



New York State Education Department

Best-Practices in Resolving Charter School Complaints

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Each charter school has a differentiated approach to amicably resolve complaints that an individual or group may bring to the board of trustees alleging a violation of the provisions of the New York Charter Schools Act, the charter, or any other provision of law relating to the management or operation of the school. These approaches are generally set forth in the charter school's charter, charter agreement, board by-laws, and authorizer-approved policies and procedures. As a resource, the NYSED Charter School Office has developed this list of effective practices that have been implemented in charter schools across the state. This resource is intended to serve as a conversation starter for your school staff.

Education Law §2855(4) outlines a **three-step process** for complaints regarding charter schools, as follows:

1. The parent sends the complaint to the school's board of trustees.
2. The parent sends the complaint to the school's charter entity/authorizer.
3. The parent sends the complaint to the Board of Regents (if the Board of Regents is not the school's authorizer).

Oftentimes, we have seen schools successfully address a parent's complaint informally so the issues do not rise to the level of a complaint pursued through Education Law §2855(4). This saves time for all parties involved and provides an opportunity for the complainant to feel that their concern(s) are being heard.

Top Ten Effective Practices Seen in NYS Charter Schools

1. Ensure that all front-line office and pedagogical staff are familiar with the school's authorizer-approved complaint policy, and can provide a copy to the complainant if needed. Make sure that the school's complaint policy is being implemented with fidelity.
2. Return parent calls within 48 hours.
3. Have translation services available when communicating with parents who speak a language other than English.
4. Respond calmly when conversing with upset stakeholders, including parents. Remember that you represent your entire school community and sometimes the entire charter sector. Schools that have strong relationships with parents often ensure that staff develop conflict resolution skills to address parent frustrations.
5. Obtain and document all relevant information:
 - a. What happened, or what is the concern?
 - b. Who was involved?
 - c. Where did the concern occur?
 - d. When did the concern occur?

- e. Why did the concern occur?
 - f. What is an acceptable solution?
6. Provide information on how parents or other stakeholders can resolve complaints informally. Be seen as a resource! It is important for parents to have a voice and feel that their concerns have been heard.
 7. Include up-to-date contact information for the board of trustees and the school's authorizer in the complaint policy, student/family handbook, and the school's discipline policy. Ensure that all documents contain the same version of the policy.
 8. Reach out to stakeholders, including parents, when notified by NYSED/the authorizer of an imminent complaint.
 9. Develop an internal protocol and timeline for investigations and decisions by the board. This takes a lot of the unknown out of the process and ensures that all stakeholders know what has to happen and when to address complaints. The process should include a procedure for acknowledging receipt of the complaint so that complainants know their concerns are being addressed.
 10. Reach out to the NYSED Charter School Office for assistance (e.g. for delayed special education evaluations). We are here as a resource.
 11. In an emergency:
 - a. Ensure student safety;
 - b. Contact emergency services and/or law enforcement, as needed;
 - c. Contact the school's attorney for advice on how to proceed; and
 - d. Contact your authorizer to provide information and keep them updated so they do not first learn about school related incidents through a complaint or in the news. The more proactive schools are, the better your authorizer is able to help the school work through the issue at hand.