

SECTION 504 DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCEDURES

The Gloucester County School Board does not discriminate against individuals on the basis of disability. Where a student believes that he or she has been discriminated against on the basis of disability, the student shall have the right to file an informal or formal grievance in accordance with the following procedures:

A. FORMAL PROCEDURE

1. Filing a Complaint

Any student who believes he or she has been the victim of discrimination on the basis of a disability should submit a complaint alleging discrimination as soon as possible to the compliance officer designated in this policy (Compliance Officer) or to any other school or School Division staff. The complaint should be submitted as soon as possible and generally within 15 school days of the alleged discrimination. Any employee who has knowledge of conduct which may constitute discrimination shall immediately report such conduct to the Compliance Officer, their supervisor, or to any other school or School Division staff.

The complainant should use the "Complaint of Discrimination" form (JB-E) to make a complaint of discrimination. However, oral complaints shall also be accepted. The complaint should be filed with the school principal, other school or school division staff, or the Compliance Officer. School or school division staff receiving a complaint of discrimination shall forward it to the school principal; who shall immediately forward the complaint of discrimination to the Compliance Officer. Any complaint that involves the Compliance Officer shall be reported to the Superintendent.

The complaint and the identity of the complainant, the individual who reported the alleged discrimination (if other than the complainant), and the persons allegedly responsible for the discrimination will not be disclosed except as required by law or policy, as necessary to fully investigate the complaint, or as authorized by the complainant.

2. Investigation

Upon receipt of a report or complaint of discrimination, the Compliance Officer shall immediately authorize or undertake an investigation. The investigation may be conducted by school staff or a third party designated by the School Division. The investigation shall be completed as soon as practicable, which should generally be not more than 15 school days after receipt of the complaint of alleged discrimination by the Compliance Officer. Within 3 school days of receiving the complaint, the Compliance Officer shall send written notice that the complaint has been received to the complainant and the person or persons allegedly responsible for the discrimination.

Also upon receiving the complaint, the Compliance Officer shall determine whether interim measures should be taken pending the outcome of the investigation. If the Compliance Officer determines that more than 15 school days will be required to investigate the complaint, he or she will notify the complainant and the persons allegedly responsible for the discrimination of the reasons for the extended investigation and of the date by which the investigation is projected to be concluded. The investigation may consist of personal interviews with the complainant, the persons allegedly responsible for the discrimination, and any others who may have knowledge of the alleged discrimination or the circumstances giving rise to the complaint. The investigation may also include the inspection of any documents or information deemed relevant by the investigator. The School Division shall take necessary steps to protect the complainant and others pending the completion of the investigation.

Whether a particular action or incident constitutes a violation of this policy requires a case by case determination based on all of the facts and circumstances revealed by a complete and thorough investigation.

The Compliance Officer shall issue a written report to the Superintendent upon completion of the investigation. If the complaint involves the Superintendent, then the report shall be sent to the School Board. The report shall include a determination of whether the allegations are substantiated, whether this policy was violated, and recommendations for corrective action, if any. The Compliance Officer's written report, and all written notices sent pursuant to this policy shall be maintained and distributed in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

3. Action by the Superintendent

Within 10 school days of receiving the Compliance Officer's report, the Superintendent or designee shall issue a decision regarding: (1) whether this policy was violated and, if so (2) what action, if any, will be taken. This decision must be provided in writing to the complainant. If the Superintendent determines that discrimination occurred, the School Division shall take prompt, appropriate action to address and remedy the harm and prevent any recurrence. Such action may include discipline up to and including recommending that a student be expelled or that an employee be discharged.

4. Appeal

If the Superintendent or designee determines that no discrimination occurred, the complainant may appeal this determination to the School Board within 5 calendar days of receiving the decision. Notice of appeal must be filed with the Superintendent, who shall forward the Compliance Officer's report and any documentation or information deemed relevant by the Compliance Officer during the course of the investigation to the School Board. The School Board shall make a decision within 30 calendar days of receiving the record. The School Board may require oral or written argument from the complainant, the Superintendent, and any other individual it deems appropriate. An extension of the 30 calendar day limit may occur if necessary as determined by the School Board Chair.

If the Superintendent or designee determines that discrimination occurred and discipline is imposed, the disciplined person (i.e. student or employee) may appeal the disciplinary sanction in accordance with existing School Board policies and regulations.

5. Compliance Officer and Alternate Compliance Officer

The School Board has designated the Director of Student Services [804-693-7863] as the Compliance Officer responsible for identifying, preventing and remedying discrimination. Complaints of discrimination may also be made to the Assistant Superintendent of Administrative Services [804-693-5304], the Alternate Compliance Officer. The Compliance Officer duties may include the following:

- a. receive reports and complaints of discrimination;
- b. conduct or oversee the investigation of any alleged discrimination;
- c. assess the training needs of the School Division in connection with this policy;
- d. arrange necessary training to achieve compliance with this policy;

B. INFORMAL PROCEDURE

If the complainant and the persons allegedly responsible for the discrimination agree, the school principal, designee, or the Compliance Officer may arrange for them to resolve the complaint informally with the assistance of a counselor, teacher, or other school or School Division staff.

If the complainant and the persons allegedly responsible for the discrimination agree to attempt to resolve the complaint informally, they shall each be informed that they have the right to abandon the informal procedure at any time in favor of the initiation of the above formal procedures.

If the complaint is resolved informally, the counselor, teacher, or other school or School Division staff shall notify the School Principal of the resolution. The School Principal shall notify the complainant, the persons allegedly responsible for the discrimination, and the Compliance Officer in writing that the complaint has been resolved informally.

C. RETALIATION

Retaliation against students, school staff, or School Division staff who report discrimination or participate in the related proceedings is prohibited. The School Division shall take appropriate action against any student or employee who retaliates against another student or employee who reports alleged discrimination or participates in related proceedings.

D. FALSE CHARGES

Students, school staff, or School Division staff who make false charges of discrimination shall be subject to disciplinary action.

ADOPTED: April 10, 2007

REVISED: January 10, 2012

LEGAL REFERENCES: 29 U.S.C. § 794
34 CFR Part 104.7(b)
GCPS Guidelines for Section 504 Rehabilitation Act of 1973

CROSS REFERENCES: JB Equal Educational Opportunities/Nondiscrimination
JB-E Report of Discrimination
JO Student Records