

EARLY LEARNING

Community Feedback, Concern, and Complaint

HS Act: 642 (c)(1)(E)(iv)(X)(bb)

EC: IA-2, PAO-34, PAO-59

Policy

Purpose: The purpose of the Community Feedback and Complaint policy and procedure is to provide a process for feedback to be given and for concerns to be addressed, and a process for disclosing, addressing, and resolving complaints, including investigations, when appropriate. A process for appeals is also outlined.

The OESD Early Learning program is committed to providing the highest quality services to children and families and therefore welcomes and appreciates feedback to center staff and/or OESD staff members from parents, guardians, and community members. We strive to address all feedback, concerns, and complaints through direct communication with the center or site leadership, specific staff person, or OESD staff member through informal means whenever possible.

Community members, center staff, and/or program participants (parents/guardians) may also present unresolved or egregious complaints to the appropriate person(s) about the Early Learning Program, any ECEAP/Head Start staff member, or an OESD staff member. The *Community Feedback and Complaint Procedure* should be used when the complainant feels that ECEAP/Head Start policies have been violated or their concerns have not adequately been addressed through informal partnership.

Procedure

Informal vs Formal: Every effort will be made to resolve complaints by **informal discussion** between the person(s) filing the concern or complaint (often called the complainant) and the staff. If the situation is not satisfactorily resolved, the complainant may continue to make a formal complaint. There will be no retaliation against the complainant or the complainant's child for bringing forward an informal or formal complaint.

Informal Resolution of Complaint

In keeping with our program values, we strive to resolve complaints by taking the concern directly to the person or people involved to share concern and impact.

- **Concern or complaint about staff or leadership or other issues** should first be brought to the relevant staff person. If warranted, concerns/complaints can be taken to appropriate leadership through the informal or formal complaint process. If not satisfied, proceed to formal process below.
- **Concern or complaint about** OESD early learning staff should be sent to the OESD Early Learning Manager or Director.
- **Concern or complaint about** OESD Early Learning Director should be sent to the OESD Assistant Superintendent.

Formal Resolution of Complaint

- Formal complaints pertaining to OESD early learning program or staff shall go to the Early Learning Director. Complaints relating to Early Learning Director will be taken to the OESD Assistant Superintendent or designee.
- There will be no retaliation against a complainant or their child for using the complaint procedure. Such alleged action shall constitute grounds for a separate complaint.
- The complainant must receive a response acknowledging the receipt of the complaint no later than 7 working days from the date of filed complaint.

Responsibility of Person Filing Formal Complaint

1. The person filing the complaint will put his/her complaint in writing or bring a verbal complaint forward by calling the appropriate person. The program official that receives a verbal complaint will summarize the complaint in writing and send it back to the complainant for approval.
2. The complaint must be specific and describe conditions or circumstances of the concern
3. The complaint must include information on how to contact the person making the complaint. If a complaint is made anonymously, the investigation and follow up will take place, however, the results or outcome will not be shared back to the complainant.

Responsibility of the Official Receiving the Formal Written Complaint

The official will respond in writing to the complainant no later than 10 working days after the written complaint is received. This written response will clearly state the following:

- The written complaint has been received and what the next steps are and expected timeline for the investigation to be completed.
- The official will then conduct a thorough investigation of the complaint, which may include a meeting with the complainant. Investigations are to be completed in a timely manner and may vary in length of time depending upon the complexity of the issue. Upon completion of the investigation, a written response will be sent to the complainant clearly stating either of the following: The official denies the validity of the complaint, or
- A plan for corrective action has been designed and will be fully implemented in a prompt manner.

In the event that the complaint is still not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, they may request a formal meeting with the OESD Assistant Superintendent or designee, or pursue a formal Appeal.

Right to Appeal Decision of the Program or OESD Early Learning Director

If the validity of a complaint is denied by the Director or OESD staff, the complainant will be advised that they have a right to a further hearing if they are not satisfied with the response. They may choose to further pursue their concern by sending the complaint to the OESD Early Learning Director or to the OESD Assistant Superintendent if appealing the decision of the Early Learning Director.

- **If appealing a staff member decision:**
The OESD Early Learning Director will conduct a follow up investigation of the complaint including contacting the Center Director as appropriate and shall respond to the complainant in writing within 15 working days of receiving the appeal, sending a copy to appropriate staff.

- **If appealing an OESD Early Learning Directors decision:**

The OESD Assistant Superintendent will conduct a follow up investigation of the complaint including contacting the Early Learning Director as appropriate and shall respond to the complainant in writing within 15 working days of receiving the appeal, sending a copy to the Early Learning Director and staff if appropriate.

- **If appealing the OESD Assistant Superintendents decision:**

In the event that the complaint is still not resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, they may request a formal meeting with the OESD Superintendent or designee, and ask that the complaint to be moved to be heard by a Complaint Hearing Board comprised of an OESD Board of Director, a Policy Council representative who represents the child/families program enrollment, and a representative from OESD Early Learning staff, using procedures comparable to the "fair hearing" procedures in WAC 38808 and the Administrative procedures ACT RCW 34.04 for contested cases. The Hearing Board shall schedule a hearing within 15 working days after the meeting. A decision on the complaint will be made by the complaint hearing board.