

Community Relations

Public Complaints

Constructive criticism of the schools is welcome through whatever medium on the assumption that it is motivated by a sincere desire to improve the quality of the educational program and to equip the school to perform its task more effectively. The following policy shall apply except when there is a statutory right to hearing, e.g., residency and expulsion matters, when the statutory procedures shall prevail.

Specific complaints about the conduct of the schools may originate with school personnel, students, parents, and other citizens. Persons making complaints about the school shall be referred to the most immediate level at which the problems can be resolved, and, as necessary, through lines of organization. Anonymous complaints will not be formally considered since such complaints cannot be appropriately reviewed. The subject of a complaint has a right to due process and to know the specifics of any complaint against him/her. Persons wishing to remain anonymous should be informed of this fact and should be encouraged to come forward if a complaint appears to have merit.

The Board retains sole discretion as to whether to permit witnesses and how much time is to be allowed to the complainant in any such informal hearing. The Board also reserves the right to hear from the Superintendent, either at the hearing or thereafter, as it deems appropriate. Within thirty (30) days of the conclusion of any such hearing, the Board shall inform the complainant of its decision, which shall be final.

The Board is responsible for setting policy for the district, and, as the chief executive officer, the Superintendent is responsible for operational issues in the district, including all personnel matters. When Board members are approached directly by persons with concerns or complaints, they should decline to intervene directly and suggest that the complainant meet with the individual at the most immediate level, be it a teacher, principal or the staff member, preferably face-to-face at a scheduled meeting. Should the problem not be resolved at the lowest level, the complainant should proceed through the "chain-of-command," e.g., from teacher to principal to Assistant Superintendent. Should a problem reach the Superintendent and not be resolved, the complainant may make a written request that the Board of Education review the matter. The Superintendent shall transmit this request to the Board, along with his or her recommendation on whether the Board should hear the complaint. Discussion of any such request may take place in executive session if the matter is appropriate for executive session, but any decision to hear a complaint shall be made by public vote. Given that the Superintendent is responsible for supervising staff, the Board will decline to hear specific complaints concerning school personnel.

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Legal Reference: *Keyishian v. Board of Regents* 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967)

President's Council, District 25 v. Community School Board No. 25 457 F.2d 289 (1972), cert. denied 409 U.S. 998 (1976)

Minarcini v. Strongsville City School District, 541 F. 2d 577 (6th Cir. 1976).

Board of Education, Island Trees Union Free School District No. 26 v. Pico, 457 U.S. 853 (1982).

Academic Freedom Policy (adopted by Connecticut State Board of Education, 9/9/81).

Connecticut General Statutes

10-238 Petition for hearing by board of education.

Policy adopted: May 5, 2015

NEWTOWN PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Newtown, Connecticut

EFFECTIVE: July 1, 2015

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Specific complaints about the conduct of the schools may originate with school personnel, students, parents, and other citizens. Such complaints can be resolved most expeditiously if they are taken first to the staff member or the administrator immediately in charge of the area in which the problem arises, then through successive administrative levels to the Superintendent, and subsequently to the Board of Education, if necessary. Whenever a complaint is made directly to the Board as a whole or to a Board member as an individual, it shall be referred to the Superintendent for study and possible resolution through normal channels.

If a specific employee is involved because of the circumstances, that employee shall be advised of the nature of the complaint and shall be given every opportunity for explanation, comment, and presentation of the facts as he/she sees them.

Failing to reach a satisfactory resolution to the problem or complaint with the staff member or administrator immediately in charge of the area in which the problem arises, the complainant shall be encouraged to ask for review and further consideration through successive administrative levels to the Superintendent, and subsequently the Board of Education, if necessary, as indicated below. Given that the Superintendent is responsible for supervising staff, the Board will generally decline to hear specific complaints concerning school personnel.

School Personnel

In instances where the complaint involved an employee, the administrator immediately in charge of the area in which the problem arises shall promptly provide the Superintendent or his/her designee with a written report including:

- A statement of the complaint prepared by the complainant and specifying the precise nature of the complaint. The statement must be signed by the complainant.
- A statement of the facts on both sides of the matter.
- A summary of the opportunities afforded both sides to be heard.
- A statement on how the complainant would propose to resolve the matter.
- A statement on how the staff member would propose to resolve the matter.
- A recommendation on how the complaint can best be resolved from the point of view of the administrator.

Instructional Materials

If the complaint cannot be resolved at the building level, the Superintendent or his/her designee shall consider the matter and make a decision. If the Superintendent determines that a recommendation concerning the complaint would be helpful to him, he/she may decide to establish a review committee to make a recommendation concerning a response to the complaint. Such a committee shall be appointed by the Superintendent, and it shall be composed of one administrator with district responsibilities and five or more members selected from the administrative and instructional areas most closely concerned.

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Instructional Materials (continued)

In their deliberations, the review committee shall consider the educational philosophy of the school district; the professional opinions of other staff members in the instructional area most closely concerned, as well as other competent authorities; reviews of the materials by reputable bodies; the teacher's own stated objectives in using the materials, and the objections of the complainant.

The findings and recommendation of the review committee as to the disposition of the complaint shall be in writing and be transmitted to the Superintendent or his/her designee. The Superintendent or his/her designee shall share the findings and recommendation of the review committee with the complainant and shall meet with the complainant for purposes of resolving the matter. After meeting with the complainant to review the findings and recommendation of the review committee, the Superintendent shall issue his/her decision on the complaint in writing to the complainant, with a copy to the members of the review committee and the Principal of the affected school.

The Superintendent shall submit to the Board the report from the district review committee, along with his/her recommendation, if Board involvement becomes necessary to resolve the complaint.

An individual student may be excused from using challenged materials. The teacher will then assign the student alternate materials of equal merit. Although individuals may be excused from using challenged materials, the use of challenged materials by class, school or district shall not be restricted until final disposition has been made in accordance with this regulation.

Regulation approved: May 5, 2015

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