



Education Law Center

How to Enroll Your Child in Public School

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IMPORTANT: ELC's publications are intended to give you a general idea of the law. However, each situation is different. If, after reading our publications, you have questions about how the law applies to your particular situation, contact us for a referral, or contact an attorney of your choice.

Dear Parent,

Making sure that your child enrolls in and goes to public school is very important for her education and future. By following these four simple steps, we can help you enroll your child in public school (which includes charter school.)

Step 1: Is the Child Living with You?

A child can attend school in the school district where she lives with her parent.

Step 2: How to Enroll

A child can be enrolled by a parent, foster parent, guardian, caseworker or anyone having charge or care of the child.

Go to the central registration office in the school district where you live. You must bring with you:

- Proof of the child's age
- Proof of where you live
- The child's immunization records.

Remind the secretary to request the child's education records from her old school! The child's old school must send the records to the new school in 10 business days.

NOTE: See Top Ten Questions for more information

Step 3: What Happens If the Child is NOT Enrolled in Five Business Days?

If the child has not started school within five (5) business days of completing Step 2, call the district's registration office and ask them why the child has not been enrolled.

- *The law says that the child must be enrolled and going to school within five business days of the school receiving all enrollment documents.*

If the school district does not allow the child to start school after five (5) business days, file a complaint with the Pennsylvania Department of Education. We have included a complaint letter for you to use—just fill out “Tool #1” and mail or fax it or you can call the Pennsylvania Department of Education at this special number: 717-783-6610. If the Pennsylvania Department of Education does not help, call us at 215-238-6970.

Step 4: Is there Anything Else You Should Know Before the Child Starts School?

Yes. You can ask to talk to a counselor or an administrator at the child's new school about these issues:

- Find out what credits the school requires for graduation. Make sure that the school is giving the child credit for ALL the courses she has already taken.
- If the child has an IEP, make sure that the school has a copy of it. The school must follow the old IEP until you have a new IEP Team meeting. If you asked for a special education evaluation at your child's old school, tell your child's new school about it.
- If the child needs tutoring or wants to be in a vocational class or is interested in participating in an extracurricular activity, ask about it.
- Remember: Even if the child was in an alternative education program at her last school district, the new school district cannot automatically place her in an alternative education program UNLESS she is CURRENTLY expelled for a weapons offense from her prior school.

Top Ten Questions About Enrolling Your Child in School

1) Can the school district ask you to provide proof of the child's age?

Yes, but they can only require that you bring in ONE of the following: birth certificate, passport, baptismal certificate, notarized statement from a parent or relative of the child's age, or prior school records.

2) Can the school district ask you to give them proof of the child's physical or dental examination or a physical health or mental health history in order to enroll in school?

No! This information can never be required as a condition of enrollment.

3) Are there any documents that a school district CANNOT ask you to provide?

Yes! School districts can never ask for a child's social security number or card, immigration documents, or information about why the child is living with you.

4) Can a school district ever ask about a child's immigration status?

No!

5) If a child is under age 21 and has passed the GED Tests, can the child still enroll in school and work towards her regular high school diploma?

Yes, unless the child is currently expelled from the school district in which she wants to enroll.

6) If the child was in a delinquency placement and now wants to reenroll in her school district, can the school district automatically place the child in an alternative education program for disruptive youth?

No, the child has a right to an informal hearing before she is sent to an alternative education program. The child must be currently disruptive in order to be sent to an alternative education program.

7) Can the school district ask that you provide proof of where you live?

Yes. Examples of documents that you can use as proof of where you live are: a lease, a deed, a property tax bill, driver's license, state or federal documents (such as mail from the Social Security Administration), current utility bills, vehicle registration, or a notarized statement signed by you that says where you and the child live.

8) Can a school district delay enrollment to decide the child's classroom placement, have an IEP Team meeting, or conduct academic testing?

No. A child is entitled to start school within five (5) business days of providing the required enrollment documents so that the child does not fall behind.

9) Is a child "too old" to be in school if she is 19 or 20 years old?

No. A child has a legal right to go to school in Pennsylvania until she is 21 years old (as long as she has not yet graduated from high school).

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Tool 1

Enrollment Dispute Letter

Fill this letter out and mail it to:

Sarah Pearce
Office of School Services
Pennsylvania Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

_____ (your name)
_____ (address)
_____ (phone number) (optional)
_____ (email) (optional)

Date: _____

Re: Enrollment Dispute of _____ (child's name) Birth date: _____

Dear Ms. Pearce:

I am writing to complain that _____ School District is refusing to enroll the above named child or is otherwise violating 22 PA Code §11.11. The child lives with me at _____, PA. As of today, the child has been out of school for approximately ____ days.

I provided to the District proof of my child's age, immunization records and proof of residency on _____ (date).

I understand that this student must be enrolled and able to attend school within five (5) business days of the submission of this information. I hereby request that the Department investigate and take appropriate corrective action. I understand that PDE will fax a letter to the school district within five (5) business days of receiving this complaint. Please send a copy of this letter to me and fax a copy of this and any further correspondence to the Education Law Center. The school district then has five (5) business days to respond.

Thank you very much for your prompt attention to this matter. Please let me know upon your receipt of this letter by phone [or email if appropriate] if you need any additional information.

Sincerely,

_____ (sign here)

KEEP A COPY OF THIS LETTER FOR YOUR RECORDS