

What is the role of the Ombudsman in Schools?



Complaints about **SCHOOL BOARDS**

The Ontario Ombudsman has the power to investigate and resolve complaints about municipalities, universities and school boards. The Ombudsman Ontario services include referrals, complaints resolution, independent investigations of individual and systemic issues, and recommendations to improve government administration, service and accountability.

The 2016-17 Annual Report of Ombudsman Ontario notes that the Ombudsman dealt with 945 school board complaints and completed one investigation of a systemic issue related to school board busing in Toronto. Most of the complaints were resolved without formal investigation. For more information check the list of [resolved issues](#) on the website. The report on the Toronto busing situation, [The Route of the Problem](#), identified systemic problems, related to communication, contracting process, bus driver recruitment, pre-planning and handling of parent and school inquiries and complaints.

Should you consider filing a complaint with Ombudsman Ontario?

The article, [Advocacy: How to deal with concerns at school](#), outlines the steps that should be taken in handling a concern

at school. This includes taking the issue to the person concerned, usually the teacher, and trying to get it resolved as soon as possible. The article further outlines the importance of documentation (about the issue, who you spoke to and when) and following the chain of command (starting with the teacher and moving to the principal before contacting other school board staff). The article also identifies the option of contacting the Ombudsman if you have complaints about school issues.

On the Ombudsman website, the most common school board issues are identified as:

- Administration of policies: Discipline, etc.
- Responses to bullying
- Special Education supports
- Services for students with disabilities
- Condition of school buildings
- Conduct and role of trustees

The Ombudsman also recognizes that anyone with a concern can make a complaint, including:

- Students, parents and other family members
- School Board staff, teachers and trustees
- Members of interest groups

If you have a complaint...

- Have you already contacted the school board about the complaint? If not, Ombudsman staff may refer you back to the appropriate local officials. The Ombudsman can help if your issues isn't resolved.
- Can you provide information about the issue and the steps you have taken (Name of school board, officials you have dealt with, relevant documents, etc.)
- Do you need more information about the Ombudsman office? You can review the complaint forms and information about the complaint process, and Bill 8 on the website, or you

can call to speak to a staff member to help.

How the Ombudsman office helps:

1. They assess all complaints and refer them to the local officials for quick resolution whenever possible.
2. If local mechanisms are unsuccessful, they may attempt resolution and may contact the school board for more information.
3. If an investigation is necessary, the school board will receive written notice and will be required to provide relevant information and documents
4. If the Ombudsman makes recommendations, the school board will have a chance to respond before any report is made public.
5. The ombudsman follows up on all recommendations to ensure they are implemented and have the desired effect.

[Complaints about School Boards-brochure-SB2016-EN](#)

[Complaints-about-SCHOOL-BOARDS-EN-accessible](#)

For more information about the Ombudsman check the website at www.ombudsman.on.ca