



PLATTSBURGH CITY  
SCHOOL DISTRICT

# Complaint Procedures

# **1. Introduction**

## **1.1 Purpose**

This procedure outlines how complaints will be handled by the Plattsburgh City School District at each of our school buildings. This guidance supports BOE Policy 1440 Public Complaints.

Our complaint procedure is intended to:

- Respond to complaints brought to the attention of an administrator
- Resolve complaints in a timely, fair and helpful manner
- Give the public confidence in our administrative processes
- Provide information to enhance our services, systems and complaint handling, and
- Prevent complainants or students from suffering detriment because a complaint has been made by them or on their behalf.

The District/Building is committed to:

- Respectful treatment of complainants
- Providing information about making complaints and ensuring that it is accessible to complainants
- Open communication with complainants about the status of their complaints
- Taking ownership of complaints and ensuring that people who are responding to complaints are supported
- Timeliness of complaint handling and dealing with issues as soon as possible
- Transparency through recording and analyzing issues to inform systems improvement

# **2. Receiving a Complaint**

## **2.1 First Steps**

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction made to the District/Building, where a response or resolution is reasonably expected or legally required. A complaint can be about any aspect of the services provided by the District/Building, including the behavior or decisions of staff, practices, or policies and procedures.

This procedure applies to all complaints other than complaints made by staff, which are dealt with as outlined in the negotiated contracts for all units.

Some complaints may fall outside the standard definition of a complaint, such as allegations of misconduct by a staff member and therefore need a referral or a report to be made.

Complaints must be made in writing.

## 2.2 Assessing Risk and referring Certain Matters

Any staff member may receive a complaint. The receiving staff member should assess the complaint to identify any immediate health, safety or security risks.

The person who receives a complaint should immediately take action if the issue falls within their parameters and/or escalate the issue to the principal if there are risks. Any identified risks and risk management actions should then be documented by the principal.

Some complaints are not dealt with by the District/Building. Where there are allegations of criminal conduct, there must be a report to the Police. Where there is a risk of significant harm to a student, contact to Child Protective Services should be made.

## 2.3 Deciding Who is the Best Person to Manage the Complaint

**Most** complaints are best resolved promptly at the local level. In schools, the classroom or subject area teacher is often the best person to handle routine concerns about matters within their classroom and/or area of responsibility.

**Some** complaints will need the involvement of the principal.

**Few** complaints should require management at the District level. Some complaints received at the District level may also be suitable to be referred back to the school.

In many cases, staff can manage made directly to them, even if the complaint relates to their actions. For example; where a parent complains to the classroom teacher about their programming or student behavior management, the teacher may be able to respond to the complaint. This often also best meets the parent's needs.

## 3. Managing the Complaint

The five key stages of managing a complaint are:

1. Acknowledge complaint
2. Assess/gather information
3. Provide conclusions and actions
4. Implement outcome actions/follow up
5. Close complaint and keep records

### 3.1 Acknowledging the Complaint

When responding to a complaint it is important to deal with all complaints with respect and be helpful and responsive at all times.

Individuals who receive a complaint should:

- Acknowledge the complaint as soon as possible, if possible within 3 working days. This can be done in person, by telephone e-mail or formerly in writing. If acknowledgement was made verbally, it should still be documented by the individual receiving the complaint.
- Let the complainant know that they will be kept up to date with progress.
- Keep the matter as confidential as possible by only sharing information with those who would need to know about the complaint issues.
- Listen carefully to the issues and resolve the complaint directly at the building level whenever possible.

### 3.2 Assess, Gather Information and Resolve

**Assess** – It is important to determine what the complaint is about. This may require going back to the complainant to clarify their concerns. For verbal complaints, it is useful to document the complaint issues, provide these to the complainant and them to confirm that the complaint has been characterized accurately. If the process of clarifying/defining the complaint starts to indicate that the complaint issue is different from what was first raised, that's should be documented and confirmed with the complainant. That way, there is agreement about the nature of the complaint.

Keep matters confidential as it is easier to handle and manage complaints when the information about the complaint is only shared on a need to know basis. While the District/Building cannot enforce this with the complainant, it may be useful to remind them that it will assist in the resolution process.

**Gather Information** – Gather enough information to allow a proper assessment of the concerns as quickly as possible. Information to be gathered could include:

- Policies and procedures
- Copies of other documents such as forms, reports, student records, etc.
- Copies of previous correspondence
- Information and/or accounts from students, staff or other areas of the District/Building
- Further information form complainants

All staff should assist in the gathering of information and respond promptly and cooperatively when reasonable requests are made for information. Complainants should also provide any additional information requested for a proper assessment of their concerns.

**Resolve the Complaint** – Complaints should be finalized as soon as possible and no later than 20 working days. Individuals leading this process must keep people updated on the progress of their complaint. If a delay is anticipated, inform the complainant and other parties and provide reasons for the delay.

Outcomes will depend on the circumstances of each complaint and take into account and statutory requirements. Lead individuals should consider flexible approaches whenever possible.

### 3.3 Provide Information About the Complain Outcome

Lead individuals should provide information about the outcome to the complainant. This may be in a meeting or by telephone or e-mail.

When giving the outcome information, explain:

- The outcome of the complaint and any action that is going to be taken, by whom and when
- The reason(s) for the decision
- Any internal or external options for review

In any case, the complaint outcome should always be confirmed in writing. E-mail is acceptable. Complex complaints may require additional record keeping. While it is best practice to provide as much information as you can about outcomes, it is important to keep confidential specific personal details about the management of staff. If a person is the subject of a complaint, they should also be provided with information about the outcome.

### 3.4 Implement Outcome Actions

Take all reasonable steps to implement and monitor the outcomes of the complaint. Where the outcomes relate to whole school processes, the administrator should oversee progress and/or delegate responsibility to a specific member of the staff with relevant responsibilities.

### 3.5 Record Keeping

Individuals receiving complaints should document:

- Their contacts with the complainant
- How they managed the complaint
- The outcome of the complaint, including how and whether any concerns were substantiated and the action taken in response
- The steps taken to follow up any outcome actions

Staff resolving complaints immediately at the local level should use their professional judgement to decide what, if any, records to keep.

## **4. Management of Unreasonable Conduct by People Making Complaints**

All staff should be accessible and responsive to people who make complaints. At the same time, proper resolution of complaints depends on:

- The District/Building performing its functions efficiently and effectively
- The health, safety and security of the student/staff in the care of the District/Building
- District/Building capacity to allocate resources fairly across all the complaints we receive

## **5. Reviews**

Complainants may request a review of the complaint outcome if they have information that:

- The complaint outcome was incorrect and/or
- The complaint handling process was unfair

Requests should be in writing and given the reasons for the request review and which particular part of their complaint is the subject of their review request. The request should be addressed to the Building Principal or their supervisor. Requests for review should be made within 10 working days from the initial complaint decision, unless there are circumstances that have reasonably prevented the complainant from requesting review within the 10 day interval.

The review must be conducted by a more senior officer than or at least an equivalent level person who handled the complaint. The reviewing administrator must not be the subject of the complaint in any way or have been involved in managing the complaint. The review should be completed within 20 working days of the receipt of the request.

## **6. Ongoing Responsibilities**

All staff and managers have ongoing responsibilities to:

- Respond to and manage complaints so that the complaint process is accessible to all members of the community
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that complainants are being treated fairly
- Keep confidentiality about complaints at all times, including after a satisfactory resolution. This requires everyone to ensure that information is restricted to those who genuinely need to know.