

Personnel Certified/Non-Certified

Students

Title IX: Grievance Procedure/Complaint Process

Filing of a Formal Complaint

The Board of Education (Board) encourages all sexual discrimination victims based on the Title IX policy, whether students or employees, to promptly report such claims. Timely reporting of complaints facilitates the investigation and resolution of such complaints. Any person may report sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, whether or not the person reporting is the alleged victim of conduct that would constitute sex discrimination or sexual harassment.

Such a report may be made in person, by mail, by telephone, or by email, using the contact information listed for the Title IX Coordinator, or by any other means that results in the Title IX Coordinator receiving the person's verbal or written report.

Such reports may be made at any time, including during non-business hours, using the Title IX Coordinator's listed telephone number, email address, or by mail to the office address. Any third party, as well as the complainant, may report sexual harassment. This includes parents and guardians of students.

Any employee who believes that he/she has been sexually harassed or otherwise discriminated against on the basis of sex should submit a complaint to the Title IX Coordinator. If the Title IX Coordinator is the subject of the complaint, the written complaint should be submitted to the Superintendent of Schools or his/her designee.

A student who believes that he/she has been subjected to sex discrimination or sexual harassment should make a written complaint to The Title IX Coordinator or the building principal or his/her designee. As age-appropriate, a student may be assisted by a staff member in preparing the written statement. A student may also notify any employee of any school in the District who shall bring the allegation to the Title IX coordinator's attention.

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Filing of a Formal Complaint (continued)

The complaint should state the:

1. Name of the complainant,
2. Date of the complaint,
3. Date(s) of the alleged harassment/discrimination,
4. Name(s) of the harasser(s) or discriminator(s),
5. Location/manner where such harassment/discrimination occurred,
6. Names of any witness(es) to the harassment/discrimination,
7. Detailed statement of the circumstances constituting the alleged harassment/discrimination, and
8. Remedy requested.

At the time of filing a formal complaint, the complainant must be participating in or attempting to participate in the education program or activity of the District with which the formal complaint is filed.

This grievance/investigative procedure shall be followed before imposing any disciplinary sanctions or other actions that are not supportive measures against a respondent.

Sexual harassment allegations in any formal complaint will be investigated. The formal complaint can be filed by a complainant or signed by the Title IX Coordinator.

The complainant's wishes regarding whether the District/school investigates shall be respected unless the Title IX Coordinator determines that signing a formal complaint to initiate an investigation over the complainant's wishes is not clearly unreasonable in light of the known circumstances.

If the allegations contained in a formal complaint do not meet the definition of sexual harassment contained within the policy or did not occur in the District's educational; program or activity against a person in the United States, the District will, as required, dismiss such allegations for purposes of Title IX but may still address the allegations in any manner deemed appropriate by the District.

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Filing of a Formal Complaint (continued)

The District shall keep confidential the identity of any individual who has made a report or complaint of sex discrimination, including any individual who made a report or filed a formal complaint of sexual harassment, including any complainant, any individual who has been reported to be the perpetrator of sex discrimination, any respondent, and any witness except as permitted by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) or required by law or to conduct any investigations or judicial proceeding under the final sexual harassment regulations.

Any student or employee making a complaint shall be provided a copy of the Title IX policy and administrative regulation (#4000.1/#5145.44)

Definitions

Sex discrimination for purposes of the Title IX policy occurs when an individual, because of his or her sex, is denied participation in or the benefits of any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. It includes when the District, as an employer, refuses to hire, disciplines, or discharges any individual, or otherwise discriminates against an individual with respect to such individual's compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment on the basis of the individual's sex.

Sexual harassment for purposes of this Title IX policy includes any of the three types of misconduct on the basis of sex, all of which jeopardize the equal access to education that Title IX is designed to protect:

1. Any instance of *quid pro quo* harassment by a school's employee;
2. Any unwelcome conduct that a reasonable person would find so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it denies a person's equal educational access; or
3. Any instance of sexual assault (as defined in the Clery Act), dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking (as defined in the Violence Against Women's Act).

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Definitions (continued)

Program or activity includes those locations, events, or circumstances over which the District exercises substantial control over both the respondent and the context in which the sexual harassment occurred.

