BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of: PARENT ON BEHALF OF STUDENT, v. FAIRFIELD-SUISUN UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT.	OAH Case No. 2014110073 ORDER OF DETERMINATION OF SUFFICIENCY OF DUE PROCESS COMPLAINT

On October 27, 2014, Parent on behalf of Student (Student) filed with the Office of Administrative Hearings a Due Process Hearing Request[1] (complaint) naming the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District as respondent. On November 5, 2014, Fairfield timely filed a Notice of Insufficiency as to Student's complaint. On November 7, 2014, OAH issued an order finding five of the six issues raised by Student in his complaint not sufficient.

On November 12, 2014, Student filed with OAH an amended complaint. On December 5, 2014, Fairfield filed a NOI as to the amended complaint.

APPLICABLE LAW

The named parties to a due process hearing request have the right to challenge the sufficiency of the complaint.[2] The party filing the complaint is not entitled to a hearing unless the complaint meets the requirements of title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A).

The complaint is deemed sufficient unless a party notifies the Office of Administrative Hearings and the other party in writing within 15 days of receiving the complaint that the party believes the complaint has not met the notice requirements.[3]

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[1] A request for a due process hearing under Education Code section 56502 is the due process complaint notice required under title 20 United States Code section 1415(b)(7)(A).

[2] 20 U.S.C. § 1415(b) & (c).

[3] 20 U.S.C. § 1415(c)(2)(C); Ed. Code, § 56502, subd. (d)(1).

A complaint is sufficient if it contains: (1) a description of the nature of the problem of the child relating to the proposed initiation or change concerning the identification, evaluation, or educational placement of the child, or the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to the child; (2) facts relating to the problem; and (3) a proposed resolution of the problem to the extent known and available to the party at the time.[4] These requirements prevent vague and confusing complaints, and promote fairness by providing the named parties with sufficient information to know how to prepare for the hearing and how to participate in resolution sessions and mediation.[5]

The complaint provides enough information when it provides "an awareness and understanding of the issues forming the basis of the complaint."[6] The pleading requirements should be liberally construed in light of the broad remedial purposes of the IDEA and the relative informality of the due process hearings it authorizes.[7] Whether the complaint is sufficient is a matter within the sound discretion of the Administrative Law Judge.[8]

DISCUSSION

Student's amended complaint was filed on November 12, 2014. Fairfield indicates in its NOI that it received Student's amended complaint on November 14, 2014. Fairfield's NOI was dated, November 24, 2014, but was filed with OAH and served on December 5, 2014, which is more than 15 days after it received Student's amended complaint. Fairfield's fax confirmation notice is not to OAH's fax number, 916-376-6319. Fairfield's NOI was not filed within the statutorily required timeline. Therefore, Student's amended complaint is deemed sufficient.

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[4] 20 U.S.C. § 1415(b)(7)(A)(ii)(III) & (IV).

[5] See, H.R.Rep. No. 108-77, 1st Sess. (2003), p. 115; Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, 1st Sess. (2003), pp. 34-35.

[6] Sen. Rep. No. 108-185, *supra*, at p. 34.

[7] *Alexandra R. v. Brookline School Dist*. (D.N.H., Sept. 10, 2009, No. 06-cv-0215-JL) 2009 WL 2957991 at p.3 [nonpub. opn.]; *Escambia County Board of Educ. v. Benton* (S.D.Ala. 2005) 406 F. Supp.2d 1248, 1259-1260; *Sammons v. Polk County School Bd.* (M.D. Fla., Oct. 28, 2005, No. 8:04CV2657T24EAJ) 2005 WL 2850076 at p. 3[nonpub. opn.] ; but cf. *M.S.-G. v. Lenape Regional High School Dist.* (3d Cir. 2009) 306 Fed.Appx. 772, at p. 3[nonpub. opn.].

[8] Assistance to States for the Education of Children With Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children With Disabilities, 71 Fed.Reg. 46540-46541, 46699 (Aug. 14, 2006).

ORDER

1. The complaint is deemed sufficient under title 20 United States Code section 1415(c)(2)(C) and Education Code section 56502, subdivision (d)(1).

2. All mediation, prehearing conference, and hearing dates in this matter are confirmed.

DATE: December 5, 2014

/s/

ROBERT HELFAND
Administrative Law Judge
Office of Administrative Hearings