



POLICY TITLE:	Community Complaint Policy
ADOPTION/EFFECTIVE DATE:	September 30, 2011
MOST RECENTLY UPDATED:	December 14, 2020

PURPOSE

Parents/guardians and community members may file a formal complaint with DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) pertaining to such topics as academics, bullying, discipline, enrollment, health and safety, special education, transportation, uniforms, and other issues that the school has not addressed.¹ When a parent/guardian or community member reaches out to DC PCSB with a complaint against a school, the primary goal is to ensure that the school has (a) followed its complaint process in order to address the person’s grievance (See *D.C. Code § 38-1802.04(c)(13)*); (b) is in compliance with its charter agreement; and (c) has not violated any applicable laws.

POLICY

Before contacting DC PCSB, parents/guardians and community members who have concerns or unresolved issues with public charter schools should follow these steps:

1. Ask for and follow the school’s formal complaint process.
2. Contact the school’s Board of Trustees if, after following the complaint process, the school is unresponsive or unwilling to assist in resolving the issue in a timely manner. If the school has not provided the complainant with the contact information for members of the Board, DC PCSB will provide that information.
3. If the previous steps do not yield resolution, consider asking the school to engage in an informal mediation process, if applicable.

¹ Some issues may not fall within DC PCSB’s purview as the charter authorizer. For example, barring unusual circumstances, DC PCSB will generally log school personnel and human resource disputes as “concerns” not complaints, as the School Reform Act broadly grants control over personnel issues to a charter school, within the limits imposed by the law and the school’s charter. Please reference the footnote on page two for a definition of concern.



Filing and Responding to a Complaint

In the event parents/guardians or community members are not satisfied after filing a complaint with the school, they can file a formal community complaint with DC PCSB by emailing complaints@dcpcsb.org, calling the community complaints hotline at (202) 963-0968, or submitting public comment. DC PCSB staff will ask the complainant a series of questions, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Caller's contact information, including call-back number and email
- Information about the student (e.g., grade level, IEP status), if applicable
- Whether this is the first time the individual is calling to report this complaint to DC PCSB
- Confirmation that the caller has asked for the school's complaint process, including date(s) and whether the school has provided the process
- The explicit steps that the caller has made as per the school's complaint process, including any evidence of responsiveness and unresponsiveness of the school, including date(s)
- The date(s) the caller has contacted the school's Board of Trustees and the result of this contact
- A detailed account of the complaint

DC PCSB staff will determine whether the issue raised by the caller should be filed as either a complaint or a concern.² DC PCSB will capture the caller's narrative in an unfiltered script. Within two business days, DC PCSB will notify the school's complaint point of contact and its designated Board of Trustees member of the complaint via email and include the complaint itself (either the email or a phone call summary).

Schools should begin working to address the issues raised upon receipt of the complaint. Within five business days, the school must respond to DC PCSB via email or phone call acknowledging receipt of the complaint and provide information regarding the steps the school has taken to address the issues raised. Within seven business days of receiving a complaint, DC PCSB will follow up with

² A concern is defined as a case where there is no violation of the school's policies, the charter agreement, or the law, but the caller is frustrated by the school's action or inaction and/or may require further information to address their issues. In this case, DC PCSB does not require the school to provide a response but will share the issues raised with the school.



the complainant by phone or email to inquire on the status of the complaint. If the complaint has not been resolved, DC PCSB may contact the school for more information.

For complaints regarding access to student learning or the health and safety of students and staff (e.g., issues with access to virtual learning, allegations of corporal punishment, sexual misconduct or abuse), the school must respond to the complainant within one business day. The school must subsequently provide a response to DC PCSB within two business days via email or phone acknowledging receipt of the complaint and provide information on how the school is addressing the issues. When a serious health and safety issue arises (e.g., allegations of corporal punishment, sexual misconduct or abuse), DC PCSB will alert the necessary authorities, including the Metropolitan Police Department and Child Family Services Agency,³ and may visit the school.

