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LHCS Statement of Purpose

We believe it is our responsibility as Christians to raise children in the light of God's Word. The education of children must be Christ-centered, equipping them to become responsive disciples of Christ who seek the will of the Lord in all aspects of life.

LHCS Mission Statement

Kitchener-Waterloo Christian School Society advances dynamic, excellent Christ-centered education through unconstrained facilities, exceptional programs, and extensive resources that cultivate responsive disciples of Christ.

LHCS Vision Statement

As a diverse community, Kitchener Waterloo Christian School Society intentionally engages God's world, locally and globally, through distinctive educational programming, strategic partnerships and sustainable growth.

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Revision Date(s):	Committee: Board of Directors

Policy 112 – Conflict Resolution Policy

Background

This policy is adopted from the *Conflict Resolution Manual for Christian Schools*, 2004, issued by the OACS, and has been adapted for use at LHCS. This policy deals with conflicts that usually involve “grey” areas that are not governed by formal relationships (like teacher contracts, for example). These conflicts can be classified into four categories, each type having its own character and its own resolution process:

1. Parental disagreements with a teacher
2. Complaints
3. Rumours
4. Internal board conflicts

Responsibility for this policy lies with the Board.

Preamble

Biblical Guidelines

Each individual is created in God's image, as an important servant of the King and a steward in his kingdom. The Christian school is an institution that is under the rule of Christ and its reputation reflects on the reputation of Christ and his kingdom. Consequently, it is everyone's responsibility to observe and adhere to the ethical rules designed to honour the reputations of God's servants and institutions.

i. Respect each other out of reverence for Christ

The Bible contains many direct rules and indirect stories from which we can learn how we ought to live together and treat one another. (ref Ephesians 4, Thessalonians 4:12-13, Romans 13:1,7,8) These passages call us to live in harmony as the renewed people of God in all of life's relationships, and to show respect to each other according to the relationships God has put us in.

ii. Use biblical procedures in dealing with differences

These passages call us to live as renewed people who know we serve the Lord in our daily work and respect each other according to the relationships God has put us in. They also remind us that we do have differences and get angry with each other. The presence of differences and anger is not necessarily a sin: "In your anger do not sin." However, Scripture calls us to deal with our differences and anger in ways that do not grieve the Holy Spirit or dishonour the name of Christ. The procedures in this manual are meant to help us in doing that. A good place to begin when Christians have differences and conflicts is to call to mind the procedures Jesus laid out in Mathew 18:15-17.

If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

This passage is directed at personal conflicts between adults where one person has sinned against another, e.g., a personal insult. When such problems arise in a school, the adults involved should try to settle the matter themselves using the principles and procedures Jesus gives in this text. However, if they were not able to solve the problem on their own, the offended parties should seek redress in the school organization, rather than the church congregation.

However, many of the problems and conflicts that arise in a school do not fit the situation that Jesus envisioned in giving these procedures. The conflict may be between a parent and a teacher over the treatment of a child. It may be between a child and an adult. It may not involve personal matters, but official board policies, or professional duties, or the school as an institution. These matters are not personal sins against the person complaining or do not involve two adults. Therefore, these matters should be dealt with ethically and legally in ways that are suited to the school organization, using the procedures recommended below.

iii. Differences can lead to growth

We should always remember that differences are opportunities to rethink our policies or our practices. If we deal with them creatively, they can lead to improved practices while relationships are strengthened and commitment to the Christian school increased.

In Acts 6, we read that the early church faced a conflict over the inequitable treatment of various groups of widows in the daily distribution of food. The apostles took this opportunity to appoint deacons to take on this task. They created a new office which has served the church well to this day.

iv. Do not attack persons but deal with issues

A final caution: We are sometimes tempted to personalize conflicts and turn them into moral questions or even moral short-comings or moral sins. This temptation should be avoided because it unfairly prejudices the actions and motives of individuals and it misrepresents the nature of organizational values and imperatives.