Actual knowledge means notice of sexual harassment or allegations of sexual harassment to the District's Title IX Coordinator or to any employee of the school district.

Title IX Coordinator is the individual designated by the Board to coordinate its efforts to comply with Title IX responsibilities.

Complainant is the individual who is alleged to be the victim of conduct that could constitute sexual harassment.

Respondent is the individual who has been reported to be the perpetrator of conduct that could constitute sexual harassment.

Formal complaint is the document filed by a complainant or signed by the Title IX Coordinator alleging sexual harassment against a respondent and requesting that the District investigate sexual harassment allegations.

Supportive measures are individualized services reasonably available that are non-punitive, non-disciplinary, and not unreasonably burdensome to the other party while designed to ensure equal educational access, protect safety, or deter sexual harassment. Supportive measures may include counseling, course-related adjustments, modifications of work or class schedules, campus escort services, increased security and monitoring of certain areas of campus, and mutual restrictions on contacts between the parties.

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Grievance/Investigative Process

The following investigative procedure will be utilized upon the receipt of a written formal complaint or when knowledge of a sexual harassment allegation is made available to an employee of the District. The District personnel involved in the implementation of this process shall operate under the presumption that the respondent is not responsible (a presumption of innocence) so that the District bears the burden of proof and the standard of evidence is correctly applied.

Step 1: Notification of the Involved Parties

The Title IX Coordinator or his/her designee will notify in writing the involved parties that a complaint exists, and also on an ongoing basis if the District decides to include additional allegations during the course of the investigation, and that an investigation will promptly begin.

The written notice shall contain information about the grievance/investigation process, including information about any informal resolution process, and sufficient details about the allegations at hand, the conduct allegedly constituting sexual harassment, and the date and location of the alleged incident, if known, and include the identities of the parties involved in the incident, the complainant's and respondent's rights, the policy that the alleged behavior violates, and the contact information for the investigator.

The notice shall contain a statement that the respondent is presumed not responsible for the alleged conduct and that responsibility will be determined at the conclusion of the grievance/investigation process.

The notice shall also advise the parties that they may have an advisor of their choice, who may be, but does not need to be, an attorney and that they may inspect and review evidence obtained in the investigation, throughout the investigation.

The notice shall also inform the parties of any provisions in the District's code of conduct that prohibits knowingly making false statements or knowingly submitting false information during the grievance process.

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Grievance/Investigative Process (continued)

Step 1: Notification of the Involved Parties (continued)

The notice can also be used to schedule an intake meeting, either in person or electronically, to discuss basic information about the allegations and to determine the next steps of the investigation.

The District's response shall include refraining from disciplining a respondent without following the Title IX grievance/investigative process, which includes investigating the formal complaint of sexual harassment.

The Title IX Coordinator or his/her designee shall promptly discuss with the alleged victim (complainant) the availability of supportive measures and consider the complainant's wishes with respect to such measures. The complainant shall be offered such measures with or without the filing of a formal complaint. The process for filing a formal complaint will be explained to the complainant.

A complaint may be dismissed if the complainant notifies the Title IX Coordinator or his/her designee at any time that he/she wishes to withdraw the complaint or allegation. The complaint shall also be dismissed if the respondent's enrollment or employment in the District ends, or if specific circumstances prevent the District from gathering evidence sufficient to reach a determination about the complaint.

The District may choose to remove a respondent from its education program or activity on an emergency basis after the District has conducted a safety and risk analysis and determined that such emergency removal is necessary to protect a student or other individual from an immediate threat to physical health or safety.

The District may also, as applicable, place an employee-respondent on administrative leave during the pendency of the grievance/investigative process.

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Grievance/Investigative Process (continued)

Step 2: Fact Gathering

If the complainant decides to proceed with the investigative process, information is to be gathered related to the allegations. This process shall include, but not be limited to, the collection of documents, audio and video recordings, social media posts, and cell phone records.

The complainant and the respondent are to be interviewed, asking them to explain their side of the occurrence(s) and their relationship with the other party. The names of potential witnesses and any other details that may be pertinent to the investigation shall be sought.

A party's written consent shall be required before using the party's medical, psychological, or similar treatment records during the grievance/investigative process. The District shall not access, consider, disclose, or otherwise use a party's records that are maintained by a physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, or other recognized professional or paraprofessional acting in such individual's capacity, unless the District obtains that party's voluntary written consent.

