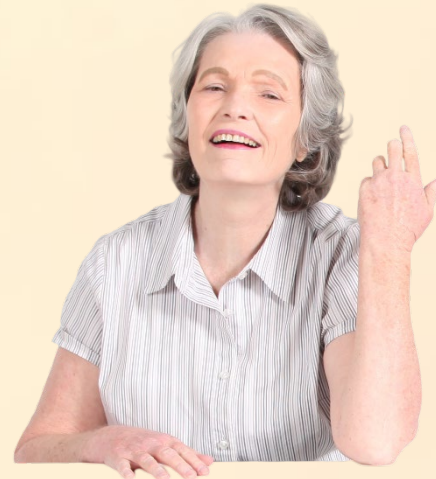
Receiver



Clear communication

Sender's intended message is a joke

Sender

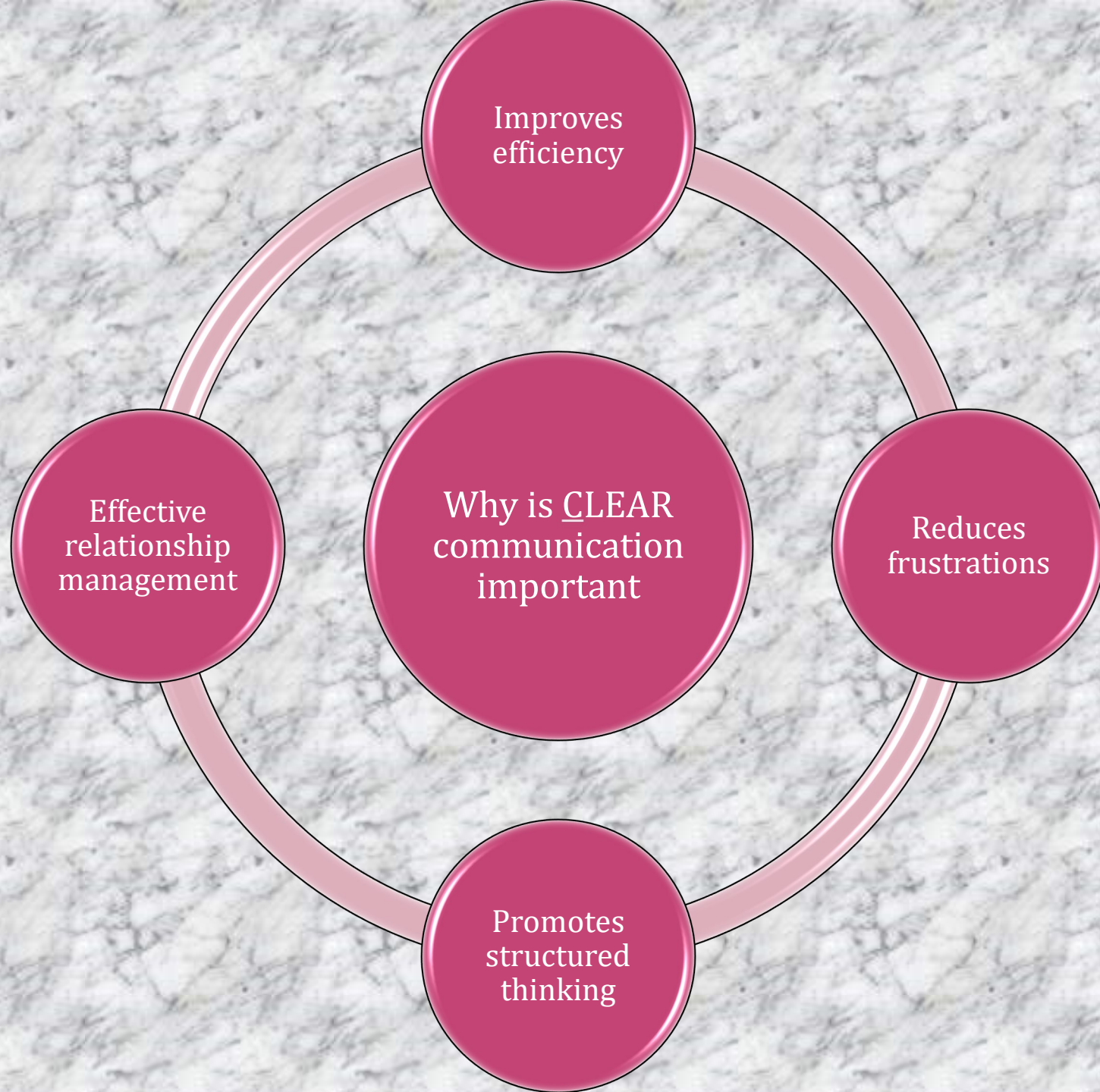


Receiver



NOT Clear communication





# When CLEAR Communication goes wrong

Message is not clear in sender's mind



Verbal and non-verbal messages are not consistent



Good morning...



Good morning...