Policy Statements

- I. The key to successful resolution is proper identification of the problem and accurate direction about the processes to be followed in bringing about resolution and healing.
- II. The majority of breaks and frustrations are unnecessarily exaggerated because the process is not understood. Only a few problems are so difficult or impossible to resolve that they lead to irreconcilable conflict.
- III. Serious interpersonal problems that cannot be resolved through understanding, good-will, inspiration, and persuasion may be resolved through special intervention available from outside the school such as mediation.
- IV. A respect for distinct and varied roles and responsibilities is central to resolving conflicts and restoring relationships.
- V. The COO's role in conflict resolution is to identify and enforce board policy and contract stipulations, to help the parties in conflict to find appropriate means to work toward a resolution, and to keep the process ethical and civil.
- VI. The board and COO should help parents or others with a complaint or conflict to disentangle intertwined issues and deal with each issue in a proper manner.
- VII. The board should not be upset about differences of opinion and should follow the old maxim (Peter Meiderlin [Rupertus Meldenus], 1626):
 - i. a. In essentials, unity; b. In nonessentials, liberty; c. In all things, charity.
- VIII. Sometimes differences can lead to major conflict and open hostility. When this occurs, it is to the board's benefit to call in a professional Christian mediator from outside the local community to help resolve the confrontations.
- IX. If the board suspects an underground campaign (e.g., in rumours), it should encourage members and others to come forward with their concerns. This can be done in informal forums organized by the board itself.

The following table outlines potential areas of conflict which are not covered by this policy, and references the policies and guidelines which govern each of those relationships.

Types of Conflict	Responsibility	OACS Resources/Policies
Disagreements about contract, salary	Contract Partnership Committee	<i>Compensation Reports Contract Partnership Committee Manual</i>
Contract Disputes (board-teacher, board-COO)	OACS/EDIFIDE/OCSAA Mediation/Arbitration Commission	<i>Teacher Supervision and Evaluation Policy Staff Growth and Development Manual OACS/EDIFIDE/OCSAA Mediation/Arbitration Commission Manual</i>
COO-teacher disagreements	Grievance Committee	<i>OACS/EDIFIDE Personnel Manual Human Resources Committee Manual Best Practices for Employment Relations in the Christian School</i>

Procedures

1. Parental Disagreements with a Teacher

a. Type of disagreement

- The COO should first determine which type of disagreement is at stake here. Parents may have two different types of disagreement with a school:
 - Disagreements about issues, and
 - Disagreements involving personal behaviours and personalities.
- Sometimes this type of disagreement comes first to the Board or the Program Committee. In this case, the letter should be referred to the COO to initiate the resolution.

b. Disagreements on issues

i. Substance

- These disagreements may be about issues such as assessment and evaluation policies, the school program, the promotion and retention of students, the student code of conduct, the discipline policy and procedures, etc.
- The issue is not primarily the treatment of the parent's own child, though it may begin there.
- The Matthew 18 principle is not used here because this is not a personal sin between two people but a disagreement about ideas.

ii. Process

- Parent communicates with the COO;
- COO may consult with the teacher(s);
- COO may refer the matter to the Program Committee if it falls within the committee's mandate.
- COO makes a decision.
- Once the decision has been made, the COO communicates the decision back to the person who raised the issue.

c. Disagreements involving personal behaviours or personalities

i. Substance

- It is not unusual to have a parent disagree with the teacher about the about the education or discipline of the parent's child.
- It is a normal role for parents to be advocates for their children and they should be encouraged to carry out this role in an appropriate manner.
- A special problem is that parents often wear other organizational "hats". Hence they have an opportunity to bypass the official process by using roles other than that of parent. This must be discouraged by all parties as it will undermine others as they exercise their properly constituted roles in the authorized process.

ii. Process

- The parent meets with the teacher to discuss the matter. The teacher and parent try to come to a resolution.
- Either the teacher or the parent may request the COO to be at the first meeting if they feel uncomfortable in meeting together.
- The teacher and parent try to come to an agreement to resolve the situation.
- If the parent and teacher cannot agree on a resolution, the teacher makes a decision, or refers the matter to the COO.
- The parent may appeal the teacher's decision to the COO. The COO will normally consult with the teacher and may arrange a meeting to discuss the matter with both parties.

