

# HOW TO USE COMMON SENSE AND PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT TO AVOID LEGAL COMPLICATION IN THE CLASSROOM

## A. INTERACTION WITH STUDENTS

- Maintain a professional barrier between you and students. You are the adult, the teacher, and the professional; act like the expert, not like another one of the “kids”.
- Keep the classroom door open when talking with students.
- Refer students to the appropriate resource person for counseling and/or discussions about personal matters.
- **DO NOT** flirt with students.
- **DO NOT** discuss your personal life or personal matters with students.
- **DO NOT** discuss your husband, wife, girlfriend, boyfriend, or dates with students.
- When transporting students, coordinate transportation ahead of time, and use school or mass transportation if possible. If necessary, call a taxi for the student. If you must transport a student in your vehicle, ask a co-worker to accompany you.
- Avoid leaving your students unsupervised; have an alternate plan of action.
- Keep your hands and other parts of your body to yourself.
- Use verbal praise and reinforcement.
- Know your school policies and District and State laws governing corporal punishment. Establish and follow a consistent behavior plan. Treat each student with respect. Know the student’s rights.
- Chaperone only school-sponsored functions. **DO NOT** socialize with students. If you chaperone a field trip, put in writing what your responsibilities will be. **DO NOT** take children home with you.
- **DO NOT** make telephone calls or write notes of a personal nature to students.
- **DO NOT** harass students; respect their differences. What you intend as humor may, in fact, be cultural bias or harassment.
- When monitoring after school detention, it is better practice to have more than one student in the room at one time. Alternatively, combine your after school detention with that of another teacher.

## **B. RECORD KEEPING AND ACCOUNTING PROCEDURES**

- Know the laws, School Board policies, and School Board rules, and follow them. Know your rights.
- Know your school policies and District and State Laws regarding collecting money, purchasing materials and equipment and follow them. Work in pairs when collecting large amounts of money.
- Establish a policy regarding your grading system consistent with school and district policies, where applicable. Give a written explanation of it to students and parents at the beginning of the year or when they begin your class or unit of instruction.
- Establish a policy regarding your behavioral management system. Give a written explanation of it to students and parents at the beginning of the year or when they begin your class unit of instruction.

## **C. REPUTATION IN THE COMMUNITY**

- Keep your co-workers and supervisors informed; work and communicate as a team; plan and teach together.
- Communicate with parents and document your communications.
- Dress and act appropriately and professionally. You are a role model in the community as well as in the school; be a good example for students.
- Use common sense and good judgment. Ask yourself how someone else could perceive your comments or actions. Ask yourself if your comments or actions could be taken out of context and/or misinterpreted.
- Avoid putting yourself in a position where you have to defend, explain, or justify your behavior or actions. Avoid putting yourself in a position where it is your word against another person's word.
- Maintain a professional reputation in the community. Even when you are off the job, be discreet.

**SOURCE:** Florida Education Practice Commission