

**NEW SALEM/WENDELL UNION SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
PUBLIC COMPLAINTS**

The Swift River School Committee recognizes that from time to time members of the public – primarily students, parents/guardians or residents of the town - will have complaints. The Committee recognizes that complaints may vary in substance, perspective, intensity, and accuracy; they may be written or expressed orally. Any dissatisfaction brought to a representative of the school district may be considered a complaint. The Committee believes that complaints may offer opportunities for reflection and/or improvement of the school system and therefore expects that complaints be respectfully heard and professionally addressed.

The School Committee believes that complaints are best handled as close to their origin as possible, therefore they need to be brought to the individual or body directly responsible for the issue in question. The proper channeling of complaints for most situations, including issues regarding instruction, discipline or learning materials, should likely be as follows:

1. Teacher
2. School building administrator
3. Superintendent
4. School Committee

If the complainant does not get satisfaction, s/he may bring forth the complaint to the next individual or body designated above. Unless indicated by law, the School Committee is the final body for hearing appeals and all decisions of the Committee are final.

Complaints about specific student(s) and district personnel are required by law to be confidential. In instances that are not guided by legal requirements, the need for and practice regarding confidentiality will be determined by school or district administration.

How individual complaints are handled will vary from situation to situation consistent with state and federal law, or based on the policies and procedures of the Swift River School District. In situations where the initial public complaint is made to the School Committee, it will likely be referred to the appropriate individual or body for any follow-up, investigation, solution or action. The School Committee is not bound to respond to complaints from individuals who are not residents of New Salem or Wendell or who are unrelated to district personnel or students. Similarly, the Committee is not bound to respond to complaints not directly about Swift River personnel or students.

It is recommended but not required that matters which are brought to the Superintendent and/or the School Committee be in writing. Unless otherwise specified by law or policy, written complaints shall receive a written acknowledgment and an appropriate response by the responsible individual or body responsible. The period for a response will vary but is expected to be reasonable to the specifics of the situation.

In situations where the complaint concerns the Committee or Committee members, the School Committee itself will determine what follow-up, investigation, solution or action is appropriate. Public complaints may be brought to individual School Committee members outside of a meeting or during a School Committee meeting. Complaints brought before a School Committee meeting will be in compliance with policy BEDH regarding public participation at school committee meetings. When a complaint is initially made directly to the School Committee, the Committee shall expect a written report or presentation from the Superintendent or Principal

when the situation is resolved, describing the final disposition of the matter. Any presentation must comply with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

#### A. If Complaint Is About District Personnel

For purposes of this policy, district personnel shall comply with definitions in Massachusetts law and shall specifically include district employees, volunteers, central office/Union #28 staff serving the district, contract workers, vendors providing services to the district, and members of the School Committee. All complaints against District Personnel must be in writing and attributed to the individual making the complaint or charge.

Procedures will be developed, for review by the Committee that ensure that prompt and fair attention to complaints against district personnel occurs. These procedures must be made reasonably available to the public including via the Family Handbook and on the school website.

If it appears necessary, a representative of the school/district administration, the person(s) who made the complaint, or the district personnel involved, may request a meeting with the School Committee. The School Committee retains the right to determine if whether it will convene such a meeting or not. If a meeting is convened, state law will determine if whether such a meeting should be an open, public meeting or an executive session of the Committee; in either case all statutory requirements must be observed and confidentiality will be expected, consistent with legal requirements.

SOURCE: MASC

LEGAL REFS.: 603 CMR 26:09 and 26.10

First Reading: December 15, 2011

Second Reading, First Vote: January 19, 2012

Final Vote: February 16, 2012

Amended October 8, 2015

First Reading: November 5, 2015

Second Reading, First Vote: December 3, 2015

Final Vote: January 7, 2016