



# Advocates for Justice and Education, Inc.

*The federally designated Parent Training and Information Center for Washington DC*

## Know Your Rights: The DCPS CARE Team

We created this document for families who are thinking about filing a complaint or grievance with the DCPS CARE team, or whose complaint was forwarded to the CARE team. If you are unsure of what something in this document means, click the link provided to receive background information, the underlying DCPS document, or obtain additional information. Families can always reach out to AJE if they have questions as well.

### What is the DCPS CARE team?

The Comprehensive Alternative Resolution & Equity team (CARE) is DCPS's multi-purpose dispute resolution/complaint system. [See about CARE Team on the DCPS website](#), and see this [DCPS organizational chart](#) to understand where the CARE team fits in.

The CARE Team staff is responsible for receiving claims of discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying, or any unfair treatment a student, parent, or visitor encounters at a DCPS School in compliance with [DCMR Student, Parent, Visitor grievance procedures](#) (Sections 2405 and 405 E). [See DCPS internal training here](#) and the [DCPS Notice of Nondiscrimination here](#). The CARE Team may see your complaint even if it was not made directly to them, as complaints made to the Chancellor, Instructional Superintendents, and other central office staff are often forwarded to the CARE team for investigation and/or resolution. Parents and community members may also file complaints directly with the CARE team through the [online grievances](#) form, email address, or via phone.

### What kinds of issues does the CARE team investigate?

CARE holds broad jurisdiction to investigate improper treatment in the school system, this includes, [according to the DCMR](#):

- Student(s) denied access to an adequate educational opportunity.
- Student(s) rights are being denied or abridged.
- Student(s) being subjected to an arbitrary or unreasonable regulation, procedure, or standard of conduct.
- Student(s) is being denied participation in any school activity for which the student is eligible.
- Student(s) is a victim of bullying or sexual harassment.
- Student and Parent grievances based on violations of the [DC Human Rights Act \(DC HRA\)](#), [some parts of the DC Language Access Act \(LAA\)](#), and the [School Safety Omnibus Amendment Act of 2013](#).
- School transfers. [\(Parents may also file with the Office of Human Rights regarding violations of the DC HRA and the LAA.\)](#)
- Student(s) facing a [Title IX violation](#).

[The online form consolidates the list from the DCMR into five categories of complaints](#) 1) *Discrimination* 2) *Harassment* 3) *Denial of Rights* 4) *Title IX/Sexual Harassment (unwelcome conduct that is of a sexual nature or sex and/or gender-based, including unwanted sexual touching and requests for sexual favors)* *Hot Spots (locations in schools where inappropriate activity occurs)* and 5) *Unfair Treatment*

**In our experience, the CARE Team WILL NOT Investigate grievances that do not fall under those listed above.**

In AJE's experience, many parents may find the investigative process slow and frustrating, especially because the CARE team does not disclose or address employment matters, even if they fall into one of the five categories listed above. The CARE team does not investigate complaints about or against DCPS employees or many of those filed by employees. Such complaints are usually given to [DCPS Labor Management and Employee Relations](#). It is unclear to AJE when complaints submitted by parents about DCPS employees will be referred to LMER. AJE has found that employees filing a complaint about working conditions are typically referred to LMER, as are parents who are filing complaints about potential employee misconduct.


**The CARE Team is not the only group in DCPS investigating and making decisions about complaints.** In addition to LMER, there is also the [Office of Integrity \(OI\)](#). LMER and OI appear to be mostly separate from the CARE team. In contrast, Title IX complaints appear to be processed within the CARE team and investigated by CARE team members who have received Title IX-specific training. We will talk more about Title IX below.

The Office of Integrity (OI) can assist with student safety and security issues, school staff interactions, and academic support coordination to improve student achievement. If these issues have not been addressed in a sufficient way by lower school staff, you may file a complaint with the OI. OI also says that they work to make sure that systems like the CARE team are working properly, and sometimes they serve as a place where a parent can appeal a decision or resolution provided by the CARE team.


The CARE team DOES NOT hear matters related to evaluation, eligibility, or programming for students with IEPs under IDEA. Those complaints are heard by Independent Hearing Officers within OSSE's [Office of Dispute Resolution](#). There is a [separate dispute resolution process available to DCPS families with concerns about eligibility for a 504 plan, and concerns about the content of the 504 plan](#) as well. However, the CARE team does hear complaints about [discrimination against students with disabilities](#), including those who have 504 Plans or IEPs.

### Filing a complaint or grievance with the CARE Team

You do not need to have an attorney to file a complaint with the CARE Team, you should be able to [file in your native language or have interpretation available](#), and obtain any disability-related accommodations you need to file the complaint. If you decide to file with CARE it is important to know that team members are not trained law enforcement officers, they do not have subpoena authority nor can they require that people talk to them. As [mandated reporters](#), if CARE Team staff suspect child abuse, including by a DCPS employee, they MUST report it to MPD and/or CFSA. **You can file any of these three ways.**

 by calling (202)-442-5405

 by emailing [dcps.care@k12.dc.gov](mailto:dcps.care@k12.dc.gov)

 by completing this [online form](#)

## What to expect when you file with the CARE team?

The timeline below is built by DCPS' [staff training](#) on how to conduct a successful investigation. This timeline is not consistent with what families have shared with AJE about their experience. Remember, you have the right to request [language accommodation](#) throughout this process.

- Day 1-2: Agency acknowledgment of grievance.
- Day 3-9: Investigation and resolution
- Day 10: Issuance of Letter of Resolution to reporting party with the outcome (LOR) of the investigation. (A [LOR](#) discusses the decision that CARE has come to, including whether or not they have referred your case to another office)

Members of the CARE team investigate to verify that a violation has occurred and to collect evidence to prove that violation. DCPS requires that your complaint must have corroboration (camera footage, statement of school staff) and be within school grounds to avoid your complaint being resolved during the preliminary investigation. If this happens you would still be given a LOR but it would likely be very short. This can be frustrating for families because DCPS often makes it difficult for families to obtain that corroboration (like camera footage) promptly.

## Letter of Resolution (LOR)

**No matter what, if you filed a complaint with the CARE team, you should receive a [Letter of Resolution \(LOR\)](#)** from the CARE Team informing you what the resolution of your complaint was, even if it is that your case has shifted offices, or that they are declining to investigate. If you do not agree with your LOR, you're free to appeal; directions on how to do so are required to be discussed in your LOR. Different subject matters have different appeal rights. Linked [here](#) are redacted LORS where you can see some examples.

You are also free to take your grievance to other appropriate government agencies. Your LOR will contain your appeal rights and options and you can find [many of those agencies here](#).

## Title IX and the CARE team

It appears to AJE that some staff within the CARE team have been designated as TITLE IX coordinators or investigators, and those staff members oversee complaints about Title IX violations. A Title IX violation occurs when a right is infringed upon based on sex. Anyone, including staff, students, family, or outsiders can [report a Title IX violation](#) and the DCPS Title IX team will review it. Unsure if your case falls under Title IX? You can reference page 28 of this [DCPS training PowerPoint](#).

If families want to file a Title IX report or complaints, they can do so here by [clicking here](#) or on the general CARE Team page. This [flowchart](#) is helpful in understanding the process.

## Contact Advocates for Justice and Education (AJE)

If you have questions or would like to request our assistance call, email, or visit AJE.  
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