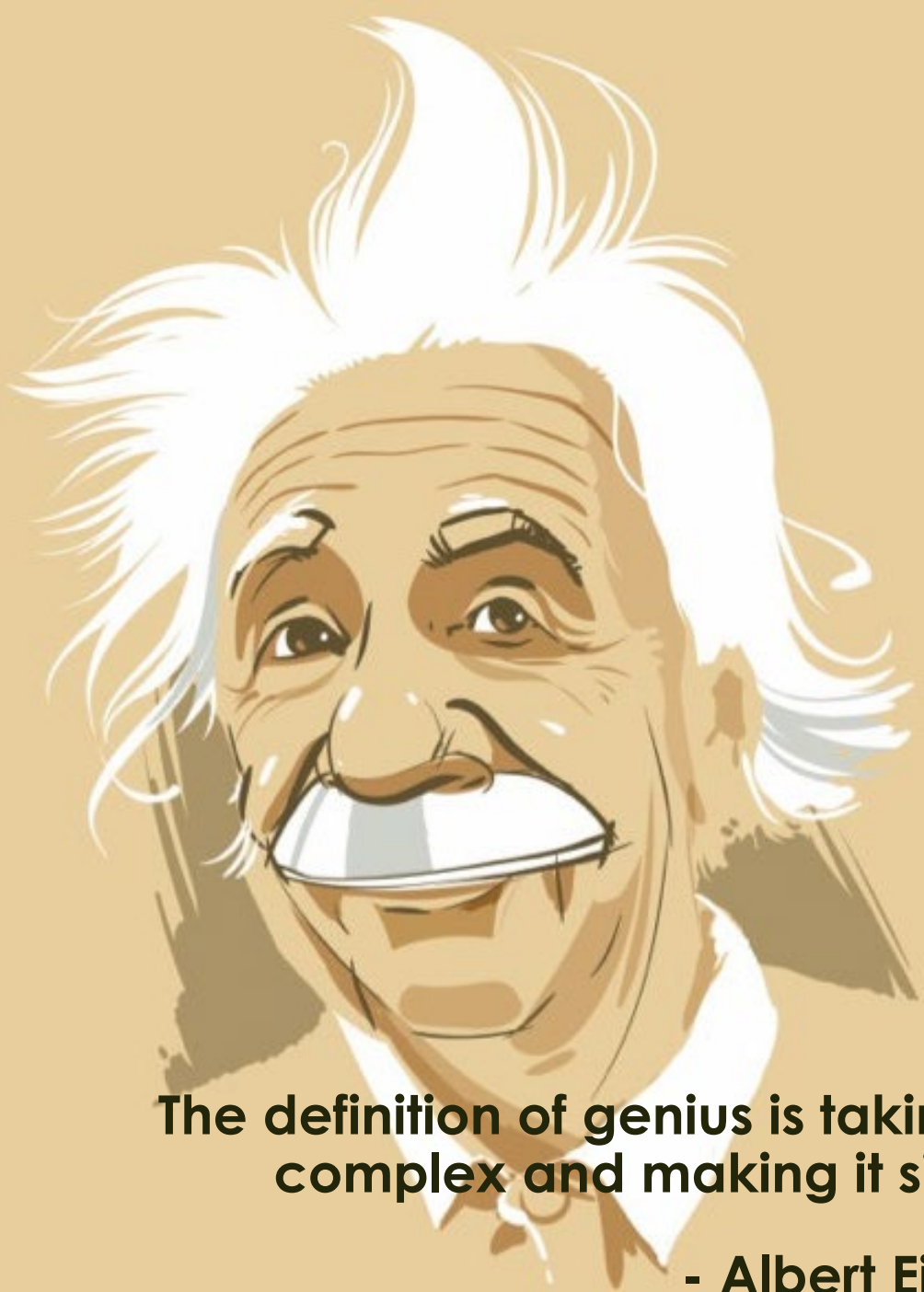
Insensitivity to cultural values

Receiver's assumptions or prejudices





**Can you think of a  
time when the  
receiver did not  
understand the  
words of your  
message and it  
prevented CLEAR  
communication?**



**The definition of genius is taking the complex and making it simple.**

**- Albert Einstein**

**Concise**: giving a lot of information clearly and in a few words

IS

- ▶ Short and sweet
- ▶ Direct and to the point
- ▶ Focused and efficient

IS NOT

- ▶ Long winded and convoluted
- ▶ Lengthy and beating around the bush
- ▶ Wordy and inefficient
- ▶ Example

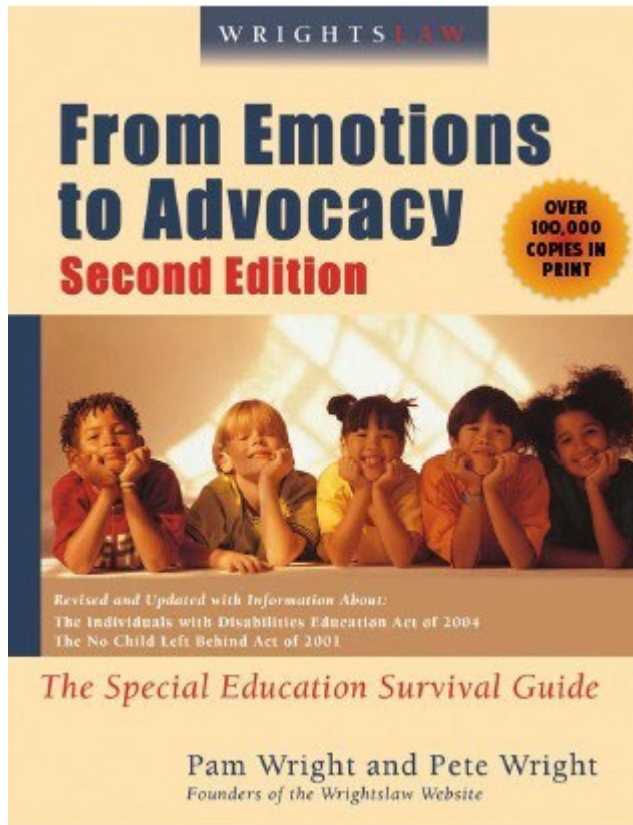




# Sample letters

- Request IEP meeting
- Follow-up
- Conversation confirmation
- Request educational records
- Appreciation
- Request Notice of Proposed/Refused Actions

# WHERE TO BEGIN:



- **From Emotions to Advocacy by Pam Wright and Pete Wright**
- COPAA – Council of Parent Attorneys & Advocates  
[www.copaa.org](http://www.copaa.org)  
\*Scholarships are available!
- **Advocates University – Ask A Special Education Attorney on Facebook**
- Local parent training center  
**Families Helping Families**  
or  
**Pyramid Community Parent Resource Center**  
[www.pyramidparentcenter.org](http://www.pyramidparentcenter.org)
- **Advocacy Group/ Advocate**
- **Attorney**



Thank you, to our partner:

