



## Ban parents from school campuses only as last resort

Banning parents from school premises should only be exercised in extremely limited circumstances, when all other avenues and techniques have been exhausted, said Lauren E. Tedesco, a school attorney at Capehart Scatchard in Mt. Laurel, N.J.

"Effectively, you are cutting off that parent's access to their child's education," she said. In order to even consider it, there should be egregious actions and behaviors by the parent, such as an extensive record of verbal abuse to staff by making demeaning, hurtful, or harmful comments; or borderline harassment, like sending 20 emails a day or making many telephone calls in a short period of time, Tedesco said. It may even come to the point where police or local authorities may have to get involved. "Take this all collectively," she said. "It can't be one instance of something."

This was not the case in *Fulton (GA) County Schs.*, [120 LRP 22139](#) (OCR 05/18/20), where the district faced allegations that it retaliated against a parent by banning her from a school campus in violation of Section 504 and Title II of the ADA. Based on the components that were mentioned in the resolution agreement, the parent was angry, allegedly called a member of the Section 504 team a liar, and threatened staff. "Reading through the agreement, to me, I don't see the justification of an indefinite ban for behaviors alleged and described," Tedesco said.

What might you do instead, should you find yourself in a similar situation?

- **Employ de-escalation techniques at the meeting.** If the meeting is getting heated, try to use de-escalation techniques, Tedesco said. For example, you might give a warning like, "This is getting a little off track," or suggest that the team reconvenes at another time by saying something like, "Maybe everyone should take a little time. We can reschedule at a later date."
- **Investigate.** Conduct an internal investigation to see whether there is any veracity to the parent's complaint, Tedesco said.

"When the parent [in the *Fulton County* case] made the initial complaint that the student was not receiving the initial time per the 504 to complete classwork and homework, I likely would have recommended some sort of internal investigation," she said.

- **Train all staff on how to communicate with parents.** At least once a year, districts should be doing an extensive overall 504 training for all staff who participate in 504 meetings, Tedesco said. Include in the meeting a component on communication with parents and parent interaction.

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"Parents are being advocates for their children," she said. "These types of meetings can get heated and emotionally driven at times. Staff need to be properly trained and aware as how to handle those sometimes difficult meetings."

- **Bring in an outside ally.** Consider bringing in a teaching staff member who isn't part of the 504 team but with whom the parent has a good positive relationship, Tedesco said. Consult that staff member for help and feedback. She might be more successful in speaking to and reasoning with the parent.

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