

2023 RESOURCE GUIDE

**Families' Rights &
Reasonable Accommodations**

**FLORIDA
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS**

**Navigating School Systems & Participating in Primary
& Secondary Public Education**



Mission & Vision

CAIR-Florida's vision is that every person deserves to be treated with respect and dignity, regardless of their background or beliefs – that's why we're committed to promoting justice and equality for all.

CAIR-Florida's mission is simple: to defend the civil rights of Florida's Muslim community and to promote a more just and equitable society for all – join us in this vital work today.

Copyright © 2023 CAIR-Florida Inc.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations Florida, Inc. (CAIR Florida, Inc.), a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, was established in 2001 to challenge stereotypes of Islam and Muslims and defend civil liberties.

The vast majority of CAIR Florida's work deals with civil rights and anti-defamation. CAIR Florida has consistently won praise from elected officials and the media for its tenacious efforts to combat both discrimination against Muslims and Islamophobia.

Direct questions about this resource guide to:
CAIR-Florida | Council on American-Islamic Relations
8076 N 56th St., Tampa, FL 33617
Tel. (833) [224-7352](tel:8332247352)
info@fl.cair.com
cairflorida.org

FAIR USE NOTICE: This resource may contain copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. It is being made available in an effort to advance the understanding of political, human rights, democracy, and social justice issues. It is believed that this constitutes a "fair use" of any such copyrighted material as provided for in Section 107 of the U.S. Copyright Law. In accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107, the material in this report is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving the included information for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material in this report for purposes of your own that go beyond "fair use," you must obtain permission from the copyright owner.

The material in this report is provided for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for an attorney's consultation. Please consult your own attorney to get counsel on your situation. The information in this report does not constitute legal advice. No part of this publication may be stored in a retrieval system, transmitted, or reproduced in any way, including but not limited to, photocopy, photograph, and magnetic or other record, without the prior agreement and written approval of the publisher.

Table of Contents

- Introduction..... 3
- Overview..... 3
- Students' Rights & Accommodations..... 4
- Parents' Rights & Accommodations..... 5
- Requesting an Accommodation..... 6
- Navigating Your Role in Public Education..... 8
- Parental Participation in Education..... 9
- Benefits of Parental Participation..... 10
- CAIR-FL's Expectations & How Can We Help?..... 11



Introduction

Rights and reasonable accommodations in public education are fundamental principles and protections that ensure equitable access, fair treatment, and a safe learning environment for students of all backgrounds. These rights and accommodations are designed to uphold the values of inclusivity, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, privacy, and due process within the educational setting. They vary across jurisdictions, but they typically encompass areas such as access to education, non-discrimination, special education services, freedom of expression, privacy rights, and ensuring a safe and secure learning environment.

Understanding and navigating these rights and accommodations is essential for promoting educational equality, protecting liberties, and fostering an atmosphere conducive to learning and personal development. By being aware of their rights and reasonable accommodations in public education, families can actively participate in shaping their children's educational experiences and advocate for their and others' well-being.

This enables families to exercise agency, demonstrate initiative and contribute to the development of an inclusive, respectful, and supportive educational community. These rights and accommodations play a crucial role in fostering growth and success, and preparing students to actively participate in a pluralistic society



Overview

This resource guide was developed with the aim of empowering parents, guardians and children to fully participate in the educational system by providing families with essential information about common rights and reasonable accommodations in the public education system.

It offers an overview of key protections, expectations, policies, and resources available to ensure that families can actively participate in their children's education and effectively advocate for their needs. By understanding these rights and reasonable accommodations, families can navigate the educational landscape more confidently and promote the best interests of their children with better outcomes

Students' Rights & Reasonable Accommodations

➤ A Free **Education:**

Florida's constitution recognizes the right of all children to receive a free education funded by tax dollars. This ensures that access to education is available to all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

➤ Non-**Discrimination:**

All students should be able to reasonably expect a public education that affords equal opportunities without discrimination. This includes protecting students from bullying, harassment, or exclusion on the basis of protected characteristics.

➤ **Special Education** Services:

Students with disabilities should be able to receive appropriate educational services and accommodations that enable them to participate in the educational environment. This may include specialized instruction, assistive technology, individualized educational plans (IEP's), and access to support services.

➤ Freedom of **Expression:**

Students generally have the right to express their opinions and beliefs, as long as it does not disrupt the learning environment or infringe upon the rights of others. This may include the right to engage in peaceful protests, discussions, or creative expression within reasonable limits.