- The COO tries to help the two parties come to a resolution. If necessary, the COO makes a decision.
- Both the teacher and the COO make a record of the resolution.

2. Complaints

a. Substance

- Complaints are negative assessments of specific persons or events which in the opinion of the speaker require school action.
- They could originate in situations such as:
 - Parents complaining about board policy or operations
 - Members complaining about teachers, staff, volunteers; students; policies; incidentals.
 - Non-members complaining: about property damage; student misbehavior; buses; violation of city ordinances.

b. Process

- Every complaint of this type should be directed to the COO.
- The COO will assess the problem and identify how it should be handled.
- It is impossible to be prescriptive or definitive about the precise procedures to be used, because the range of possible problems is very wide. However, the COO may find it helpful to use the following filters in assessing the problem and the methods to use in resolving it:
 - Is this type of issue normally handled by one of the regular committees?
 - Educational issues (curriculum, pedagogy) should be referred to the Program Committee.
 - Contractual issues (working conditions) would go to the Contract Partnership Committee, or the Human Resources Committee manual.
 - What is the real source of the complaint?
 - If it is based on misinformation or misunderstanding of policies or procedures, provide the correct information.
 - If it is trivial, find out what the issue is under the surface and deal with that.
 - Occasionally, you may have a mischievous complaint (i.e., there is a hidden agenda). Again, find out what the underlying issue is and deal with that ethically and forthrightly.
 - Is this a public relations issue that may affect the reputation of the school? Ultimately, every issue has the potential to affect the reputation of the school, but how the issue is handled has its own effect on the school's reputation.
 - What school policies are related to the issue? Are these policies good ones or should they be clarified or reviewed?
 - Is this a new situation that requires action? If so, consult the proper people and begin to address the issue.
- In every case, the COO must introduce the person to the proper procedures for dealing with the complaint and help work towards a just treatment of the issue.
- The COO must always communicate with the appropriate parties, including the complainant, and advise them of the resolution when this has been achieved.

3. Rumours

a. Substance

- A rumour is "an unconfirmed story or report in circulation." Rumours may become persistent negative talk about the school, the society, or its reputation which have not been officially reported to the board or COO.

- ii. Most rumours are based to a greater or lesser degree on misinformation. Such rumours are easy to remedy (unless they involve confidential information about a person). They must be taken seriously by the leadership because they will affect the reputation of the school.
- iii. Spreading rumours is gossip. Gossip is “idle talk, especially about the affairs of others.” It is often of a personal, sensational, or intimate nature. A gossip is “a person who talks idly or lets out secrets.” A gossip may think that the talk is merely trivial, chatty, or witty, but it is still idle talk that damages others. At its worst, gossip is the intentional communication of erroneous or malicious information or damaging insinuations about specific persons or institutions.
- iv. Scripture has clear injunctions against idle talk, gossip, and defamation and requires all Christians to guard their tongues (e.g., Leviticus 19:16; James 3:1-15).
- v. Everyone has a duty to counteract gossip without fanning the flames. Many reputations and institutions have come to ruin because the leadership ignored the rumours.

b. Process

i. **Wisdom.** The most difficult part of dealing with rumours is to determine specifically what the concern is. It is in everyone's best interest that the concern be addressed promptly and ethically. However, it is equally important that the board does not act on hearsay or gossip and thereby create or validate the gossip.

ii. **One who hears a rumour.** The person who hears a rumour:

- should report it to a proper receiving authority such as the COO, a board member, or the chairperson of a standing committee.
- may want to verify the accusation and information with the source. However, the hearer should not become an investigator or a meddler, and still has a duty to report.

iii. **The receiving authority.** The receiving authority should record the complaint with appropriate detail and refer the issue or item, whatever it is, to the person responsible for this area, whether the COO, board chair, committee chair, or another person.