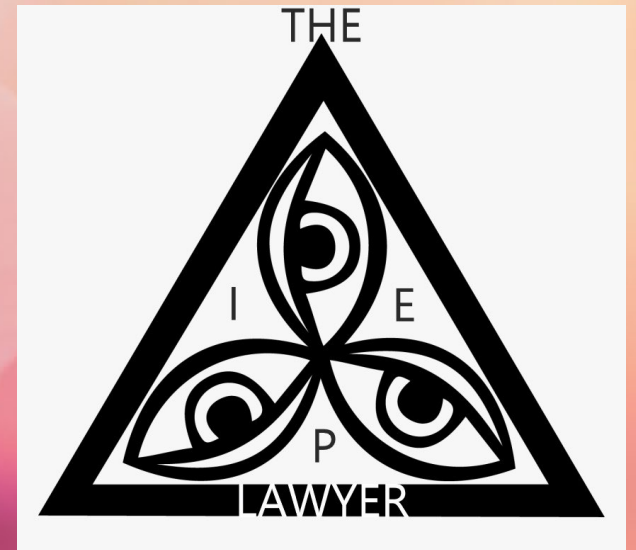


The program provides information and training on special education and disability legislation, through workshops, newsletters, referrals, and one-to-one assistance.

**[www.pyramidparentcenter.org](http://www.pyramidparentcenter.org)**

[www.theieplawyer.com](http://www.theieplawyer.com)

PRESENTED BY:  
ATTORNEY KIMONA HOGAN  
OF  
HOGAN LAW FIRM, LLC



Using the gift of  
skilled advocacy to  
serve our Families, with  
grace and by Grace.

Our home office is located in Denham Springs, La.



# **EXAMPLE OF A NOT-SO CONCISE LETTER**

**From: Uniformed Parent**

**Sent:** Thursday, December 5, 2019 3:11 PM

**To: Principal Green, Vice Principal Brown, Superintendent Bellue**

**CC: ESS Director Jones**

**Subject:** Re: The Review and Revision of the Initial IEP Assessment, IEP for Student, Multiple Violations per School Exceptional Student Services and School System Staff

Dear Superintendent,

My child, Journey, is currently in seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) grade at Oak Grove Middle School. I recently had the opportunity and pleasure of meeting the principal, Mr. Green, after the untimely and inconvenient orders per, April Jones, ESS Middle School Director, whom changed my child's placement in chronological order, from Northern Middle School to Southern Middle School to Eastern Middle School to Oak Grove Middle School, contacted and informed me on November 6, 2019 at 11:50am, call lasting 7 minutes, of having to enroll at yet another school or ESS would get Child Welfare and Attendance involved. Why? Was Journey provided any accommodations? Was Journey ever provided any supports? Why was Journey's placement changed so many times by the school system in one school year? Was the staff adequately trained? Did anyone ever consider the mental and emotional effect this would have on my child?

My daughter is a very happy and loveable child. She loves playing on her iPad, interacting with people, and giving/receiving hugs. She has some visual challenges requiring eyeglasses. Journey has multiple medical diagnosis, including ADHD, Anxiety, and Tourette's syndrome. According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, "Tourette syndrome (TS) is a neurological disorder characterized by repetitive, stereotyped, involuntary movements and vocalizations called tics. Tics are classified as either simple or complex. Simple motor tics are sudden, brief, repetitive movements that involve a limited number of muscle groups. Some of the more common simple tics include eye blinking and other eye movements, facial grimacing, shoulder shrugging, and head or

shoulder jerking. Simple vocalizations might include repetitive throat-clearing, sniffing, or grunting sounds. Complex tics are distinct, coordinated patterns of movements involving several muscle groups. Complex motor tics might include facial grimacing combined with a head twist and a shoulder shrug. Other complex motor tics may actually appear purposeful, including sniffing or touching objects, hopping, jumping, bending, or twisting. Simple vocal tics may include throatclearing, sniffing/snorting, grunting, or barking. More complex vocal tics

include words or phrases. Perhaps the most dramatic and disabling tics include motor movements that result in self-harm such as punching oneself in the face or vocal tics including coprolalia (uttering socially inappropriate words such as swearing) or echolalia (repeating the words or phrases of others). However, coprolalia is only present in a small number (10 to 15 percent) of individuals with TS. Some tics are preceded by an urge or sensation in the affected muscle group, commonly called a premonitory urge. Some with TS will describe a need to complete a tic in a certain way or a certain number of times in order to relieve the urge or decrease the sensation.