Escalation and Intervention

DC PCSB may escalate a complaint if DC PCSB determines it is necessary. Reasons for escalation include, but are not limited to:

- Systemic allegations made against a school that the school denies (e.g., academic dishonesty, manipulation of school attendance data, or failing to follow the school's discipline policy)
- Allegations made against a school that relate to serious student health and/or safety issues
- A series of complaints that constitutes a pattern of the same or similar issues
- Non-responsiveness to community complaint notifications
- Failure to make a good faith effort to address the issues identified in the complaint

In such cases, DC PCSB may intervene with one or a combination of the below actions.

³ Where applicable, the school must also make any and all required reports to the Metropolitan Police Department and/or the Child and Family Services Agency under DC Code § 4-1321.02.



Early Warning and Out of Compliance Notice

For non-responsiveness to community complaint notifications, DC PCSB staff may issue an early warning or out of compliance notice (in alignment with DC PCSB's Data and Document Submission Policy).⁴

Desk Audit

DC PCSB staff will ask the school to provide a written rationale for the complaint or practice as well as supplemental documentation. Based on the information reviewed, DC PCSB will close the audit with recommendations or pursue further action, including an on-site audit, staff-to-staff meeting, or other Board action. Staff may continue to monitor a school after an audit is closed and may request progress updates in subsequent months. Past audit results may be considered in determining future actions.

Unannounced Visit

DC PCSB may make unannounced visits to schools to observe and take notes on health, safety, and instruction, which will be shared with the school. Staff may continue to monitor a school after an unannounced visit and may request progress updates. Past visits may be considered in determining future actions.

On-Site Audit

DC PCSB staff will visit the school to review any relevant documentation, interview staff, and/or conduct observations. Based on the information reviewed, DC PCSB will close the audit with written recommendations or pursue further action, including a staff-to-staff meeting or other Board action. Staff may continue to monitor a school after an audit is close and may request progress updates. Past audit results may be considered in determining future actions.

Staff-to-Staff Meeting

DC PCSB staff may request a formal meeting with relevant school staff to discuss the complaint(s) and the results of desk or on-site audit(s), if applicable.

⁴ DC PCSB's Data and Document Submission Policy can be found at <https://dcpcsb.org/data-and-document-submission-policy>.



Board-to-Board Meeting

Board members from DC PCSB and the school may meet to discuss significant community complaints. The volume and/or severity of the grievance(s) will be considered prior to scheduling a Board-to-Board meeting.

Notice of Concern

The Board may issue a Notice of Concern if (a) after DC PCSB's escalation process, the school continues to be out of compliance with applicable law, its charter agreement, or its own policies, and/or (b) the school's actions are deemed systemic. Notices of Concern require the school to come before the DC PCSB Board at a public meeting, and are taken into consideration during each school's five- and ten-year charter reviews, the charter renewal process, and enrollment ceiling increase requests. The Notice of Concern will provide a timeframe for the school to correct the issue. Uncured Notices may lead to further Board action.

Closing Out a Complaint

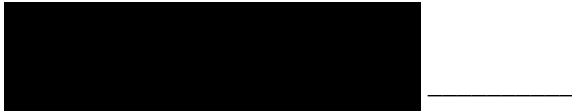
DC PCSB considers a complaint "closed" when the school has documented that it has made a good faith effort to address the issue(s) raised. A school demonstrates "good faith effort" when it makes reasonable attempts to respond to and address all the complainant's grievances. This includes providing detailed documentation in response to each issue raised. Should a complainant remain dissatisfied but the school has demonstrated that it (a) has followed its own policies and procedures; (b) is not in violation of the law or its charter; and (c) made a good faith effort to resolve the concerns, DC PCSB may consider the complaint closed. In such cases, DC PCSB may encourage schools and complainants to engage in a formal mediation process.⁵

The outcomes or resolutions of all complaints will be documented for DC PCSB's records. Intermittently and at the end of the school year, DC PCSB will share with each school's designated staff and board members the aggregate complaints received for that school.

⁵ For further information on formal mediation or conflict resolution processes, contact the DC Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education at the following link: <https://sboe.dc.gov/page/office-ombudsman-public-education>.



Board Approval Acknowledged By:



Rick Cruz
DC PCSB Board Chair

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