

BEFORE THE
OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE HEARINGS
STATE OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE MATTER OF:
WESTMINSTER SCHOOL DISTRICT,

v.

PARENTS ON BEHALF OF STUDENT.

OAH CASE NUMBER 2024040011

ORDER FOLLOWING PREHEARING CONFERENCE
GRANTING REQUEST FOR CONTINUANCE

APRIL 15, 2024

On April 15, 2024, Administrative Law Judge Linda Dowd, Office of Administrative Hearings, held a telephonic prehearing conference. The Administrative Law Judge will be referred to as an ALJ. The prehearing conference will be referred to as a PHC. The Office of Administrative Hearings will be referred to as OAH.

Attorney Karen Van Dijk appeared on behalf of Westminster School District. Attorney Madeline Knutson appeared on behalf of Student. The PHC was recorded. Based upon discussion with the parties, the ALJ issues the following order:

HEARING DATES, TIMES, AND LOCATION

The Friday prior to the PHC, the parties filed a joint request to continue the PHC and due process hearing and schedule a mediation date. The motion was not filed three days before the PHC. However, the parties established good cause for filing the motion less than three days before this PHC. The parties were working together to identify a mutually agreeable mediation date when Student filed an initial request to continue this matter on April 10, 2024. Student's request included good cause to continue because of scheduling conflicts for his attorney. The parties thought OAH would grant Student's request and they would have additional time to identify a mediation date. Student's scheduling conflict was three other earlier filed OAH cases. On Friday afternoon, OAH granted a continuance in the last of the three cases Student cited as a scheduling conflict. Therefore, the parties were not aware until Friday, April 12, 2024, that Student's good cause for the initial continuance request no longer existed. The parties were able to identify a mutually agreeable mediation date and submitted a joint request to continue and mediate.

OAH must conduct a due process hearing and issue a decision within 45 days of receiving the due process complaint unless an extension is granted. (34 C.F.R. § 300.515(a); Ed. Code, §§ 56502, subd. (f), 56505, subd. (f)(3).) Resolving the due process hearing quickly is legally required. Hearings may only be continued if "good cause" is established. (Ed. Code, § 56505, subd. (f)(3).) OAH is guided by the Administrative Procedure Act and the California Rules of Court when ruling on continuance motions. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 1, § 1020; Cal. Rules of Court, rule 3.1332.)

Good cause to continue a hearing may include:

- an essential lay or expert witness is unavailable because of death, illness, or other excusable circumstances,
- a party is unavailable because of death, illness, or other excusable circumstances,
- a party's attorney is unavailable because of death, illness, or other excusable circumstances,
- a new attorney substitutes in, but only if the party establishes that the substitution is required in the interests of justice,
- a new party is added, and the new party has not had a reasonable opportunity to prepare for trial, or other parties have not had a reasonable opportunity to prepare for trial regarding the new party's involvement,
- a party is unable to obtain essential testimony, documents, or other material evidence despite diligent efforts, or
- the case has a significant and unexpected change which makes the case not ready for trial.

Generally, continuances are disfavored. (Cal. Rules of Court, rule 3.1332(c).)

The request for continuance is granted for good cause. The parties desire to mediate constitutes good cause for a first continuance. All previously scheduled dates are vacated. The case shall proceed as follows:

MEDIATION DATE is May 8, 2024, 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM.

MEDIATION will occur via telephone or videoconference.

PREHEARING CONFERENCE will be held on July 1, 2024, at 1:00 PM

All other prehearing matters shall be addressed at the July 1, 2024, PHC. All prehearing motions must be filed three business days before the PHC.

DUE PROCESS HEARING will be held on July 9, through July 11, 2024.

The hearing will be conducted via telephone or videoconference and shall begin at 9:30 AM and end at 3:30 PM on all days, unless otherwise ordered. The hearing shall continue day to day at the discretion of the ALJ.

The parties shall immediately notify all potential witnesses of the hearing dates, and shall subpoena witnesses, if necessary, to ensure that the witnesses will be available to testify. A witness will not be regarded as unavailable for purposes of showing "good cause" to continue the hearing if the witness is not properly notified of the hearing date or properly subpoenaed.

SETTLEMENT

The parties shall immediately inform OAH in writing if they reach a settlement or otherwise resolve the dispute before the scheduled hearing. If the parties reach a settlement within five days of the scheduled start of the due process hearing, the parties shall also inform OAH of the settlement by telephone at (916) 263-0880.

If a full and final written settlement agreement is reached after 5:00 PM the day before the hearing, the parties shall leave a voicemail message regarding the settlement at (916) 274-6035. The parties should also leave contact information such as cellular phone numbers of each party or counsel for each party. At the same time, the parties should send the signature page of the signed agreement or a letter withdrawing the case to OAH at <https://www.applications.dgs.ca.gov/oah/oahsftweb>.

Dates for hearing will not be cancelled until the letter of withdrawal or signature page of the signed agreement has been received by OAH. If an agreement in principle is reached, the parties should plan to attend the scheduled hearing unless different arrangements have been agreed upon by the assigned ALJ.

If the matter settles subject to board approval, in addition to a signed copy of the signature page of the settlement agreement, the parties shall provide the date of the next board meeting. The hearing dates will not be cancelled without this information.

FAILURE TO COMPLY

Failure to comply with this order may result in the exclusion of evidence or other sanctions.

ORDER INCLUDES ALL RULINGS

This Order includes all rulings made at the PHC.

IT IS SO ORDERED.

Linda Dowd

Linda Dowd

Administrative Law Judge

Office of Administrative Hearings