iv. **The authorized person.** The person authorized to deal with this area should:

- determine the reliability of the complaint,
- determine if immediate action is required,
- determine if the matter is important,
- report the matter to the proper authority for disposition,
- take steps to counteract the possible damage created by general discussion of the complaint.

v. **Committee members who hear a complaint.** Persons serving on a committee are not to encourage or discuss complaints coming to their attention. Their response should be to refer the complainant to the proper receiving authority.

vi. **Board members.**

- A Board member who receives a complaint should set an example in referring the complaint to the proper committee, the COO, or the board agenda.
- If a board member wants to refer the matter directly to the board then
 - the complaint should be put in writing,
 - the board chair should authorize it for the appropriate agenda.
- If significant concerns seem to exist in the membership or larger community, the board, after verifying that the concern exists, may:
 - request a review of the policy involved,
 - issue a public statement about it without aggravating the concern,
 - call a meeting of those with the concern.

4. Internal Board Conflicts

a. Substance

- i. Conflicts sometimes arise between individual board members, or between one board member and the rest of the board.
- ii. A conflict may involve a member's violation or alleged violation of the Code of Conduct. These conflicts may involve such matters as:
 - non-cooperation
 - breaking confidence
 - incompetence
 - not completing board duties
 - poor attendance at board meetings
 - interference in school affairs
 - not complying with board policies (e.g., not sending children to the school)
- iii. Some conflicts between board members do not involve a violation of the Code of Conduct for Board Members. These may be differences in style, personal dislikes, or other matters. Charity and wisdom are required on the part of all involved.
- iv. If these types of conflicts are not dealt with, they may escalate to the point where they affect the work of the Board. When that is the case, the matter falls under the Code of Ethics.

b. Process

- i. Annually, the Board should adopt by motion a Code of Conduct for Board Members as a standing policy.
- ii. A conflict about an issue is settled by the Board discussing the issue and making a decision. All members must then support the Board decision.
- iii. A personal disagreement between two or three board members that does not involve an alleged violation of the Board Member's Code of Conduct should be settled between the parties (as outlined in Matthew 18). If necessary, they can request the help of a third party.
- iv. Where a conflict appears to involve the Code of Conduct, the member involved or a member who is aware of such a problem, should contact the board chair and request him or her to investigate the matter. If the board chair is involved in the conflict, contact the board vice-chair.
- v. The board chair (or vice-chair if the board chair is involved in the conflict) should first determine whether this conflict involves a violation of the Code of Conduct for Board Members. If not, then the matter should be discussed with the parties to bring about resolution and restoration. If necessary, the help of a third party can be enlisted.
- vi. If it is determined that the conflict does involve a violation of the Code of Conduct, the board chair will speak to the member to point out and identify the problem. If the board chair is not able to do this for any reason (it may be a family member), this duty may be delegated to the vice-chair.
- vii. If the member amends his or her ways, the matter is resolved.
- viii. If the member does not amend his or her ways, the board chair and another person may speak to the member.
- ix. If a small group cannot resolve the matter, it will be referred to the board.
- x. The board will discuss the matter. If there is no agreement on the matter after hearing the person out and discussing the matter with him or her, the board will meet without the person present and make a decision.
- xi. If the board is divided on the issue, the board may seek advice from the OACS.
- xii. The board may come to one of three possible decisions:
 - Ask the member to recommit to the board and fulfill the duties;
 - Ask the member to resign;
 - Remove the member from the board.

- xiii. If it is necessary to remove a person from the board, the board shall follow the procedures specified in the school's bylaws and board policies.
- xiv. The board may or may not report to the membership on the matter depending on the outcome.
- xv. All parties should respect confidentiality at every step of the process in order to protect the reputations of the persons involved and the board. Here too, everything should be done "in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Corinthians 14:40).
- xvi. In all cases of personal disagreements, the board should seek not only resolution of the conflict, but also restoration of the relationships.