➤ **Privacy:**

Students should be able to expect reasonable privacy in their educational records and personal information. Public schools are required to follow strict guidelines regarding the collection, use, and disclosure of student information, in accordance with applicable privacy laws.

➤ **Due Process:**

Students should be able to expect fair procedures and protections in disciplinary actions, including suspension or expulsion. This generally includes a notice of allegations, an opportunity to respond, and to appeal decisions.

➤ **Safe and Secure** Learning Environment:

Public educational institutions are responsible for providing a safe and secure environment for students. This includes taking measures to prevent and address bullying, violence, or harassment, as well as providing appropriate safety protocols and emergency preparedness.

➤ Reasonable Religious Accommodations:

Students have the constitutional and legal right to reasonable religious accommodations in schools. Students may need such accommodations for prayer, fasting, attire, physical education activities and other related issues. The extent of this right can vary based on the facts of the specific situation, as well as the laws and policies in the relevant location.

Parents' Rights & Reasonable Accommodations

➤ Request Information:

Parents and guardians should be able to request information about their child's classroom syllabus, course design, and lesson plans.

➤ Be Informed:

Parents and guardians should be able to learn about any significant developments in their child's overall health, safety, and academic performance. A school's duty to keep parents informed can vary based on the specific situation, as well as the laws and policies in the relevant state.

➤ Transparency:

Schools should not conceal from parents and guardians important information about their child's health, safety and academic performance absent an applicable law or policy, which can vary based on state.

➤ Public Input:

Parents and guardians should be able to provide reasonable input on policies and guidelines in the school system that stand to impact their child.

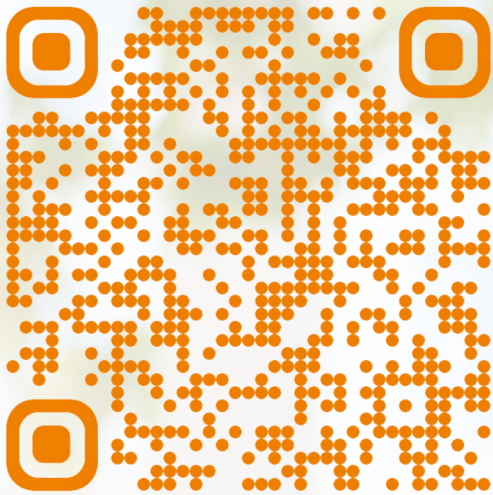
➤ Request Reasonable Accommodations:

Parents and guardians should be able to request that schools excuse their child from classroom activities, holiday celebrations, sports, or other activities that would force a student to unnecessarily compromise their sincerely-held religious beliefs. The laws, policies and legal precedents in each state can impact the extent to which a child can receive such exemptions.



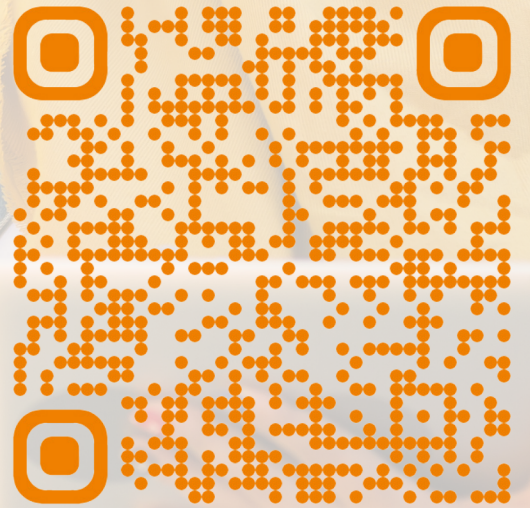
Requesting Accommodations


Scan these QR codes or visit the links to download template letter CAIR-FL designed for families to request reasonable religious accommodations



**General Accommodations:
bit.ly/cflschoolletter**

**Lesson Accommodations:
bit.ly/cflschoollessons**





Parents should be able to remain informed about their children's school life education.



Navigating Your Role in Public Education

Familiarize yourself with the website for your child's public school system and school. This can be found on the Florida Dept. of Education's website:

<https://www.fldoe.org>

Locate links to the Board of Education & Superintendent and note their contact information. Find the schedule for the Board of Education's public hearings. Families are encouraged to research issues on the hearing agendas, attend, testify and stay engaged.

