



BOARD POLICY MANUAL	
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Policy Section <b>Society</b>	Identification <b>SOC-2006</b>

## DISPUTE RECONCILIATION POLICY AND PROCEDURE

### Context

The presence of a common vision for Christian education is one of the basic reasons why Christians have joined their efforts to establish schools. This vision of Christian education is usually broad enough to encompass the individual desires of many people.

However, this common vision of Christian education may not always express fully the views of certain people within the membership of the society. Although unified by the constitution of the school society, the community may often experience diversity of opinion.

The challenge for a Christian school society is how to continue to grow and develop with this diversity of opinion within the school society. We must learn how to deal with differences and disputes properly.

Differences of opinion and outlook will always exist between members of our school society. We must strive to be clear, truthful and loving in our debates. The judicious settling of disputes should affirm the development of a common bond within the school society. Debates over issues should assist in maintaining the focus of the school's vision on biblical truth and sound, pedagogical practice.

### Principles

When disputes and complaints arise, there needs to be a set of principles to guide the procedures to be followed in resolving these matters:

1. Get all the facts. Listen to both sides of the story. Keep in mind the possibility of bias or short-sightedness on the part of another person's account. Avoid jumping to conclusions or taking impetuous actions.
2. Speak directly to the person involved. It is a clear biblical principle (Matthew 18) that one first approach the brother or sister in the Lord with whom you have a complaint. This is also to be done discreetly.
3. *Avoid speaking to inappropriate people.* Friends and relatives are not the people to speak to first. Speaking ill of someone without their knowledge is not biblical. These actions contribute to gossip, slander and defamation of character.
4. *Use the democratic process to have your point of view heard.* Our school society is structured around a democratic model of government in which each member has the right to speak and to vote. Within the societal structure, there are persons placed in positions of responsibility whose task it is to listen to and judiciously deal with objections and disputes.
5. *Accept the democratic process to have your difficulties resolved.* Learn to accept the resolution of a problem even though you do not agree fully with it. Submit in Christian love to the ruling of the authorities. Consider the matter dealt with, unless the resolution of a matter is in violation of the law or of one's conscience before God.

### Initial Contact

One of the first problems a person encounters when a complaint is to be raised is to determine to whom to properly address the problem. This is the important first step towards reconciliation and it must be done with care. The following guidelines should be helpful:

1. If a complaint concerns the personal comments or actions of another member in the school society or an employee of the school, the person should speak directly to that person by himself.
2. If a complaint concerns the manner in which an employee of the school performs his duties, the person should speak directly to that employee by himself.  
Where a school policy has been violated, and the Principal is aware of the situation, the Principal must intervene, whether or not the parent has spoken already to the teacher. For example, if a teacher started teaching a denominational doctrine as though it were the only acceptable position on a certain issue, the parent would be encouraged to talk to the teacher first, but it would not be necessary. The Principal could intervene directly.  
There will still be situations where a teacher has done something that a parent dislikes, and the parent should try to resolve the issue with the teacher before notifying the Principal. An example of such a situation might be the choice of a song in music class or the lack of comments on student work. These are not covered by a policy and, in and of themselves, would not warrant action on the part of the Principal.
3. If a complaint concerns the personal opinions or actions of a Board member, the person should speak directly to that Board member by himself. In the event that the matter cannot be resolved, the complainant may choose to address the Board of Directors by means of a personal letter. The solicitation of signatures of other society members who support the complainant's position is not an acceptable avenue to garner added weight or incentive since it does not contribute to the building of community, trust and unity.
4. If a complaint concerns school policy, school programs or a Board decision, the person should speak directly to the Principal by himself.
5. In most cases when a complaint is initially brought to the attention of someone, an explanation can often be given that quietly settles the matter. Often, once the larger context of a situation or issue is explained, the person with the objection discovers that his view has already been considered or that his basis for the objection is not valid.

### **Follow-Up**

However, there will be times when a complaint will not be settled or resolved during the initial contact. A proper understanding of what procedures to follow is important.

1. *Regarding a fellow society member.* If the matter is not resolved, the person should request two board members to accompany him/her to have the complaint brought back to the fellow society member. If effort at this level does not resolve the matter, the person with the problem should address the Board of Directors by letter.
2. *Regarding a school employee.* If the matter is not resolved, the person should request the Principal to accompany him/her to have the complaint brought back to the employee. If this effort does not resolve the matter, the person with the complaint should address the Board of Directors by letter.
3. *Regarding the Principal.* If the matter is not resolved, the person with the complaint should address the Board of Directors by letter.
4. *Regarding a school policy, school programs or a Board decision.* If the matter has not been resolved, the person with the complaint should address the Board of Directors by letter.

## **A Fair Hearing**

Whenever a complaint is properly addressed to the Board of Directors, meaning that the proper discussions outlined previously have taken place, the Board has an obligation to provide a fair hearing to the person with the complaint. Letters of complaint that have not gone through proper procedures prior to being written will not be read at the Board meeting. The chairperson will need to determine if such a letter of complaint is indeed properly presented. In order to provide such a fair hearing, the following steps should be taken:

1. *Allow the complaint to be presented.* The Board of Directors should allow the presentation of a letter of complaint within a reasonable amount of time and, possibly with the presenter at the meeting. In this way, questions of clarification can be asked. If there is a defendant to the complaint, he/she should also be allowed to address the Board of Directors in an equal fashion by letter or presentation.
2. *Allow for the process of consultation.* Prior to reaching a decision, the Board may choose to seek advice. This may come from the Principal, a standing or ad hoc committee or outside experts. Their recommendation is to be referred back to the Board. The Board may accept that recommendation, request the consulting group to reconsider, or modify the recommendation due to other considerations not discussed by the consulting group.
3. *Make a decision on the matter.* This should be done in the form of a properly motioned resolution that receives a majority vote. A letter should be written to the persons directly involved with the complaint communicating the Board's decision.

## **A Right To An Appeal**

A person who wishes to challenge the decision of the Board of Directors regarding a complaint may do so at a society membership meeting. A special meeting may be called if the Board chooses not to place this issue on a regularly scheduled meeting agenda. This can be done following the procedure outlined in the constitution. The complaint will then be discussed by the members. If there is no support for the complaint in the form of a properly motioned and approved resolution, the matter will be considered closed.