

River Valley Charter School- Complaint Policy*

May 6, 2015

It is the policy of the RVCS Board of Trustees that all complaints should be resolved as close to their source as possible. All members of the school community and all outside parties involved in a dispute are encouraged to deal directly with the other parties involved. Any complaint should only move to a higher level of authority after direct communications between those initially involved fail to produce a resolution.

All members of the school community, as well as the Complaint committee, will be expected to make all reasonable efforts to reach a solution that is acceptable to all parties involved. Any party bringing a concern to the Complaint committee will be made aware of the requirements for filing a complaint, as well as all avenues for resolving a complaint.

Composition of the Complaint committee

The Complaint Committee shall be composed entirely of River Valley Charter School trustees. The Committee shall at all times include at least one officer of the Board. The Committee shall at all times be chaired by a trustee other than an officer of the Board. The committee shall have no fewer than five members. [The Board will convene a complaint committee on an ad-hoc basis when a complaint is received.](#)

Authority and Role of the Complaint Committee

The role of the Complaint Committee is to review a complaint that has not been resolved at the staff or administrative levels. The Committee must balance their duty to protect the interests of the Charter and the school as a whole with the concerns of the party filing the complaint. In general, it is the opinion of the Board of Trustees that the interests of the school and those of the individuals within should coincide if viewed from an appropriate distance. It is the job of this committee to find and take such a view. The committee can make recommendations to any party for corrective action. In cases where the committee feels the scope of the dispute warrants the opinion or review of the full board, the committee will prepare its conclusions, present them to the Board, and request a vote.

To these ends, the Complaint committee is authorized by the full Board to review the conduct, relative to a specific complaint, of all employees and representatives of the River Valley Charter School. The Complaint Committee shall be authorized to make recommendations designed to resolve existing complaints (and avoid future complaints) regarding staff conduct and educational policies. The Committee shall also have the authority to review the actions of any parent, student, or any other individual or group involved in a formal written complaint.

Notes Regarding the Nature of the Complaint Process

The Board of Trustees is aware that any complaint or issue that reaches the Complaint Committee level will naturally have a strong emotional element. It is the job of those on the committee to evaluate the issue in a thoughtful and respectful manner, without allowing the emotions involved to overwhelm their work. The Committee will be as impartial as possible and strive not to prejudge any individual or situation. Any party involved in a complaint should be prepared to present a factual account of the situation, to remain respectful of other people and other perspectives, and to allow the committee reasonable time to do its work.

Parties bringing a Complaint related to employment or involving an employee of the school should be aware that the School Director holds primary responsibility and authority for the oversight and employment of the school staff. The Board of Trustees is not involved directly in the normal hiring, firing, or other management of any school staff or employees other than the director her/himself. The Complaint Committee will respect this separation of responsibilities, and may ask the parties to return to the Director to achieve a resolution of employee/employment related issues. This does not preclude the Complaint Committee, with a supporting vote from the Board, from making employment/employee related decision in cases where such is warranted.

*Revised May, 2015. The Complaint process and Complaint policy will replace the Grievance process and Grievance policy in its entirety. The Grievance Committee shall be renamed the Complaint Committee. This reflects language used by the Charter School Office in their guidance to Massachusetts Charter schools.

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Steps of the Complaint Process

Step One: A parent, guardian, or other individuals or groups should contact those directly involved in the issue or decision. With concerns relating to students, begin by speaking with the head teacher. Communicate the complaint as clearly as possible, and identify actions that will lead to a resolution of the issue. Work in a cooperative environment to resolve the complaint based upon the actions identified.

Step Two: If the complaint has not been resolved to your satisfaction, speak with the Director of the River Valley Charter School and develop a plan to resolve the issue. Any such plan may require review and revision during the process.

Step Three: If your complaint remains unresolved after providing the School Director a reasonable amount of time to bring a solution to bear, notify the Chair of the Board of Trustees. You will be asked to file a formal written report detailing the specifics of your complaint and requesting that the Complaint Committee review your case. Your report must clearly document the efforts made to comply with steps one and two of this process. Each party named in your complaint will receive a copy of your report.

Step Four: Your written report will be reviewed by the Complaint Committee of the Board of Trustees. If the committee believes that more effort can reasonably be made to resolve the issue at the staff or Director level, it will return the complaint to the appropriate level. The committee will provide an initial response to your report within 10 days.

If the committee finds that steps one and two of this process have been exhausted, it will schedule meetings with all parties involved in the complaint. The purpose of these meetings will be to gather information, determine specific points of conflict, and identify possible solutions. The Complaint committee will review the conduct, decisions, and policies that were involved in the complaint.

The Complaint Committee may, if appropriate, schedule a meeting that includes all parties in order to mediate an acceptable resolution. Alternatively, the Committee may reach conclusions regarding merits of the complaint and present its own recommendations and conclusions. The committee will issue a formal written response to the complaint at the end of this process. The Complaint Committee will attempt to issue its report within thirty days of receipt of the formal written complaint, but each complaint will warrant its own schedule

Step Five: After completion of its work and the issuance of its final report, the Complaint Committee will report to the Board with an executive summary of the complaint and its resolution. If necessary, the Board may be asked by the Committee to vote on policy or other action items arising from the Committee's conclusions.

A complaining party who believes their complaint has not been adequately addressed by the Complaint Committee of the Board of Trustees can submit the complaint in writing to the Commissioner of Education. The laws governing Massachusetts Charter Schools are M.G.L. c. 71 section 89, and 603 CMR 1.00. A copy of these laws will be provided by River Valley Charter School upon request.

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