➤ The public school system's website is where families should be able to find readily accessible information about:

- Opportunities for public comment
- Policies & regulations
- Advisory committees
- Legislative priorities
- Budget information
- Process on appeals and legal notices

➤ Familiarize yourself with the school system's policies on a wide range of topics. Obtain a copy of the school's Student Handbook or Code of Conduct. These documents often outline the rights and responsibilities of students and provide information on disciplinary procedures, freedom of expression, and other relevant matters.

➤ If you have questions or concerns, reach out to school administrators including the principal and vice-principal. They should be able to provide guidance and clarification on specific policies and procedures.

➤ Join or reach out to parent-teacher associations or advocacy groups in your community. These groups often have resources and knowledgeable individuals who can offer guidance on navigating rights and accommodations in public education.

➤ If you believe your rights have been violated or you learn about or witness a violation, document the incident(s) with as much detail as possible. Report the incident to the appropriate authorities within your school or educational institution, such as the principal or designated administrator.

➤ In cases where you believe your rights have been violated or if you require legal advice, contact CAIR-FL or consider consulting an education attorney for guidance on your rights and options for recourse.

Parental Participation in Education

Communicate with teachers.



Attend parent-teacher conferences and get to know your child's teachers to discuss their progress, strengths, and areas for improvement. Maintain open lines of communication. Establish a positive relationship with them by regularly communicating via email, phone calls, or in-person meetings to stay informed about your child's academic and social development.

Volunteer opportunities.



Offer to volunteer in the classroom. Assist teachers with various tasks or activities, such as reading to the class or organizing materials. Join and participate in PTA meetings, fundraisers, and school events to contribute to the school community and engage with other parents.

Homework and Study Support.



Create a consistent homework routine. Establish a quiet, well-equipped study area at home and set aside dedicated time for homework. Offer guidance, clarification, and support when your child is working on assignments or studying for exams.

Involvement in School Activities.



Show support by attending school concerts, plays, art shows, sports events, and other activities in which your child participates. Take part in workshops offered by the school that provide information and strategies on various parenting and educational topics. Consider joining committees or councils that involve parents in decision-making processes, such as curriculum development, policy formation, or school improvement plans.

Support Learning at Home.



Encourage a love for reading. Set aside time for reading together as a family, visit the library regularly, and discuss books your child is reading. Explore educational websites, apps, and games that reinforce learning outside of school.

Advocate for Your Child.



Stay informed of local, state, or national policies that impact your child's education and advocate for their best interests when necessary. If you have concerns about your child's educational experience, approach teachers or administrators respectfully to address and resolve them.

Each family's level of participation will vary based on personal circumstances, schedules, and available opportunities. The key is to find ways to engage meaningfully with your child's education and create a supportive learning environment both at home and in collaboration with the school.

Parental participation in schools is a time-honored American tradition and civic responsibility.

Benefits of Parental Participation

Participating in your child's education:

- has a positive impact on your child's academic performance.
- improves communication and collaboration with teachers & administrators.
- increases your awareness of your child's experiences and exposure in schools.
- can improve your child's social, emotional and behavioral development.
- can help shape school policies, programs and initiatives.
- promotes a sense of community, trust and mutual respect.
- facilitates advocacy for your child's needs and rights.
- impacts systemic issues that can benefit other students.
- provides you with an opportunity to play an active role in your child's education and to stay informed about their progress and well-being.

CAIR-FL's Expectations

- Every child deserves to be **valued and respected**.
- One student's rights should **not unnecessarily violate** the rights of other students.
- When appropriate, schools have a **responsibility to communicate** with parents and students about curriculums, policies, and guidelines.
- Trust in the school system requires transparency and ample opportunity for **community input** when appropriate.

Need Help? Contact CAIR-FL

Contact CAIR-FL at **833-224-7352** or email us at **info@fl.cair.com**.

- We can advise you on your **options**.
- We can accompany you to **meetings with administrators** or contact them on your behalf.
- We can provide a **free cultural competency workshop** for your school or classroom.
- We can help you **file a complaint** if school administrators aren't taking effective action.
- We can connect you to **resources about your faith**, which you can share with teachers.
- We can connect you to **counseling services** to deal with the stress of harassment.

REMEMBER: Even if you don't wish to take action in your situation, **you should still report what's happening**. The more we know about what Muslim youth face at school, the better equipped we can be to solve problems for you and others in the future.





CAIR-Florida | Council on American-Islamic Relations
8076 N 56th St., Tampa, FL 33617
Tel. (833) 224-7352
info@fl.cair.com
www.cairflorida.org

Support CAIR-FL's work today at
cairflorida.org/donate