All questioning shall exclude evidence about the complainant's sexual predisposition or prior sexual behavior unless such questions and evidence are offered to prove someone other than the respondent committed the conduct alleged by the complainant or if the questions or evidence are offered to prove consent.

The District recognizes that during the time frame needed to promptly conclude the grievance/investigative process there may be temporary delays based on good causes, including but not limited to, law enforcement involvement, absence of a party, witness or advisor, or translation or accommodation needs. Notice of such delays will be provided by the investigator explaining any reasons for the delay.

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Grievance/Investigative Process (continued)

Step 3: Review and Analysis of Information

The trained Title IX investigator, after collecting as much relevant information as possible, shall evaluate such evidence without prejudice of the facts at issue and free from conflicts of interest or bias for or against either party.

The investigator shall provide both the complainant and the respondent at least ten days to review the collected and provided information before any determination is reached regarding responsibility. Such a review period is to allow for any additional information from either party or the opportunity to address a discrepancy. The investigator shall afford each party the opportunity to submit written, relevant questions that a party wants asked of any party or witness, provide each party with the answers, and allow for additional, limited follow-up questions from each party.

Step 4: Determine a Violation (Determinations of Responsibility)

A separate decision-maker will determine if a violation has occurred. (The decision-maker is not the same person as the investigator or the Title IX Coordinator.) The decision-maker will then review, weigh, analyze, and compare the information to see if there is sufficient information to determine whether a violation occurred. The District will apply its chosen standard of evidence to determine responsibility. The District shall provide the same standard of evidence to all formal complaints of sexual harassment whether the respondent is a student or an employee, including a faculty member.

The Board has chosen to use the preponderance of evidence standard as the District's standard of evidence.

The *preponderance of evidence standard* of proof means that the information gathered concludes that the allegations are 'more likely than not' to be true, or more than 50 percent likely. This standard requires more convincing proof than 'probable cause' and less than "beyond a reasonable doubt.

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Grievance/Investigative Process (continued)

Step 5: Written Report and Notification of Outcome to the Parties

After a determination has been made, the final investigative report shall be prepared. The report shall contain the initial allegations, the policy violated, if any, the parties involved, the evidence gathered, a summary of the interviews and any other relevant information, an explanation of how and why the decision-maker reached the conclusions. The written determination shall also include a statement of and rationale for the result as to each allegation, including a determination of responsibility, any disciplinary sanctions, and whether remedies to restore or preserve equal access to the educational program or activity will be provided.

A copy of the final report shall be sent to each party at least ten days before it is finalized in order to give the respective parties the opportunity to respond.

After the outcome is finalized, a written determination of the outcome shall be sent to both parties. This notice shall include information about the outcome, reasons supporting the determination, and, depending on the conclusion, the next steps in the Title IX process.

The District shall implement remedies for a complainant if a respondent is found responsible for sexual harassment. Such remedies should be reasonably calculated to end the discrimination, and appropriate corrective action and/or disciplinary action aimed at preventing the recurrence of the harassment or discrimination, as deemed appropriate by the Superintendent or his/her designee.

Remedies offered may include the same actions described as supportive measures, but remedies need not avoid punishing or burdening the respondent.

Step 6: Appeal Process

After notification to the complainant and respondent of the outcome, either or both parties may appeal the decision in writing, within ten days, to the Superintendent of Schools or his/her designee to request an administrative review. An appeal can be filed on the basis of procedural irregularity that affected the outcome, newly discovered evidence that was not reasonably available at the time of determination and could affect the outcome, and/or conflict of interest or bias of the Title IX personnel (Title IX Coordinator, investigator, or decision-maker) that affected

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Step 6: Appeal Process (continued)

or could affect the outcome of the matter. In an administrative review, the Superintendent or his/her designee, shall review the decision maker's written report, the information collected by the Title IX Coordinator and the investigator(s). The Superintendent or his/her designee will determine if further action and/or investigation is warranted. The Superintendent or his/her designee shall respond to the party(s) requesting the appeal within fifteen school days following the receipt of the written appeal request.

Note: The decision-maker for an appeal may not be the Title IX Coordinator, investigator, or initial decision-maker. The appeal decision-maker must have also received the training previously described.