Tics are often worse with excitement or anxiety and better during calm, focused activities. Certain physical experiences can trigger or worsen tics, for example tight collars may trigger neck tics, or hearing another person sniff or throat-clear may trigger similar sounds. Tics do not go away during sleep but are often significantly diminished.

Although students with TS often function well in the regular classroom, ADHD, learning disabilities, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, and frequent tics can greatly interfere with academic performance or social adjustment. After a comprehensive assessment, students should be placed in an educational setting that meets their individual needs. Students may require tutoring, smaller or special classes, and in some cases special schools.

All students with TS need a tolerant and compassionate setting that both encourages them to work to their full potential and is flexible enough to accommodate their special needs. This setting may include a private study area, exams outside the regular classroom, or even oral exams when the child's symptoms interfere with his or her ability to write. Untimed testing reduces stress for students with TS.”

While my child was attending Northern Middle School, she was subjected to seclusion, emotional abuse, and bullying led and continually encouraged by the teacher and staff. Simultaneously, I was informed per the teacher of her lack of



training and knowledge of working, caring, and educating someone with Tourette's. To assist Vice Principal Brown and the staff, the Tourette's Syndrome Association emailed the staff offering free training. However, the school staff respectfully declined. Once I learned of these events (bullying, seclusion, etc.), I spoke with multiple staff, including the principal – Mr. Green, regarding the bullying and documentation required. However, I was retaliated against in the form of Journey being suspended, recommended for expulsion and MDR, and required to change her educational setting to self-contained the entire day. Why?

The initial IEP assessment was conducted in October 2019. Her assessment results were revised prior to being discussed with me. On December 4, 2019, while discussing Journey's IEP Assessment results, I AGAIN requested an Individual Education Evaluation (IEE) at the school system's expense per 1706, 1508, and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act due to insufficient evaluation information.

As of today, I never received a response to any my IEE requests and have yet to have Journey Initial IEP meeting. This is extremely illegal. According to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, certain procedural safeguards are to be followed. However, you have violated the following sections: PRIOR WRITTEN NOTICE 34 CFR §300.503, ELECTRONIC MAIL 34 CFR §300.505, INDEPENDENT EDUCATIONAL EVALUATIONS 34 CFR §300.502, AUTHORITY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL 34 CFR §300.530, and multiple other sections. Due to these illegal acts and multiple violations, I contacted both, the Superintendent's office and the Exceptional Students Service Director's office, informing them of the violations.

This is my formal statement regarding Exceptional Student Services staff and Mr, Green's failure to adhere to and exhibit the following: lack of expertise, lack of knowledge of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, lack of knowledge of Every Student Succeed Act, lack of knowledge of American Disabilities Act, lack of knowledge of Section 504 Rehabilitation Act, lack of knowledge of Civil Rights Act, lack of knowledge of Louisiana Parents Bill of Rights, lack of knowledge of Louisiana Bulletin 1508, lack of knowledge of Louisiana Bulletin 1706, lack of knowledge of Louisiana Bulletin 741, and multiple laws and respective governing policies with the school system.

Prior to the end of this week, before the next IEP meeting, I would like to receive copies of any and all the school's IEP forms, notes, and attachments that are relevant to this meeting. This includes all plans of care, behavioral plans, documentation logs, observational data, notes from the teacher, principal, speech pathologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, guidance counselor, medical team, and any notes from meetings with any and all the before mentioned. These documents should be mailed to me via United States Postal Service at the above address and sent via email.

