School board, woman head for showdown

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WINSTED — When the Board of Education meets this month, Ruth Wheeler plans to publicly complain about what she believes were inappropriate disciplinary actions school officials took against her son.

Although Wheeler plans on speaking at the Aug. 13 meeting, the school board may ask her to wait.

Acting Superintendent of Schools Robert W. Voight said he will recommend to the board that Wheeler be asked to wait to comment until the September board meeting.

In September, teachers and administrators will be available to come to the board's meeting and Voight said he believes it is only right to have those being accused present when the accusations are made.

Wheeler's complaints center around her belief that her son was inappropriately disciplined after he was labeled a behavior problem and his desk was turned to the back wall for 60 days.

Wheeler, who has been registering complaints on the same incident for two years, said she believes she, or anyone, has the right to speak unchecked at a public meeting and the board is stalling.

But Thomas M. Condon, board chairman, said he has some concerns about accusations being made at a public meeting.

He said he will consult with the board's attorney before the meeting. Condon said he feels uneasy about allowing Wheeler to speak at the board's public session because he believes it may compromise the rights of those being accused or put the board in a difficult position.

According to state statutes governing executive sessions, the board may only speak about personnel matters provided that they notify the person who is the subject of the conversation.

But Wheeler wants to speak in public session.

In a public session board members are prohibited by law from discussing a personnel complaint.

Whether any such restrictions extend to the public is where the two sides disagree.

Wheeler and Winsted's Community Lawyer Charlene LaVoie have both argued that the education board may not be allowed to engage in discussion with Wheeler over the complaint but they have no right to stop her from stating it during the public session of their meeting. LaVoie could not be reached for comment yesterday.

Former school superintendent Norman T. Michaud recommended to the board that Wheeler not be allowed to make her statement in public because it compromised the rights of the board and the staff members accused.