

Chalkboard

By

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Someday I will give you my thoughts about “Rules vs. Relationships”. Perhaps I already have. It’s a popular concept with me when I visit with administrators. Sometimes I label it as shown above; sometimes it goes under the moniker of “Things vs. People”. I have lectured that either aspect may take precedent over the other as the situation dictates but overall, in the course of a school term or a lifetime; I believe the two need to be equally balanced. While this may have a certain sense of Yin and Yang to some, I take my cue rather from “rendering unto Caesar” or “obeying one’s masters” and “loving one’s neighbor”.

Today’s piece skips the philosophizing and is rather straightforward. Arkansas Codes 6-15-502 ~ 6-15-404 require that each school district in the state have written discipline policies, that the policies be reviewed annually, and that the policies are reviewed by a committee whose members include both students and parents. You may feel free to interchange the word “policy” with “rule”.

At the Gentry district, each campus principal is charged with the formation of his or her respective discipline review committee. Any proposed additions, deletions, or modifications are presented to the school board for consideration for adoption.

Next year our district will return to having only one Parent-Student Handbook rather than having an overarching district manual with a separate compendium for each campus. Having such this year and the past few years is one of my “good ideas” that has lost its value. The intent was to make the district policies age-specific for the different grade levels. Over time, trying to do so caused more confusion than benefits. Next year the different campuses may provide some written practices and procedures for logistical purposes but such will not carry the weight of being school board policies.

Local school board policy is basically an interpretation of state and federal education laws. For example ACA 6-15-502 says, “Student discipline policies shall include, but not be limited to, the following offenses: (A) Willfully and intentionally assaulting or threatening to assault or abuse any student or teacher, principal, superintendent, or other employee of a school system; (B) Possession by students of any firearm or other weapon prohibited upon the school campus by law or by policies adopted by the school board; (C) Using, offering for sale, or selling beer, alcoholic beverages, or other illicit drugs by students on school property; (D) Possession by a student of any paging device, beeper, or similar electronic

communication device on the school campus, however: (i) The policy may provide an exemption for possession of such a device by a student who is required to use such a device for health or other compelling reasons; and (ii) The policy may exempt possession of such a device after normal school hours for extracurricular activities; and (E) Willfully or intentionally damaging, destroying, or stealing school property by students.”

Gentry school board policy lists, “**A.** Disregard of Direction or Commands; Insubordination, **B.** Disruption and Interference with School, **C.** Immorality, **D.** Possession or use fireworks or incendiary devices, **E.** Gambling for monetary gain or for objects of value, **F.** Insult, abuse or assault of school staff, **G.** Possession of any firearm or other weapon, **H.** Possession of contraband materials while on school property or at school-sponsored events, **I.** Using, being under the influence of, offering for sale, or selling beer, alcoholic beverages or other illicit drugs on school property, **J.** Using tobacco products of any kind while on school grounds or at a school activity, **K.** Damage or destruction of school property, **L.** Theft, **M.** Fighting, **N.** Use of Obscene and Vulgar Language, **N.** Truancy, **O.** Violation of Dress Code, **P.** Forgery , **Q.** Repetitious violation of school policy, **R.** Cheating, **S.** Possession by a student of any paging device, beeper, cellular phone, or similar electronic communication device on the school campus; however, an exemption may be made for possession of such a device by a student who is required to use such a device for health or other compelling reasons, **T.** Sexual harassment as defined by Title VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Civil Rights Act of 1991, **U.** Harassment, **V.** Possession of a laser pointer, **W.** Bullying behavior” as reasons that a student might be suspended from school or expelled.

As you can see the state has five things of importance while the district has 23 items it believes to be of such serious a nature as to require severe consequences. Local policy spells out, in a much more detailed fashion, expectations and consequences.

If you have items that you believe should be considered in our Parent-Teacher Handbook for 2006-07, I encourage you to contact one of the campus principals with your suggestions. The “rules” therein will govern the “people” there, in the schools.