

It is the policy of the board, in keeping with the ultimate goal of serving the educational welfare of children, to develop and practice reasonable and effective methods of resolving difficulties that may arise among employees. The intent is to reduce potential areas of grievances and to establish and maintain recognized channels of communications between staff and administration. The purpose of this procedure is to secure, at the lowest possible level, equitable solutions to the problems that arise from time to time and affect employees.

**A. INFORMAL RESOLUTION**

It is desirable for an employee and his or her immediate supervisor to resolve problems through free and informal communication. When informal procedures fail or are inappropriate or when the employee requests formal procedures, a grievance will be processed pursuant to the steps set forth in this policy.

**B. DEFINITIONS****1. Days**

Days are the working days, exclusive of Saturdays, Sundays, vacation days, or holidays, as set forth in the aggrieved employee's employment calendar. In counting days, the first day will be the first full working day following receipt of the grievance. When a grievance is submitted on or 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; however, at the option of the grievant(s), the time limits specified herein may be postponed until the first day of the next school year for a grievance arising after May 1.

**2. Final Administrative Decision**

A final administrative decision is a decision of a school employee from which no further appeal to a school administrator is available.

**3. Grievance**

A grievance is a formal written claim by an employee regarding specific decision(s) made by another employee and alleging that such decision(s) have adversely affected the person making the claim. A grievance may include, but is not limited to, the following allegations:

- a. that there has been a violation, misapplication or misinterpretation of state or federal law or regulations, school board policy, or administrative procedure;

- b. that an employee's employment status or the terms or conditions of his or her employment have been adversely affected;
- c. that there exists a physical condition that jeopardizes an employee's health or safety or that interferes with an employee's ability to discharge his or her responsibilities properly and effectively; or
- d. that there exists a problem which cannot be resolved to the employee's satisfaction after efforts have been made to resolve the problem with the employee's immediate supervisor.

The term "grievance" does not apply to any matter for which the method of review is prescribed by law, for which there is a more specific board policy providing a process for addressing the concern, or upon which the board of education is without authority to act. Claims of discrimination, harassment or bullying must be processed under policy 1720/4015/7225, Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying Complaint Procedure.

4. Grievant

The grievant is the employee(s) of Haywood County Schools making the claim.

5. Official

The official is the person hearing and responding to the grievant.

6. Parties in Interest

"Parties in interest" refers to the grievant and the person against whom the grievance is filed.

**C. TIMELINESS OF PROCESS**

The number of days indicated at each step of the grievance process 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 shall make reasonable efforts to keep the grievant apprised of progress being made during any period of delay. Delays may not impermissibly interfere with the exercise of the grievant's 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 and the reason for the delay and the official

has consented in writing to the delay.

**D. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

1. All parties in interest and their representatives in any grievance filed pursuant to this policy shall conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times during the investigation and hearing of the grievance.
2. The board or an employee of the school system will take no reprisals of any kind against any party in interest or other employee on account of his or her participation in a grievance filed and decided pursuant to this policy.
3. Each decision will be in writing, setting forth the decision and reasons therefore, and will be transmitted promptly to all parties in interest.
4. All meetings and hearings conducted pursuant to this policy will be private; however, the board may conduct an open public hearing upon both the request of the grievant(s) and the unanimous approval of the board members present to hear the grievance.
5. The board and school system will consider requests to hear grievances from a group of grievants, but the board and officials have the discretion to hear and respond to grievants individually.
6. The board and administration will cooperate with the employee and representative in the investigation of any grievance and will furnish the employee or representative information pertinent to the grievance without cost to the grievant employee or the employee against whom the grievance is filed.
7. The employee may have a representative, including an attorney, at any stage of the grievance. However, if the grievant intends to be represented by legal counsel, he or she must notify the appropriate school official in advance so that school personnel also will have the opportunity to be represented by legal counsel.
8. Should, in the judgment of the superintendent or designee, the investigation or processing of any grievance require the absence of the grievant and/or representative from regular work assignments, such absences will be excused without loss of pay or benefits.

**E. PROCESS FOR GRIEVANCE**

It is usually desirable for an employee and his or her immediate supervisor to resolve problems through free and informal communication. However, if such informal processes fail to satisfy the employee, then, at the option of the employee(s), a grievance may proceed pursuant to the following process.

1. Filing a Grievance

- a. A formal grievance must be filed as soon as possible but no longer than thirty (30) days after disclosure or discovery of the facts giving rise to the grievance. For a grievance submitted after thirty (30) days that claims a violation, misapplication, or misinterpretation of state or federal law, the superintendent or designee shall 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 system to investigate and respond to the complaint; and whether the investigation of the complaint is necessary to meet any legal obligations. However, employees should recognize that delays in filing a grievance may significantly impair the ability of the school system to investigate and respond effectively to such complaints.
- b. All grievances must be in writing, and the written statement of grievance must remain the same throughout all steps of the grievance procedure. The written grievance must include the following information: (1) the name of the school system employee or other individual whose decision or action is at issue; (2) the specific decision(s), action(s) or physical condition at issue; (3) any local board policy, state or federal law, state or federal regulation or State Board of Education policy or procedure that the grievant believes has been misapplied, misinterpreted or violated; and (4) the specific resolution desired. If there is not a specific decision, action or physical condition at issue or no concern that federal or state law, federal or state regulation, State Board of Education policy or procedure, or board policy or procedure has been misapplied, misinterpreted or violated, then the procedure established in policy 1742/5060, Responding to Complaints, is appropriate, and the principal or immediate supervisor shall address the concern following that policy.
- c. The employee(s) shall present the grievance in writing to his or her immediate supervisor or the supervisor's designee, unless the grievance alleges that a state or federal law has been misapplied, misinterpreted or violated, in which case the grievance may be presented instead to the assistant superintendent for human resources (or to the superintendent if the grievant's supervisor is the assistant superintendent for human resources). The person receiving the grievance hereinafter will be referred to as "official."

