

SUBJECT: IMPARTIAL HEARINGS/SELECTION OF IMPARTIAL HEARING OFFICERS

The School District is committed to making every effort to amicably resolve differences involving the educational programs for students with disabilities. When outside assistance is needed to aid in resolving a disagreement about the identification, evaluation, educational placement or provision of a free appropriate education for a student with a disability, mediation is encouraged. For those exceptional circumstances where a more formal method is required, the impartial hearing process will be utilized. The impartial hearing officer (IHO) renders a written decision after the parties present and refute evidence before him/her. The decision of the IHO is final and binding on both parties unless appealed to the State Review Officer (SRO).

Impartial Hearing Process

The following is an overview of the Impartial Hearing process:

- a) Either the parent or the School District may request an impartial hearing. If a parent makes the request it must be in writing to the Board of Education describing the nature of the dispute and a proposed resolution of the problem. The District will provide a form for this purpose. However, the District may not deny or delay a parent's right to an impartial hearing if the written request is not complete.

If the District is the party initiating an impartial hearing, the District will provide prior written notice to the parent including a statement of the action proposed and any explanation of why the District proposes to take such action.

- b) Upon receipt of or initiation of a request for an impartial hearing, the District will inform the parent of the availability of mediation, of any free or low-cost legal and other relevant services available in the area, and provide them with a copy of the District's Procedural Safeguards Notice.
- c) The District must immediately [but not later than two (2) business days after receipt of the written request] initiate the process to select an IHO. The District selects the IHO through a rotational selection process in accordance with regulatory timelines. The Superintendent's Secretary/District Clerk will be responsible for contacting IHOs and maintaining appropriate records.
- d) The IHO must be certified by the Commissioner of Education, be independent and have access to the support and equipment necessary to perform the duties of an IHO. When the selected IHO indicates availability, the Board of Education must immediately appoint him/her. To expedite this process the Board may designate one (1) or more of its members to appoint the IHO on behalf of the Board.

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- e) The impartial hearing will be conducted at a location that is reasonable and convenient to the parent and the student involved. The hearing shall be closed to the public unless the parent requests an open hearing.
- f) The IHO presides over the hearing at which the parties have an opportunity to present evidence and testimony.
- g) The student remains in his/her current placement during the pendency of the impartial hearing unless both parties agree and except as otherwise provided for expedited impartial hearings for certain disciplinary suspensions or removals of a student.
- h) The IHO renders and forwards the finding of fact and decision to the parties and to the State Education Department in accordance with regulatory timelines.
- i) The decision of the IHO is final and binding on both parties unless appealed to the State Review Officer (SRO).

Recordkeeping And Reporting

The District will maintain an alphabetical list of the names of each IHO who is certified in New York State and available to serve in the District. The District will record and report to the State Education Department required information relating to the selection of IHOs and the conduct of impartial hearings according to the manner and schedule specified by the department.

Compensation Of Impartial Hearing Officers

The District will be responsible for compensating the IHO for pre-hearing, hearing and post-hearing activities at the rate agreed upon at the time of the IHO's appointment. The rate of compensation may not exceed the maximum rate approved by the Director of the Division of the Budget. The District will also reimburse the IHO for travel and other hearing-related expenses (e.g., duplication and telephone costs) pursuant to an annually determined schedule. On an annual basis, the District will forward a copy of its compensation rates to each IHO on the District's rotational list.

Mediation

Mediation is voluntary and does not deny or delay a parent's right to an impartial hearing. If mediation is initiated after a request for an impartial hearing has been received, the impartial hearing must continue unless the request for the impartial hearing is withdrawn. However, a party may request an extension to an impartial hearing in order to pursue mediation.

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Guardians ad Litem at Impartial Hearings

Unless a surrogate parent has been previously appointed, the IHO must appoint a guardian ad litem when he/she determines that the interests of the parent(s) are opposed to or inconsistent with those of the student or whenever the interests of the student would be best protected by such appointment.

Confidentiality

All issues relating to a request for and conduct of an Impartial Hearing must be kept confidential by all District staff.

Administrative Procedures

Administrative procedures will be developed for the selection and appointment of an IHO consistent with regulatory requirements.

Education Law Sections 4404(1) and 4410(7)
8 New York Code of Rules and Regulations
(NYCRR) Sections 200.1, 200.2, 200.5, 200.16,
200.21 and 201.11