Thank you for your assistance. I look forward to hearing from you in writing within the next two (2) school days via email or United States Postal Service.

Sincerely,

*Aggravated Parent*



## **EXAMPLE OF APPRECIATION LETTER**

Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Your email address  
Daytime telephone number

Name of person to whom you are writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (Person's name),

I want to express my appreciation for (\_\_\_\_\_)! As you are aware, (briefly describe issue). I had become frustrated because although I contacted the school and notified the appropriate personnel, the issue was not resolved.

(In one or two sentences, briefly describe how the person you are showing appreciation for resolved the issue.)

I wanted to acknowledge (\_\_\_\_\_)’s dedication and efforts in helping (your child’s name) and hope that you do the same.

Sincerely,

Your Name

## **EXAMPLE OF FOLLOW-UP LETTER**

Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Your email address  
Daytime telephone number

Name of person to whom you originally wrote  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (Person's name),

I wrote to you on (date) and am now writing to follow up and request (explain your original request briefly).

Enclosed or Attached is a copy of my first letter to you.

I would appreciate a response by (give a date, 3 to 5 working days). Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Enclosure



Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Your email address  
Daytime telephone number

Name of person to whom you are writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Re: Child's Name, Name of School, Purpose of Letter (Request an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE))

Dear (Person's name),

My name is (your name) and my child, (child's name), is a student in the ( ) grade at (name of school), in (name of teacher)'s class. My child was evaluated for special education services in (month/year). I am writing to request an IEE at public expense for the following reasons: (BRIEFLY list your reason(s). Be specific. For example:

"I disagree with the evaluation results because..."

"The evaluation should have included..."

"The evaluation should have been done in the area of..."

I would like the IEE to be done as quickly as possible so we can fully address (name of child)'s needs. Please respond as soon as possible and send me copies of the school's guidelines for obtaining IEEs at the public's expense.

I would appreciate a response by (give a date one or two weeks from the letter). Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Your Name

# **EXAMPLE OF A LETTER REQUESTING IEP MEETING**

Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Your email address  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Your Child's Teacher  
Name of School  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Re: Child's Name, Purpose of Letter (Request an IEP Review Meeting)

Dear (Teacher's name),

I am writing to request an IEP review meeting. I would like to discuss making some changes in (child's name)'s IEP. I am concerned about (BRIEFLY state your reasons, but don't go into detail about the specific changes you want to make – save those for the meeting).

I can arrange to meet with the IEP team on (give at 2 or 3 available dates – at least 10 days out) between (give a range of time, such as between 9 and 11am). Please let me know what time would be best for you.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Your email address  
Daytime telephone number

Name of person to whom you are writing  
Title  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Re: Child's Name, Name of School, Purpose of Letter (Request an Explanation for Denial of Services)

Dear (Person's name),

At our meeting (or) During our phone conversation on (date), we discussed my child's (evaluation, eligibility, placement, IEP, services, etc.) I requested (\_\_\_\_\_) and was denied (or) I was told the school intends to (\_\_\_\_\_). As of today, I have not received any information about this decision in writing. I am requesting the prior written notice regarding (be specific about the issue/decision you want the school to respond to. Bullet or number the items.)

I look forward to receiving a detailed response to my request as soon as possible. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Your Name



Today's Date (include month, day, and year)

Your Name  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code  
Your email address  
Daytime telephone number

Name of Principal  
Name of School  
Street Address  
City, State, Zip Code

Re: Child's Name, Purpose of Letter (Request for Meeting)

Dear (Principal's name),

My name is (your name) and my child, (child's name), is a student in the ( ) grade in (name of teacher)'s class.

I am writing because (give relevant history and facts that support your concerns)

To address this situation, I would like the school to (state your desired outcome. You may briefly say what you would not like, or what has been tried and not worked. However, spend most of this paragraph saying what you want).

(Say what type of response you would prefer and provide the best contact information for your preferred method. For instance, do you want to meet with someone, do you want a return letter or email, or is a phone call preferred)

I would appreciate a response by (give a date one or two weeks from the letter). Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Your Name