

STUDENT AND PARENT GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

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A. OPTIONS FOR RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

The board strives to resolve concerns and complaints whenever possible. To this end, the board has provided opportunities for students and parents to express their concerns through processes established in board policies.

While the board encourages informal resolutions, the board recognizes that students and parents may want a more formal process for certain types of complaints or if an informal process was not satisfactory. This policy provides a complaint procedure that can be used as described below.

Any parent or student who is unclear of the options for proceeding with a concern may contact the principal's office or the superintendent's office for further information and copies of all applicable board policies.

B. DEFINITIONS

Days: The working days, exclusive of Saturdays, Sundays, vacation days or holidays, as set forth in the school calendar. In counting days, the first day will be the first full working day following the receipt of the grievance. After May 1, time limits will consist of all weekdays (Monday - Friday) so that the matter may be resolved before the close of the school term or as soon thereafter as possible.

Grievance: a formal complaint regarding specific decisions made by school personnel. A grievance may be submitted in specific circumstances such as when a student or parent believes that board policy or law has been misapplied, misinterpreted or violated. Any claims of discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, pregnancy, religion, age or disability also may be submitted as a grievance.

Grievant: the parent or student or group of parents or students submitting the grievance.

Official: the school district personnel hearing and responding to the grievant.

C. TIMELINESS OF PROCESS

The number of days indicated at each level should be considered a maximum and every effort should be made to expedite the process.

Failure by the official at any step to communicate a decision within the specified time limit will permit the grievant to appeal the grievance to the next step unless the official has notified the grievant of the delay and the reason for the delay, such as the complexity of the investigation or report. The official will make reasonable efforts to keep the grievant apprised of progress being made during any period of delay. Delays are not permitted that interfere with the exercise of any legal rights.

Failure by the grievant at any step to appeal a grievance to the next step within the specified time limit will be considered acceptance of the decision at that step, unless the grievant has notified the official of a delay, the reason for the delay and the official has consented in writing to the delay.

D. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

1. No reprisals of any kind will be taken by the board or by an employee of the school district against any grievant or other student or employee on account of his or her participation in a grievance filed and decided pursuant to this policy.

2. All meetings and hearings conducted pursuant to this policy will be private.
3. The board and school district will consider requests to hear grievances from a group of grievants, but the board and officials have the discretion to respond to individual grievant.
4. The grievant may have a representative, including an attorney, at any stage of the grievance.

E. PROCESS FOR GRIEVANCE

Reporting Grievance

1. A grievance must be filed as soon as possible but no longer than 30 days after disclosure or discovery of the facts giving rise to the grievance. For a grievance submitted after 30 days which claims a violation, misapplication or misinterpretation of state or federal law, including discrimination, the superintendent or designee will determine whether the grievance will be investigated after considering factors such as the reason for the delay; the extent of the delay; the effect of the delay on the ability of the school district to investigate and respond to the complaint; and whether the investigation of the complaint is necessary to meet any legal obligations. However, students and parents should recognize that delays in reporting may significantly impair the ability of the school district to investigate and respond effectively to such complaints.
2. A student who has a grievance must provide the following information in writing to the principal: (1) the name of the school district employee or other individual whose decision or action is at issue; (2) the specific decisions(s) or actions at issue; (3) any board policy or law that the parent or student believes has been misapplied, misinterpreted or violated; (4) and the specific resolution desired. If there is not a specific decision at issue and no concern that state or federal law has been misapplied, misinterpreted or violated, then the procedure established in board policy, Responding to Complaints, is appropriate and the principal will address the concern following that board policy.
3. Even if the principal is the employee whose decision or action is at issue, the student will submit the grievance first to the principal in order for the principal to address the issue within the formal process. If, however, the grievance claims that a state or federal law has been misapplied, misinterpreted or violated, the student may submit the grievance directly to the superintendent or the superintendent's designee.

