

Final Paper: Policy and Procedures Handbook Assessment

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Prompt 1:

I work at Panguitch Middle School and Panguitch High School in Garfield County, Utah. There are 240 students in our school and a population in the contributing communities of about 3,000. Our district has an employee and student handbook, and all policies, including the handbooks, are posted on the Garfield County School District Website.

The employee handbook was created in 2021. The last official review was in July 2023 by Superintendent John Dodds, Business Administrator Lane Mecham, and the Union Representatives. I was one of those representatives. Before this employee handbook, our district had not had one for approximately 15 years. Mr. Mecham and the current union representatives are reviewing the handbook during the negotiation process. This has become standard practice as part of the negotiation process. After the handbook has been reviewed and negotiations are finalized, the revised handbook is sent to all employees.

A Policy for Garfield School District is reviewed at every board meeting. If the policy needs to change, it must have three readings before it can be adopted. Notice is given on the board agenda, available in each school, and published on the district website.

The student handbook is also available on the district website. It is reviewed with the students on the first day of school. The students have a paper they must sign that states they and their parents have reviewed the handbook and are familiar with the rules. It is reviewed and revised as needed or as the rules are challenged.

Prompt 2, Policy 1: Student Records Policies (GCSD Policy FE-Student Records)

This policy covers students' educational records. There is a specific Utah Code embedded throughout this district policy with links to ease the process of finding legal information. This policy includes records, files, documents, and any other material containing information related to the student's education agency. The policy begins with definitions of records and what those records entail.

According to the policy, the parent can request all records. When the student turns eighteen (18), the rights to records are transferred from the parent to the student. If the documentation regards more than one student, the information can only be given about the student of the requesting parent. The only exception to this rule is if the person requesting information is a school official, teacher, or administrator with a legitimate interest in the student.

If the parent believes the records are incorrect, they can ask the district to amend them. If the District does not amend the record, they must inform the parents of the decision. The parents can then ask for a hearing and challenge the decision.

Parents and students are notified of their rights yearly under the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974*.

School officials with a "legitimate educational interest" in student records may have access to the records if they are actively working with that student.

This policy also covers Confidentiality. Any identifiable information will be removed from any records given to third-party groups or other parents requesting information about situations involving more than one student. The principal is responsible for the records of all currently enrolled students. The Superintendent is accountable for all graduated or withdrawn students.

Justification:

Because of the small size of our school and community, this policy is essential to maintain the confidentiality of all students, parents, and staff. We are in a community where everyone knows all people. Discussing confidential situations without even realizing you are talking about them is easy. The district needed a policy to enforce confidentiality. Public Law 93-380, the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, protects the confidentiality of student records. The law ensures that certain identifiable information is not released without parental consent. The school has to be diligent to ensure that newspapers, social media, and other forms of public communication do not release names, photographs, or other information. (Essex, 2016) The district ensures that FERPA rights are available to all parents or students upon request. Our district has the rights listed as part of the Student Handbook. Parents and students review them at the first of the school year.

Procedures:

The GCSD Administrator handbook has a process for enforcing the policy. The employee will receive notification of the infraction from the Superintendent, and then there will be a review hearing. Following the hearing, the employee will remain without discipline; the district could take disciplinary action or terminate the employee. There is also a right to Due Process written in the GCSD teacher handbook.

Prompt 2, Policy 2: Employee Evaluation (GCSD policy DG, DGA, DGD- Employee Evaluation)

This policy covers the evaluation of Certified and Classified Evaluations. It defines who will be evaluated, who will be conducting the review, what is considered a career educator, and what is regarded as a provisional educator. This policy also has the Utah Code linked and

embedded into the policy. It is published on the Garfield County Website and in the Administrator Handbook. (GCSD, policy DG, 2018)

Part of the evaluation process for all employees includes a survey sent to parents and other stakeholders.

The policy covers the evaluation and the review of the evaluation. It gives the employee 15 days to review the assessment and request a formal review. If a review is requested, the superintendent will appoint a person who is not a district employee but a certified rater and has taught the school to review the evaluation.

This policy also provides for a mentor teacher for new educators. A mentor teacher is no longer being used, as the district has adopted Instructional Coaches in each school.

The policy also provides provisions for evaluating staff and other personnel at Garfield County School District and administration evaluations, including the superintendents.

Justification:

To be considered a highly effective teacher, the teacher must be evaluated by a certified evaluator and pass the evaluation. The Effective rating gives the teacher extra money from the legislature on their paycheck. If an educator or employee does not pass, some steps will be taken to give them additional training or to provide them with resources to become a highly effective teacher. Documentation of these support services is essential. This documentation will show that the employee has had ample training and time to correct the behavior or procedure. The supervisor and the employee should also use and document a teacher improvement plan. (Essex, 2016)

Staff are also evaluated to ensure that they are efficient at their jobs. The immediate supervisor completes this, and surveys are also sent to stakeholders.

Procedures:

Article 3.20 of the GCSD Principal Policy Handbook (Board, Principal Policy Handbook, 2023) states that if educators are deficient in their evaluation, they will be given a notice of improvement that identifies specific and measurable deficiencies. The educator or employee is then responsible for improving their performance.

Prompt 2, Policy 3: Athletic Policies (Board, Student Handbook, 2023)

Clarifies that there is “no constitutional right to participate in extracurricular activities... students who do so are considered school and community leaders and must comply with all applicable laws and standards of behavior”. (Board, Student Handbook, 2023, p. 11) The policy then defines what an extracurricular activity is and how it is associated with UHSAA or not.

The policy states that we will follow all UHSAA eligibility standards and the standards of Garfield County School District. Some of these rules are that the students must be full-time, cannot fail a class in the preceding grading period, and obtain a minimum of a 2.0 GPA on the previous grading period's cumulative report card.

After those requirements, there are local school requirements set by the local school, which must be at least the district and UHSAA requirements.

The Risk Management team also assesses all activities to determine the inherent risk associated with extracurricular activities. Specifically, it states that trampolines, fireworks, and bonfires are prohibited.

Justification:

Athletics and Extracurricular activities are significant to our school and community. This policy is essential to us to showcase that our students are student-athletes and not just athletes. Many of the coaches develop policies that are stricter than the district policy. In the policy, the Superintendent and Board have put a justification statement that says that the students who participate in leadership and extracurricular activities are the leaders and are held to a higher standard. To my knowledge and the knowledge of the principal at my school, Russell Torgersen, we have not had to drug or alcohol test a student-athlete. Other students have violated the safe school policy of having court-ordered tests, but we have not had to initiate those tests. In the *New Jersey v. TLO* case in 1992, Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia stated for the majority that drug testing on student athletes is permissible even without parent consent because student-athletes should expect low levels of privacy, school officials could be expected to exercise a more significant deal of control over student-athletes, and because the extracurricular activities help to combat drug use and the danger that is associated with participating in athletics with drugs in the system, it is permissible to test student-athletes. (Essex, 2016)

Procedures:

The policy has standards for offenses such as drugs, alcohol, and tobacco use, as well as grade deficiencies. These offenses are divided into first, second, and third offenses. The first offense is suspension from the games, meets, or activity. The second offense is a six-week suspension from extracurricular activities, and the third is an eighteen-week suspension. The coaches must catch the student, not just word of mouth, and turn it in to the principal, who notifies the student and the parents. This policy is taken very seriously. If the infraction of the rule is a violation of law, the local law enforcement is also notified.

Prompt 2, Policy 4: Safe School Policy, Intimidation, Harassment (GCSD Student Handbook, 2023 p. 7)

This policy is also found in the Student Handbook. It clarifies what bullying, harassment, hazing, and other abusive conduct are, as well as the definition regarding alcohol and drugs and fighting and retaliation for the person who reports the incident. In the case of Sexual Harassment/Assault, the specific board policy is referenced and is found on the Garfield School District Website.

Justification:

Schools should be a safe zone for students to come and learn. When it is unsafe for a student to be at school, the school is not creating a safe learning environment. If students are not secure, they will not be able to learn. In 2008, the Jeffrey Johnston Stand Up for All Students Act was passed in Florida. (Essex, 2016). This act required all schools to pass strict, safe schools that ban bullying, harassment, and intimidation. There are reporting procedures, and all bullies are referred to counseling and authorities. The victim's families are also notified. Our school does not have this, but it would be great.

Procedures:

Procedures for this policy are found in the Principal Handbook ((Board, Principal Policy Handbook, 2023) and are not available for the public to review. For the first infraction, the student is referred to the Counselor, police, parent, and possibly the justice system. The second infraction is given a 1-3 day in-school suspension, police involvement, parent/student conference, and restorative justice. The third infraction of the policy results in 3-10 days of

out-of-school suspension, police involvement, and referral to the district office for possible expulsion.

Prompt 3: Reflection:

As I wrote this paper, I was continually frustrated. I would find a prompt to write/research about, and it was a valid prompt. However, very few procedures were outlined for how the violation of the prompt would be handled. My school district could be better at creating procedures attached to the policy.

I interviewed my principal and asked him if I needed to include some information somewhere. He gave me his copy of the Principal Handbook, which is unavailable on the district website. He looked through it with me, and we found enough procedures for me to complete the assignment. However, it was still tricky. He was also frustrated. One example was the freedom of expression for students (dress code). Our board revised this policy last year and added the new policy to the student handbook. A student challenged the dress code after being sent home for a violation. The student felt that the strictness of the policy went against her freedom of expression and pushed the religious dress values of most of the board onto her. Nothing in the policy stated how the principal was to handle the violation or the procedures for violating the policy. So, that part of the dress code has yet to be enforced at our school. Because of the lack of procedures and justification, there was no clear way to implement this policy.

I recommend to the school and the school board that when they adopt a policy, they also adopt procedures to enforce the policy. Our school board is very good at looking at policies and

adopting policies from the state and making them applicable to our district. However, looking at the policies is frustrating because they don't have any procedures attached.

The other recommendation is to have all the policies in one location. When I searched the district website for the policies, I could find the policies, but the employee handbook was only available if requested. I emailed the Superintendent about that situation. He apologized and fixed the permissions, so it is viewable by clicking on the link. This handbook is found in the policies under teachers instead of being highly visible. The student handbook is available under the student policy section. The administrator handbook is only available if you talk to the administrator.

Through talking with my administrator and reviewing the administrator handbook with him, we decided together that if the procedures for violating the policies listed there were available in the other handbooks where applicable, it might help the students and staff realize that there are consequences for their actions. This would be my final recommendation.

To summarize, the handbooks need to be in a visible location and tied to procedures. This would facilitate all stakeholders' ability to locate information promptly and efficiently. The policies must be clear and concise and have procedures included. The procedures should state what happens to the violator of the policy and have a clear definition of what the consequences will be.

References:

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