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# TEACHER GUIDE

*Beyond the Norm:  
Dealing with Parental  
Harassment*



The Alberta  
Teachers' Association

# Beyond the Norm: Dealing with Parental Harassment

Teachers welcome and support a high level of cooperative parent-teacher interaction and recognize the legitimate right of parents to participate in educational decision making for their children. Teachers appreciate that parents have a legitimate right, even a duty, to express their concerns within appropriate channels. On rare occasions, though, that right can be exercised to the point of harassment.

## What Is Parental Harassment?

For the purpose of this pamphlet parental harassment in the school context is defined as **persistent** parental or community criticism of or interference with school programs, teacher performance or interaction with students that is unwarranted and/or unsubstantiated.

## The Education Act

In some instances, parental harassment may constitute a contravention of the *Education Act*. Section 256 of the *Education Act* states that

No person shall

- a) disturb or interrupt the proceedings of a school . . .
- c) loiter or trespass in a school building or on property owned by a board.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission defines harassment as a form of discrimination. Parental harassment may therefore constitute a violation of the teacher's human rights.

Harassment is truly rare. Also rare is the need to take the matter beyond the school level. Every effort is made for the teacher, school administration and district administration to work cooperatively. In many cases the ATA has been able to stand alongside system personnel.

## The Criminal Code

Parental threats to, or assaults upon, a teacher are criminal offences and are governed by the *Criminal Code*. If you feel that a parent has harassed or assaulted you, advise the school principal and contact the police immediately. Contact an Association staff officer for confidential advice, direction and intervention, if appropriate. No intervention will occur without your agreement.

## Dealing with Harassment—Steps to Take

1. Don't try to handle this alone. Seek the support and assistance of your principal.
2. Make every reasonable attempt to meet with the parent. Ensure that your principal is present.
3. Require that allegations or complaints about your actions be detailed and specific, not vague and general.
4. Listen carefully. Try to understand the parent's perspective. There may be an element of truth in the concern being expressed.
5. Try to elicit the parent's help to reach a satisfactory resolution. The goal is to resolve the problem.
6. Keep an accurate written account of events, times, places and, whenever possible, the names of witnesses.
7. If the harassment persists, request, in writing, that school or district administration become involved. Employers have an obligation to protect their employees.
8. **Contact your Association!** You are entitled to advice, assistance and representation.

For assistance in dealing with parental harassment, call Teacher Employment Services at the Association (see reverse for contact information).