

Cooperative Board

Administrative Procedure - Guidelines for Investigating Complaints and Allegations of Misconduct

All complaints are to be investigated, even when the complainant requests that nothing be done or is anonymous.

Step 1: Before the Investigation

- A. Cooperative employees must immediately report a suspicion of child abuse or neglect to the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services in compliance with State law and Policy 5:90, *Abused and Neglected Child Reporting*. Reporting is required before proceeding further with the investigation.
- B. According to policy 2:260, *Uniform Grievance Procedure*, the Executive Director appoints at least one Cooperative Complaint Manager to administer the complaint process. If possible, the Executive Director will appoint two Complaint Managers, one of each gender. A Complaint Manager investigates: (1) complaints filed under policy 2:260, *Uniform Grievance Procedure*, and (2) allegations of employee misconduct.
- C. The appropriate Principal, Program Coordinator, or designee investigates all allegations of student misconduct.
- D. Anyone with a complaint or making an allegation of misconduct should be referred to a Complaint Manager of their choosing or the Principal or Program Coordinator without delay.
- E. A Complaint Manager, Principal or Program Coordinator (hereafter referred to as *investigator*) will investigate all complaints or allegations of misconduct, except that, depending on the circumstances, the Executive Director or the Operational Board may appoint a special investigator. Whenever the Executive Director deems necessary, an attorney may serve as a special investigator. See *considerations* under F below. The investigator should not have any involvement with the complainant or the alleged wrongdoer outside of the investigation. The Executive Director will ensure that investigators have sufficient authority and resources including access to the Cooperative Attorney.
- F. Contact the Board Attorney to discuss the investigation process, including without limitation:
 1. Whether the investigator's notes and investigation records (including, without limitation, any audio or video recordings, photographs, or electronic images) are education records for purposes of the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and/or school student records as defined in the Ill. School Student Records Act (105 ILCS 10/, implemented by 23 Ill.Admin.Code §375.10)?
 2. Whether the investigator's notes and investigation records (including, without limitation, any audio or video recordings, photographs, or electronic images) will be subject to disclosure pursuant to a FOIA request? A PAC opinion, binding on the parties, found that a city's investigatory records of an employee

were not private or adjudicatory records and must be disclosed pursuant to a FOIA request (PAC Opinion 13-110).

3. Whether to record conversations, and if so, how to obtain and document consent under the criminal eavesdropping statute? 720 ILCS 5/14-1 et seq., amended by P.A. 98-1142, prohibits recording a conversation in which someone has a reasonable expectation of privacy without the consent of all parties.
4. Whether the Board Attorney should participate in or conduct the investigation? Whether an outside attorney should serve as a special investigator? Considerations include:
 - a. The U.S. Supreme Court has held that a private attorney temporarily retained by government to perform an investigation of an employee is entitled to seek qualified immunity from suit under Section 1983. Filarsky v. Delia, 132 S.Ct. 1657 (2012).
 - b. The FOIA exemption for communications between a public body and its attorney is available in only limited situations. See PAC Opinion 14-02 interpreting 5 ILCS 140/7(m).
 - c. Documents prepared by attorneys conducting an investigation under the prospect of litigation will not be subject to discovery during a subsequent lawsuit. Sandra TE v. South Berwyn School Dist., 600 F. 3d 612 (7th Circuit 2010) (when attorneys, as attorneys, perform a factual investigation, their documents are protected by the attorney-client privilege and the work-product doctrine).

G. The investigator should provide a fair opportunity for both sides to be heard.

H. The investigator should begin by carefully reading the complaint. Next the investigator should review applicable Board policies, administrative procedures and manuals, laws, regulations, and collective bargaining agreements.

I. The investigator should develop a plan, including:

1. Witness list
2. Order of interviews
3. Questions for witnesses
4. Physical evidence needed, e.g., records, documents, reports, photos, and letters

J. The investigator should make logistical arrangements, e.g., determine interview location and the need for photographs and/or a video or audio recording.

K. If the investigator encounters an issue with legal ramifications outside of his/her understanding, either before or during the investigation, he/she should consult the Cooperative Attorney before proceeding further on that legal issue, as well as any other areas of the investigation it impacts.

Step 2: The Investigation

A. Typically, interview the complainant first, next the subject of the investigation, and, finally, all witnesses. The following applies to all interviews:

1. If possible, statements should be written, dated, and signed by the person being interviewed. Do not audio or video record statements without first obtaining the Board Attorney's advice concerning legal prerequisites and treatment of the recordings.
 2. Ask open-ended questions and do not suggest answers to questions.
 3. Record important details, essentially who, did what, to whom, when and how done and, if appropriate, why?
 4. Be objective and nonjudgmental; do not prejudge an alleged wrongdoer's guilt. Never show outrage or dismay.
 5. Ask for the names of any other witnesses.
 6. Deal with emotional outbursts and anger by patiently explaining that details are needed for an accurate investigation.
 7. If a witness cannot be interviewed, record the reason.
- B. While confidentiality should be maintained, do not make promises of confidentiality or anonymity. Only the Executive Director may promise confidentiality or anonymity.
- C. Keep the Executive Director informed, but do not discuss the investigation with Board members in order to avoid the appearance of prejudice or unfairness.
- D. Obtain copies of all relevant written or electronic communications. Originals are not needed, but record how to get them.
- E. Collect physical evidence and photographs. Keep a record of when, and where, or from whom physical evidence was gathered.
- F. Document any information about the interview that is relevant, or may become relevant, including the person's demeanor, gestures, accuracy of memory, and overall credibility.
- G. During the investigation, keep the investigation file separate from personnel or student record files. In a subsequent hearing, the opposing side may be able to view the investigation file. Records relating to a public body's adjudication (hearing) of employee grievances or disciplinary cases are exempt from Freedom of Information Act public records requests under 5 ILCS 140/7(1)(n). However, the exemption does not extend to the final outcome of cases in which discipline is imposed.

Step 3: Following the Investigation

- A. Report to the Executive Director or designee the investigation results, that is, the matters investigated, facts, conclusions, and recommendations. Prepare a written report if appropriate or requested.
- Answer who, what, when, where, why, and how.
 - Factual findings are based on whether an incident's occurrence is more likely than not. Identify as many factual findings as possible to support a conclusion. In a "he said, she said" scenario, a decision can be based on the credibility of the parties and witnesses. Include in the report any findings that are inconclusive.
 - Make a determination regarding credibility of specific evidence, that is, how believable is it and why by explaining the basis for the determination. Credible evidence is capable of belief by a reasonable person.
- B. Be prepared to testify as to the fairness of the investigation, the authenticity of the evidence, and the contents of the investigation report.

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