2. Response by Official

- a. In the event the official determines at the outset that review by the official is inappropriate, the official shall forward the formal grievance to the superintendent who will investigate and respond as provided below in

subsection E.3.

- b. A meeting will take place at a mutually agreed-upon time within five (5) days after receipt of the grievance. Each party in interest may have one representative present at the meeting.
- c. The official shall conduct any investigation of the facts necessary before rendering a decision.
- d. The official shall provide the aggrieved employee(s) with a written response to the grievance within ten (10) days after the meeting.

3. Response by Superintendent

- a. If the grievant is dissatisfied with the official's response, the grievant may appeal in writing the decision to the superintendent for review by the superintendent or designee within five (5) days of receipt of the official's response.
- b. The superintendent or designee shall arrange for a meeting with the employee(s) to take place within five (5) days of the receipt of the appeal. Each party in interest may have one representative present at the meeting.
- c. The superintendent or designee shall conduct any investigation necessary before arriving at a decision. The superintendent or designee shall provide the aggrieved employee(s) with a written decision within ten (10) days after the meeting.

4. Appeal to the Board

If the grievant has alleged a violation of a specified federal or state law, federal or state regulation, State Board of Education policy or procedure, or board policy or procedure or has alleged that a specific decision of a school official adversely affects the grievant's employment status or the terms or conditions of his or her employment, the grievant shall have a right to appeal a final administrative decision to the board of education (see subsection E.4.a, Mandatory Appeals, below). If the grievant has not alleged such specific violations, he or she may request a board hearing, which the board may grant at its discretion (see subsection E.4.b, Discretionary Appeals, below).

Upon appeal, the board or a board committee designated by the board chairperson may affirm, disaffirm, or modify the decision of the superintendent. The decision of the board or board committee shall be final.

- a. Mandatory Appeals

- 1) If the grievant is not satisfied with the superintendent's response and has alleged a violation of a specified federal or state law, federal or state regulation, State Board of Education policy or procedure, or local board policy or procedure or has alleged that a specific decision of a school official adversely affects the grievant's employment status or the terms or conditions of his or her employment, the grievant may appeal in writing the decision to the board within ten (10) days of receiving the superintendent's response.
  - 2) A hearing will be conducted pursuant to policy 2500, Hearings Before the Board. Notwithstanding policy 2500, the following provisions will also apply:
    - i. The board chairperson may designate a committee of three or more board members to hear the grievance;
    - ii. No new evidence, written or verbal, may be presented without the prior knowledge and consent of all parties in interest, or without a majority vote of the board or board committee; and
    - iii. Each party in interest may have one representative present at the hearing before the board or board committee.
  - 3) The board will provide a final written decision within thirty (30) days of receiving the appeal unless further investigation is necessary or the hearing necessitates that more time be taken to respond.
- b. Discretionary Appeals
- 1) If the grievant is not satisfied with the superintendent's response but has not alleged a violation of a specified federal or state law, federal or state regulation, State Board of Education policy or procedure, or local board policy or procedure or has not alleged that a specific decision of a school official adversely affects the grievant's employment status or the terms or conditions of his or her employment, the grievant may submit to the superintendent a written request for a hearing before the board of education within ten (10) days of receiving the superintendent's response.
  - 2) If the full board will be meeting within two weeks of the request for a hearing, the board will decide at that time whether to grant a hearing. Otherwise, the board chairperson will appoint a three-person panel to review the request and determine whether to (1)

deny the request for a hearing; (2) review the superintendent's decision on the written record only; or (3) grant the request for a hearing. The panel will report the decision to the board. The board may modify the decision of the panel upon majority vote at a board meeting.

- 3) If the board denies the appeal, the decision of the superintendent will be final and the grievant will be notified within five (5) days of the board's decision.
- 4) If the board decides to grant a hearing, the hearing will be conducted pursuant to policy 2500, Hearings Before the Board. Notwithstanding policy 2500, the following provisions will also apply:
  - i. The board chairperson may designate a committee of three or more board members to hear the grievance;
  - ii. No new evidence, written or verbal, may be presented without the prior knowledge and consent of all parties in interest, or without a majority vote of the board or board committee; and
  - iii. Each party in interest may have one representative present at the hearing before the board or board committee.
- 4) The board will provide a final written decision within thirty (30) days of the decision to grant an appeal, unless further investigation is necessary or the hearing necessitates that more time be taken to respond.

## **F. RECORDS**

Appropriate records shall be maintained in accordance with state and federal law.

The superintendent or designee shall maintain confidential records of grievances, including, but not limited to: the names of the grievant(s) and other parties in interest; the decisions reached by the official(s), superintendent, and/or board; and any correction action(s) or other steps taken by the school system or its employees in response to the grievance.

Legal References: G.S. 115C-45(c); 126-16

Cross References: Prohibition Against Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying (policy 1710/4021/7230), Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying Complaint Procedure (policy 1720/4015/7225), Responding to Complaints (policy 1742/5060), Hearings Before the Board

(policy 2500)

Adopted: November 10, 2014

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