

Community Relations

Public Complaints

The Board of Education welcomes comments and suggestions for improvement from the citizens whom it serves. Constructive criticism of the schools is welcome whenever it is motivated by a sincere desire to improve the quality of the educational program or to allow the schools to do their tasks more effectively. However, the Board has confidence in its professional staff and desires to support their actions in order that they be free from unnecessary, spiteful or negative criticism and complaint. Therefore, whenever a complaint is made directly to the Board as a whole or to a Board member as an individual, it will promptly be referred to the school administration for study and possible solution.

Since individual Board members have no authority to resolve complaints, other than by formal Board action, Board members shall refer persons making complaints about the schools to the most immediate level at which the problems can be resolved and, as may be necessary, through lines of organization to the Superintendent of Schools. The Board expects that the administration will develop a procedure for receiving complaints courteously and that it will take steps to make a proper reply to the complainant. Follow-up shall be in the form of a written memorandum to the Board members.

Anonymous complaints provide no avenue for response or redress of the complaint. Therefore, it is the policy of the Board that such complaints need not be pursued. An unsigned complaint need not be read or acted upon at any meeting of the Board and anonymous telephone complaints need not be brought to the Board by any individual Board member, administrator or other District employee. The administration need not act on any anonymous complaint.

Parents should be made aware of the proper channels of communication and appeal. Complaints for which specific resolution procedures are provided shall be directed through those channels. The decision of the Principal regarding a student must include notice to the parents of the next step of appeal. Any appeal from the decision of the Superintendent to the Board shall be in writing and signed.

Complaints should be resolved at the lowest possible level of authority. If the complaint cannot be resolved at the building level, either party is encouraged to bring the matter to the attention of the Superintendent of Schools.

If all other remedies have been exhausted and a complaint cannot be satisfactorily resolved, the complaint may be appealed to the Board of Education. No appeal will be heard by the Board and no charges or accusations against an employee will be investigated unless the accusations are reduced to writing, signed by the party making the complaint, and presented to the Board through the Superintendent.

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The Board will not consider or act upon complaints that have not been explored at the appropriate level or complaints for which specific resolution procedures have been established that do not include Board review. If the Board decides to hear the complaint, the Board shall make a decision which shall be sent to all interested parties. The Board's decision is final.

Upon receipt of a written petition signed by one percent of the voters or fifty voters, whichever is greater, the Board of Education shall hold a public hearing on any question specified in the petition within three weeks of receipt of the petition.

Challenged Material

A procedure for processing and responding to criticism of approved materials shall be established and followed. This procedure shall include a formal, signed complaint of standard format and an appointed committee to re-evaluate the material in question.

In all cases, the decision to retain or reject shall be made on the basis of whether the material represents life in its true proportions, whether circumstances are realistically dealt with, and whether the material has literary or social value. Factual material shall be included in all instructional material collections.

(cf. 1220 – Citizens' Advisory Committees)

(cf. 5145.2 - Freedom of Speech/Expression)

(cf. 6144 - Controversial Issues)

(cf. 6161 - Equipment, Books, Materials: Provision/Selection)

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: June 21, 2007

NEW FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
New Fairfield, Connecticut

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The Superintendent and all building or unit administrators shall maintain a log of all written and signed public complaints received, the results of any study or investigation undertaken, and the particular action or disposition rendered. These records shall be deemed personal working files and not subject to public disclosure except that the Superintendent may review all such files at any time.

The Superintendent's own records shall be reviewable by the Board chair. Heresay and rumor shall not be considered a complaint unless directed by an identifiable complainant.

Administrators shall use understanding in dealing with the public, but nothing contained herein shall imply that any staff member is compelled to subject him/herself to inappropriate or unrestrained forms of insult, upbraiding, or other like abuse. Complainants are to be advised of their right to appeal decisions and actions to the Superintendent whose determinations may in turn be reviewed by the Board.

The Board may request a disinterested third party to act as a moderator to help it reach a mutually satisfactory solution. After the Board's decision, the usual appeal route pertains.

Any parent, guardian, or other person who insults or abuses any teacher or other employee on school property or in the presence of students may be prosecuted by the district under the provisions of law.

Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials

The following procedure shall be followed whenever there is a request for the evaluation of instructional material other than textbooks:

1. The Superintendent shall establish an ad hoc review committee broadly representative of:
 - A. Teachers competent in the area of the content covered by the material.
 - B. Administrators, directors, and supervisors appropriate to the level and/or subject for which material is used.
 - C. A media specialist who shall serve on the review committee.
 - D. Parents when appropriate, as determined by the Superintendent.
2. Objections to materials and requests for re-evaluation must be presented in writing on the proper form. Request for Re-Evaluation of Materials forms are available in the office of the Superintendent.
3. Initial action on a written request on the proper form shall be taken no later than fifteen school days after receipt of the request.

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Request for Re-Evaluation of Instructional Materials (continued)

4. A written report from the review committee shall be submitted to the Superintendent. The Superintendent shall then communicate his or her decision to the person requesting the re-evaluation.
5. Should the decision of the Superintendent not satisfy the person requesting the re-evaluation, the Board of Education may hold a special hearing to review the Superintendent's decision.
6. Once instructional material has been re-evaluated the material cannot be subject to further review without special approval by the Board of Education. Challenged instructional materials shall remain in use in the schools pending a final decision by the Board of Education, or unless suspended by the Board of Education prior to a final decision.

(cf. 1220 - Citizens, Advisory Committees)

(cf. 5145.2 - Freedom of Speech/Expression)

(cf. 6144 - Controversial Issues)

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