

## Finn Academy Complaint Policy

From Approved Charter Application, Response 13 RFA Governance

### Procedure for handling complaints, including from staff and parents:

In accordance with requirements of §2855(4) of the Education Law, any individual or group may bring a complaint to the Board of Trustees alleging a violation of the provisions of this article, the charter, or any other provision of law relating to the management or operation of the school. The Board of Trustees of Finn Academy: An Elmira Charter School designates its Dean of Scholars as the recipient of complaints, formal and informal, excepting complaints about the Dean of Scholars. Complaints pertaining to the Dean of Scholars may be directed to the Chair of the Governance Committee of the Board of Trustees. If, after presentation of the complaint to the Board of Trustees, the individual or group determines that the board has not adequately addressed the complaint, they may present that complaint to the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York and then the Board of Regents through the State Education Department, which shall investigate and respond. The SUNY Trustees or the Board of Regents shall have the power and the duty to issue appropriate remedial orders to charter schools under their jurisdiction to effectuate the provisions of this section. The grievance process will be prominently displayed and included in all school and parent manuals so that any individual or group may bring a complaint to the Board of Trustees.

Although any individual or group may bring a complaint as discussed above, Finn Academy will establish a complaint process to expeditiously resolve matters in question. The complainant must adhere to the following steps:

1. If the issue is academic in nature, the complainant must contact the child's teacher in writing or verbally.
2. If unsatisfied with the response or if the complaint does not concern the child's teacher, he/she can contact the Dean of Scholars, who may notify the Board Chair. At the discretion of the Dean of Scholars, the complaint may be required to be submitted in writing. The Dean of Scholars may also conduct an investigation into the complaint.
3. If the complainant is unsatisfied with the response of the Dean of Scholars, a written complaint can be submitted to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees will make every effort to respond to the complaint in a timely manner, not to exceed 30 business days. To help insure a thorough and timely response, the complaint should include: (i) a detailed

statement of the nature of the grievance, (ii) what response, if any, was received from the Dean of Scholars and/or teacher; (iii) copies of any correspondence between complainant and the Dean of Scholars and/or teacher; (iv) what action or relief the complainant is seeking; and (v) the complainant's name, address and telephone number.

4. If the complainant is unsatisfied with the response of the Board of Trustees, and the complainant alleges a violation of law or a provision of the school's charter, the complainant may submit the complaint in writing to the Charter School's Institute of the State University of New York.

Please note that if a scholar is expelled or given a long term suspension (more than 10 days), the parent/guardian has the right to submit a letter of appeal to the Board of Trustees within 10 days of the date of expulsion. The letter must include the reason for the request and any special or extenuating circumstances that may support the reversal of the recommended penalty. The Board Chair will present the request before the entire Board of Trustees for review and determination. A final determination letter will be sent to the student's parent or guardian indicating approval or denial of an appeal.

Finn Academy will adhere to all provisions for due process to ensure students' rights to a free and appropriate public education. Where the student is a student with a disability, Finn Academy will work with the student's host district and its Committee on Special Education to provide a manifestation determination, in accordance with law. Consequences of suspension will be delivered in accordance with state and federal law. Where necessary, Finn Academy will contract with a certified and impartial hearing officer to assist in conducting any disciplinary hearings involving a potential long-term suspension.

### **Formal Complaints**

A formal complaint involves an alleged violation of law and/or charter. A formal complaint must be in writing and delivered to the Finn Academy Charter School Board of Trustees. To help insure a thorough and timely response, the complaint should include: (i) a detailed statement of the nature of the any grievance, (ii) the response, if any, receive from the principal and/or teacher; (iii) copies of any correspondence between complainant and the principal and/or teacher; (iv) what action or relief the complainant is seeking; and (v) the complainant's name, address and telephone number. The Board of Trustees will make every effort to respond to the complaint in a timely manner, not to exceed 30 business days.

Upon resolution of a formal complaint, Finn Academy must provide to the complainant:

- (a) a written determination, including any remedial actions to be taken;
- (b) a written notice to the complainant that he or she may file an appeal with the Charter Schools Institute if the complaint involves a violation of law or charter; and
- (c) a copy of the Institute’s Grievance Guidelines (available on the Institute’s website:  
<http://www.newyorkcharters.org/parentResources.htm#questions>).

**Informal Complaints**

An informal complaint is a complaint that does not allege a violation of law or the school’s Charter Agreement. To file an informal complaint, it is recommended that the complainant follow these steps:

1. Contact the child’s teacher in writing or verbally.
2. If unsatisfied with the response or if the complaint does not concern the child’s teacher, he/she can contact the Dean of Scholars. The Dean of Scholars, at his or her discretion, may require that the complaint be submitted in writing. The Dean of Scholars may also, at his or her discretion, conduct an investigation into the complaint. If the complainant is unsatisfied, he or she shall inform the Dean of Scholars who will notify the Board Chair.

If the complainant is unsatisfied with the response of the Dean of Scholars or complainant is in regard to the Dean of Scholars, a written complaint can be submitted to the Board of Trustees (the complainant may bypass the step of speaking with the Dean of Scholars and go directly to the Board of Trustees). The Board of Trustees will make every effort to respond to the complaint in a timely manner, not to exceed 30 business days. To help insure a thorough and timely response, the complaint should include: (i) a detailed statement of the nature of the grievance, (ii) what response, if any, was received from the Dean of Scholars and/or teacher; (iv) what action or relief the complainant is seeking; and (v) the complainant’s name, address, and telephone number.

**Staff Feedback and Complaint Process**

To ensure that staff members have the opportunity to participate in the governance of the school, the Board will conduct a staff survey bi-annually. The Governance Committee will review the results; if there are areas of concern brought forth by the staff, the Governance Committee may further investigate the matter through interviews and staff input. The Board of Trustees will focus on three areas of focus for staff input: What should we keep? What should we throw out? What

should we change? As will be noted in the Board Policies, In order to promote a culture of respect, the Board expects the school leader to develop and implement a system of soliciting staff feedback, both positive and negative, to ensure a safe, high achievement culture at all times.

Staff member concerns shall be handled in a matter similar to the complaint policy. If a staff member has a concern, they should follow the chain of command, i.e. report the concern to the supervisor, if it is not resolved, it can be brought to the attention of the Dean of Scholars, and if the staff member is still not satisfied, the concern can be brought to the Board of Trustees. The only instance in which a staff member should directly report a concern to the Board is when it pertains to the safety of staff and/or scholars of Finn Academy, or if it is an issue of concern related to the Dean of Scholars.