



PRO SE / SELF-REPRESENTED GUIDE

# School Discipline Hearing Exhibit Guide

A parent's guide to organizing evidence for school disciplinary hearings, suspension appeals, HIB investigations, and IEP due process proceedings.

Your child is facing a school disciplinary hearing. Maybe it's a suspension appeal, an HIB investigation, or an expulsion proceeding. Under *Goss v. Lopez* (1975), students facing suspensions longer than 10 days have the right to a formal hearing. If your child has an IEP, IDEA requires the school to hold a manifestation determination within 10 school days. You have rights, and organized evidence is how you exercise them. This guide walks you through exactly what documents to gather and how to present them.

## Incident Documentation

- Incident report**  
The school's written account of what happened — request under FERPA
- Suspension or expulsion notice**  
The formal letter stating the disciplinary action and hearing date
- Witness statements**  
Written accounts from students, teachers, or staff who saw the incident
- Surveillance stills**  
Screenshots from school cameras if the incident was recorded
- Police report**  
If law enforcement was involved, request a copy of the report

## Student Records

- Attendance records**  
Full year of attendance showing the student's regular presence
- Grade reports**  
Academic records showing the student's performance
- Prior disciplinary history**  
Previous incidents — know what the school has before the hearing
- Guidance counselor notes**  
Any notes from meetings with school counselors
- Character references**  
Letters from teachers, coaches, or community members

This guide is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. For legal advice specific to your situation, consult with a licensed attorney. You are responsible for ensuring compliance with your local court's rules and procedures.

## IEP & Special Education Documents

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- Current IEP or 504 plan**  
The most recent individualized education program or accommodation plan
- Behavioral intervention plan**  
If one exists, the plan for managing behavioral challenges
- Functional behavioral assessment**  
Any assessment of the student's behavior patterns and triggers
- Manifestation determination records**  
Records from any prior MDR hearings for the student
- Progress monitoring data**  
Data showing how the student has been progressing on IEP goals

## Communications

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- Parent-school emails**  
Full email threads in chronological order with dates visible
- Text messages**  
Screenshots of all texts with the school, including timestamps
- Conference notes**  
Notes from meetings with teachers, principals, or administrators
- Hearing notice**  
The letter scheduling the hearing with date and procedures
- Certified mail receipts**  
Proof of any formal correspondence sent to the school

## School Policies

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- Student code of conduct**  
The specific section the school says was violated
- Anti-bullying/HIB policy**  
The school's bullying prevention policy if this is an HIB matter
- Disciplinary procedures**  
The school's own written procedures for hearings and appeals
- Zero tolerance policy**  
If applicable, the policy cited for the disciplinary action

## COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

1. Waiting until the week before the hearing to request records — FERPA gives schools 45 days
2. Deleting text messages or emails before screenshotting them with timestamps
3. Not requesting the IEP file separately from the discipline file — they are often in different systems
4. Assuming the school will provide all documents — they may only share what supports their position
5. Not bringing enough copies for the hearing officer, school representative, and yourself

## ORGANIZATION TIPS

- File your FERPA records request the same day you get the hearing notice — send by email and certified mail
- Screenshot text messages and social media posts immediately — content gets deleted
- Organize communications chronologically and highlight the date and sender on each page
- Keep a written log of every phone call with the school: date, who you spoke with, what was said
- If your child has an IEP, request manifestation determination records separately from the discipline file
- Number exhibits sequentially and create a simple table of contents listing each document

## COURTROOM PREPARATION

- Bring three copies of every exhibit: one for you, one for the hearing officer, one for the school
- Prepare a one-page timeline of events from the incident through the present day
- Know whether your child has a right to a manifestation determination — IEP or 504 students do
- Review the school's code of conduct so you can point to specific sections
- If witnesses will speak, prepare them with a brief summary of what to cover
- Bring the hearing notice so you can reference the charge and procedures
- Stay calm and factual — hearing officers respond to organized evidence, not emotional arguments

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