Step 7: Informal Resolution Process

The District shall offer and facilitate an informal resolution option, such as but not limited to, mediation or restorative justice, provided both parties, complainant, and respondent, give voluntary, informed, written consent to attempt an informal resolution to the complaint.

The Board does require as a condition of enrollment or continuing enrollment, employment or continuing employment, or enjoyment of any other right, the waiver of the right to a formal investigation, and adjudication of formal complaints of sexual harassment. The District does not require the parties to participate in an informal resolution process and will not offer such a process unless a formal complaint is filed.

At any time before agreeing to a resolution, the Board recognizes the right of any party to withdraw from the informal resolution process and to resume the grievance/investigative process concerning the formal complaint.

The Board will not offer or facilitate an informal resolution process to resolve allegations that an employee sexually harassed a student.

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Other Provisions

Some sex discrimination complaints may raise a concern about bullying behavior. In that case, the Title IX Coordinator or his/her designee shall notify the Safe School Climate Specialist or designee who shall coordinate any bullying investigation to ensure that any such bullying investigation complies with the requirements of applicable Board policies.

Retaliation against any individual who complains according to the Board's policy is strictly forbidden. The District will take the necessary actions to prevent retaliation due to filing a complaint or the involvement of any individual in the grievance/investigative process.

The District shall create and maintain for seven years records of any actions, including any supportive measures, taken in response to a report or formal complaint of sexual harassment as detailed in the Title IX policy.

The District, in responding to any claim of sexual discrimination under Title IX, shall never deprive any individual of his/her rights guaranteed under the U.S. constitution.

At any time, a complainant alleging sex discrimination or sexual harassment may file a formal complaint with the Office for Civil Rights, Boston Office, U.S. Department of Education, 8th Floor, 5 Post Office Square, Boston, MA 02109-3921 (1-617-289-0111)

The Title IX Coordinator for the District is Allison Van Etten, whose office is located at District Office 40 Field St. Pawcatuck, CT 06379 and whose telephone number is (860) 599-0233, and whose email address is avanetten@stoningtonschools.org

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Legal Reference: United States Constitution, Article XIV
Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII, 42 U.S.C. S2000e2(a).
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Policy Guidance (N915.035) on Current Issues of Sexual Harassment, Effective 10/15/88. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 USCS §1681, *et seq.*
Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 34 CFR §106, *et seq.*
Title IX Final Rule, 34 CFR 106.45 *et seq.*, May 6, 2020
34 CFR Section 106.8(b), OCR Guidelines for Title IX.
Definitions, OCR Guidelines on Sexual Harassment, Fed. Reg. Vol 62, #49, 29 CFR Sec. 1606.8 (a) 62 Fed Reg. 12033 (March 13, 1997) and 66 Fed. Reg. 5512 (January 19, 2001)
The Clery Act, 20 U.S.C. §1092(f)
The Violence Against Women Act, 34 U.S.C. §12291(a)
Mentor Savings Bank, FSB v. Vinson 477 US.57 (1986)
Faragher v. City of Boca Raton, No. 97-282 (U.S. Supreme Court, June 26, 1998)
Burlington Industries, Inc. v. Ellerth, No. 97-569, (U.S. Supreme Court, June 26, 1998)
Gebbs v. Lago Vista Indiana School District, No. 99-1866, (U.S. Supreme Court, June 26, 1998)
Davis v. Monro County Board of Education, No. 97-843, (U.S. Supreme Court, May 24, 1999.)
Connecticut General Statutes
46a60 Discriminatory employment practices prohibited.
Conn. Agencies Regs. §46a-54-200 through §46a-54-207
Constitution of the State of Connecticut, Article I, Section 20.
P.A. 19-16 An Act Combatting Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment

_____ **PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

**COMPLAINT FORM REGARDING SEX DISCRIMINATION AND
SEXUAL HARASSMENT**

Name of the complainant: _____

Date of the complaint: _____

Date of the alleged discrimination/harassment: _____

Name or names of the discriminator(s) or harasser(s): _____

Location where such discrimination/harassment occurred: _____

Name(s) of any witness(es) to the discrimination/harassment: _____

Detailed statement of the circumstances constituting the alleged discrimination or harassment:

Remedy requested by the complainant:

Signature of Complainant:

Date: