

# Chalkboard

By

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The 85 General Assembly passed approximately 2566 acts this session. I estimate about 100 of them directly affect public school education in Arkansas and thus in the Gentry School District. In our district, and certainly all the others, as soon as the dust from the session starts settling an effort is made to determine how the new laws will affect the day-to-day operation of the district.

Some of the laws passed will precipitate the revision of local school board policies at Gentry. Most will only require minor revisions. In some instances, our local policies already exceed the requirements call far in the new codes. While there is not sufficient space to explain all the 100 plus laws written for education, I will summarize below a few examples new laws passed.

Act 246 will prohibit the use of Social Security numbers as a student's identification number on records or documents that might be made available to the public. This will mean no more Social Security Numbers printed on report cards.

Act 247 prohibits adults from getting on school buses to "with criminal intent" or to disrupt the driver. It has already been our practice not to hold parent-bus driver conferences on the buses.

Act 2197 is an attempt to address "grade inflation". The law requires the ADE to investigate districts who have 20% or more students making a "B" or above but not doing well on the State End-of-Course exams.

Act 1415 requires school officials to notify parents if a child is referred to legal authorities. That is our current practice. We notify parents of everything except cases where the parents are suspected to have abused the child.

Act 660 restored one-half unit of P.E. credit for students in athletics if certain requirements are met in the class and if a certified P.E. teacher teaches the class. Our high school will assign this ½ unit when applicable.

Act 2128, called Isaac's Law, toughens up the penalties for passing a stopped school bus. The fine can be as much as a thousand dollars, a minimum license suspension of three weeks, and a maximum of one year in jail. At Gentry, we are cooperating with law enforcement officials to

identify and prosecute drivers who pass our school buses when they are stopped with the red warning lights flashing.

Many of the other laws have to do with personnel, with school facilities, with curriculum, with funding formulas, with school employee insurance, with school salary schedules, with Charter Schools, and so on and so on.

If the above simple summaries left you wanting to know more, I encourage you to visit the General Assembly's web site at <http://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/> and download the Act titles or download the actual acts. A good summary may also be found on the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators' web page at <http://www.aaea.k12.ar.us/>, the Arkansas School Board Association's site at <http://www.arsba.org/>, and the Arkansas Education Association at <http://www.aeaonline.org/default.asp>. I personally like the ASBA's site the best because it has a summary of the act and a link you can click to open and read or download the actual text of the act.

I suspect most of our students at Gentry, and perhaps a few of you readers, have never thought about the fact that most of the student and employee school board policies are a restatement or customization of a state or federal law. Better stated, most of our policies are an interpretation or translated version of a law from some "higher power".

Finally, I encourage you to visit our school's web site at <http://www.gentrypioneers.com/> and browse our student and employee school board policies. What is the saying? "Ignorance of the law is no defense?"