

Grievances 101 – A Q&A Fact Sheet Prepared By Carroll ISD

Who can file a complaint or grievance?

Just about anyone can file a formal grievance or complaint against a school employee or an Administrator or Board decision. The grievance process does not provide an avenue for a parent to grieve another parent's actions. District policy encourages students and parents to discuss their concerns and complaints through informal conferences with the appropriate teacher, principal or campus administrator. Our goal is to find early resolution at the lowest possible administrative level.

If an informal conference fails, what happens next?

The individual has a right to file a timely, written complaint as outlined in the appropriate district policy. Putting the complaint in writing on the district's formal grievance form triggers deadlines according to the appropriate policy.

Where can I find the right policy or complaint form?

District policies and complaint forms are available on the district's website or by contacting any CISD Administrator. Visit <http://www.southlakecarroll.edu> and click on the Board of Trustees drop down menu to find the "District Policies" link. There are different grievance policies for students, parents, employees and citizens.

Where and how can I file the formal complaint?

Grievances can be filed by hand delivery, fax or U.S. mail to any CISD Administrator. District policy requires the Administrator to contact the Personnel Services Department for proper processing of the complaint.

When should I file a grievance or complaint?

First take your concern or complaint to the appropriate individual at the lowest administrative level. If that informal conference does not resolve the issue to your satisfaction, you have the option of filing a formal grievance. A formal grievance or complaint should be filed within 15 days of the date the individual first knew of the decision or action giving rise to the complaint or grievance.

What must be included in the grievance?

The individual filing the grievance must state who the grievance is against, what action was taken by that individual, who was harmed by the action, what harm was done and what relief is sought.

Will my grievance be made public?

Most documents maintained by a public school district are considered public and must be turned over upon written request. If information in the document is protected as confidential by law (i.e. student names, social security numbers, E-mail addresses, etc.) the Attorney General may allow a redaction (blackening out) of that information only. The grievance itself still must be turned over when requested.

If I file a formal grievance may it later be withdrawn?

The individual filing the grievance always has the option of withdrawing the grievance. This happens sometimes when the situation gets resolved before the formal hearing and/or the individual decides for whatever reason not to continue in the grievance process. Again, it is our goal to resolve issues before they reach the hearing stage.

What determines if my grievance is a Level I, Level II or Level III grievance?

Grievances should go to the lowest level administrator who has the authority to remedy the alleged problem. In most circumstances, an individual files the Level I grievance with the campus principal. If the response to the grievance is unsatisfactory following a Level I hearing, the individual may file a Level II grievance. If there is no resolution at Level II, the individual has the option of filing a Level III grievance.

Who hears Level II complaints?

The Superintendent and/or his designee will hear Level II complaints.

Who hears Level III complaints?

The Board of Trustees hears Level III complaints. When the individual filing the grievance is not satisfied at Level I or II, the grievance may come before the Board at Level III. It is important for all parties involved to go through the proper procedure in bringing a complaint to the district.

Why can't I just file a Level III grievance immediately?

Again, it is our desire to resolve issues in an informal conference at the lowest possible level. The Board of Trustees does not handle day-to-day operations of the school; that is the duty of the Administration. The Board enacts policy and the Administration carries out that policy. A grievance could possibly begin at Level III if circumstances warrant. For instance, if a grievance is against a decision made by the Board of Trustees, the grievance may have to begin at Level III because the principal and superintendent would not have the authority to overturn a Board decision.

Can I just E-mail the Board or Administration with my complaint?

The public is always welcome to communicate via E-mail with Administrators and Trustees. Keep in mind, however, that the Board does not manage the day-to-day operations of the district. Feedback and communication with Trustees is good, but in the case of a grievance, Trustees should not engage in discussion or deliberation of arguments brought forth prior to a hearing. Trustees may have to recuse themselves from the process if they cannot remain objective. If too many Board members (4 or more) compromise their objectivity on a grievance matter, the Board will not be able to proceed in hearing the Level III grievance.

Will the Board of Trustees hear all facts and details of a particular situation?

The Board should remain neutral throughout the grievance process. District policy states that the Board shall only consider those issues and documents presented at the preceding levels and identified in the appeal notice. Discussion at the Level III grievance must pertain to the actions being grieved in that particular complaint. This means that information presented to the Board may be limited depending on the nature of the grievance being considered.

Will an investigation be done regarding my complaint?

The Administration will conduct an investigation into the complaint. The Board of Trustees, however, is not an investigative body. The Board merely acts as a jury in hearing the information presented by parties involved during closed session. Board members cannot take into consideration anything they "may have heard from someone" or something someone has sent them in an E-mail.

Will my hearing at each level be open or closed?

Typically, the grievant gets to determine whether the hearing is open or closed except in the instances where it might violate the privacy rights of a person named in the complaint. The policy relies on the District to ensure that the hearing is held in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act and other applicable law.

Is the Board required to respond immediately after the hearing?

The Board may give notice of its decision orally or in writing at any time up to and including the next regularly scheduled Board meeting.

What happens if the Board cannot reach a decision?

A lack of response by the Board upholds the Administrative decision at Level II.

Is there an appeal to the Board's decision?

Level III decisions by the Board of Trustees may be appealed to the Commissioner of Education, except as otherwise provided by state or federal law or by District policies.

Whom should I contact if I have questions about the grievance policies or procedures?

Direct grievance questions to Dr. Derek City, Assistant Superintendent for Administrative Services at 817-949-8218 or dcitty@cisdmail.com.