Investigation

1. The principal will schedule and hold a meeting with the student within five school days of receiving the request. The student may be accompanied by a parent, legal guardian or other person who is in a position of *loco parentis* to the student.
2. The principal will conduct any investigation of the facts necessary before rendering a decision.

Response by Principal

1. The principal will provide a written response to the written grievance within ten days of the meeting. The response will include the principal's decision regarding resolution of the grievance and the basis for the decision. In responding, the principal cannot disclose information about other students or employees that by law is considered confidential.
2. A copy of the grievance and the principal's response will be filed with the superintendent.

Response by Superintendent

1. If the grievant is dissatisfied with the principal's decision, the grievant may appeal the decision to the superintendent. The appeal must be made in writing within five days of receiving the principal's decision.
2. The superintendent may review the written documents and respond or the superintendent may schedule and hold a conference with the grievant and principal, and any other individuals the superintendent determines to be appropriate within five school days after receiving the appeal. The student may be accompanied by a parent, legal guardian or other person who is in a position of *loco parentis* to the student.
3. The superintendent will provide a written response within 10 days after receiving the appeal. In responding, the superintendent cannot disclose information about other students or employees that by law is considered confidential.

Response by Board

1. If the grievant is dissatisfied with the superintendent's response, the grievant may appeal the decision to the board within five days of receiving the superintendent's response.
2. A hearing will be conducted pursuant to board policy.
3. The board will provide a final written decision within 30 days of receiving the appeal unless further investigation is necessary or the hearing necessitates that more time be taken to respond.

F. SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCESDiscrimination on the Basis of Gender

Sexual harassment complaint procedures are established in board policy. For other complaints of discrimination on the basis of gender, if the grievant is dissatisfied with the principal's written response, the grievance may be appealed to staff responsible for Title IX. Staff will review the written documents and may conduct any factual inquiry and hold a conference as necessary to make a determination of whether there was discrimination on the basis of gender. Staff responsible for Title IX will provide a written response within 10 days of receiving the grievance unless additional time is necessary to complete any investigation. If the corrective steps involve actions outside of the scope of the responsible staff, the superintendent or designee also will be notified so that responsibility for the corrective steps can be delegated to the appropriate individual. If still not satisfied, the student may appeal staff's response to the superintendent and board as provided in this policy.

Discrimination on the Basis of Disability

If the student alleged discrimination on the basis of a handicapping condition or disability and the student is dissatisfied with the principal's written response, the grievance may then be appealed to the Section 504/Americans With Disabilities Act ("504/ADA") coordinator. Staff responsible for 504/ADA will review the written documents and may conduct any factual inquiry and hold a conference as necessary to make a determination of whether there was a discrimination on the basis of disability. Appropriate staff will provide a written response within 10 days of receiving the grievance unless additional time is necessary to complete any investigation. If the corrective steps involve actions outside the scope of the staff responsibilities, the superintendent or designee also will be notified so that responsibility for the corrective steps can be delegated to the appropriate individual. If still not satisfied, the student may appeal to the 504/ADA staff's response to the superintendent and board as provided in this policy.

Appeal of Superintendent's Decision

If a student wants to initiate a formal grievance in regard to a certain decision made by the superintendent that directly and specifically affects the student, the general process described in this policy will be used except the grievance will be submitted directly to the superintendent.

G. RECORDS

Records of discrimination complaints will be maintained as required by law.

Legal Reference: Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq., 34 C.F.R. pt. 100; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq.; Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681 et seq., 34 C.F.R. pt. 106; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's "Final Amended Guidelines on Discrimination Because of Sex"; Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, as amended, 29 U.S.C. § 621 et seq.; The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 706(8), 794, 34 C.F.R. pt. 104; The Americans With Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12134, 28 C.F.R. pt. 35; Office of Civil Rights, Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Students or Third Parties, 62 Fed. Reg. 12,034 (1997); Office of Civil Rights, Racial Incidents and Harassment Against Students at Educational Institutions; Investigative Guidance, 59 Fed. Reg. 11,448 (1994); G.S. 126-16, 150B-43 et seq.