

Preface

No school administrators in their right mind would ignore school discipline as one of their most important responsibilities. Nearly every survey of school administrators in recent years lists school discipline and school safety as one of or their most important areas of emphasis. Although serious acts of crime and violence are relatively rare in schools, fighting, bullying, acts of disrespect, and insubordination still remain as problems faced by school administrators every day. A study by Public Agenda (Johnson, 2004) indicated that seven in ten middle and high school teachers surveyed say their schools have serious problems with students who disrupt classes. Most experienced school administrators in charge of school discipline would say that students who continually disrupt classes make up less than 5% of students enrolled, but that 5% of enrolled students can take 90% of their time. What help exists for administrators involved with enforcing school discipline practices in schools? Unfortunately, not enough, considering the importance of the responsibility.

There is nothing that can erode the reputation of a school faster than poor school discipline. Unfortunately, one expulsion of a student having a gun on campus or a single sale of marijuana can override national merit scholarship winners and a state championship in football. Schools can become infamous for a single act of disruption. Most schools are known for their firm, fair, and consistent discipline practices. Unfortunately, the few schools with a dramatic instance of violence can taint all schools. Public relations has become an increasingly important area for school administrators.

There needs to be a special effort made to ensure that school discipline is not a vulnerable area for the reputation of a school or a school district. You cannot overstate the importance of good school discipline to public relations and the image the public has of schools. Too often school discipline is left to an overburdened assistant principal who is also responsible for school safety, attendance supervision, supervision of athletic events, and some portion of teacher evaluation. It is not possible for a single individual to deal with all the complex issues related to school discipline. School discipline practices must be a team effort and need to involve principals, counselors, teachers, superintendents, and school board members. School discipline policies need to be revised annually by a committee made up of the assistant principal in charge of discipline, at least two

X SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

teachers, three students, two parents, two counselors, two members of the community, one school board member, one police officer, and one representative from the district office. The review needs to be done during the summer when representatives are free of distractions. The committee needs a generous budget that will help staff and provide proper plant requirements to ensure school safety and discipline.

Every effort must be made to ensure that school administrators are keeping up with research on what school safety and school discipline practices are being used, and which are most effective. The individual responsible for school discipline needs to have an up-to-date library on state and federal laws pertaining to suspension and expulsion. School disciplinarians need to be familiar with how the laws have been applied in their school district and their school. They must also be familiar with community factors which may impinge on the safety of their school. There also needs to be a working relationship between law enforcement and school building administrators. The assistant principal in charge of discipline needs to become an expert on school discipline practices and to pass that expertise on to the school discipline committee.

Research indicates that more teachers leave teaching because of discipline problems than any other reasons. Losing good teachers is a serious problem for all schools, be they public or private. A troublesome student can cause many a good teacher a loss of sleep and aggravation. Teachers enter the teaching field because they are interested in teaching not wrestling with students who continually disrupt classroom time. School administrators need to be a supportive tool of teachers in their classroom management routines and practices. Helping teachers have good classroom management practices has become an important part of the school disciplinarian's role.

Parental lack of control of their children and a failure to teach discipline at home may be chief reasons why students misbehave at school. The reality is that it is almost impossible for school administrators to influence what is happening at home. It is a difficult task, but school administrators must create such a strong environment at school that students are forced to adjust to the structured atmosphere of the school. This is no easy task. School administrators need all the help they can get. It needs to be a unified effort on the part of teachers, coaches, band directors, counselors, and all members of the school staff.

This book is primarily the result of a series of School Justice Institutes held in Los Angeles by the Center for Civic Education and training programs held in Washington, D.C., by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. The Institutes were titled *Principles and Practices of Justice on School Campuses*. Special programs were also conducted in Denver, Colorado; Sonoma, California; Providence, Rhode Island; Bowling Green, Ohio; and Orlando, Florida. These programs and Institutes invited assistant principals in charge of discipline to come together and share their problems and accomplishments related to school discipline practices. The programs and institutes provided these chosen school administrators with

an opportunity to share their student codes of conduct and other forms and written materials. This text provides examples of the results of those institutes including opinions expressed.

The second edition has included much more research related to school discipline and school safety. The federal government has done some very excellent work in the field of school discipline and safety. Specific references and recommendations of those studies are contained in this newest edition. In Chapter 1, the goals of school discipline and definitions, as well as a checklist of fair discipline practices, remain intact, as does Chapter 2, standards of rule evaluation and model Student Codes of Conduct. Chapter 2 provides a compilation of the best of more than 50 codes of conduct from all over the nation. Chapter 3 provides suggestions and legal requirements related to consequences when students break school rules and district policies. Updates include timely issues such as the fairness of zero tolerance policies. Chapter 4 contains updated issues and laws related to suspension and expulsion. Chapter 5 has retained the classic court decisions that pertain to school discipline and includes several more recent rulings. Chapter 6 emphasizes research by the United States Department of Education and the Disciplined and Drug Free Schools Program. Chapter 7 is entirely new and describes prevention strategies including school climate, anger control, counseling, communication, documentation, and community involvement. Chapter 8 has been added due to the need for information related to disciplining special education students under the Individual Disabilities Education Act.

This book is not intended to be a complete resource text on school laws related to discipline. This would take a text by itself. It does try to be a summary of issues that school administrators need to address in order to keep from being unprepared for issues that may have serious consequences for the reputation and operation of their school. There are undoubtedly issues left out that may be important to some schools. It may be that a new book that emphasizes issues such as race and elementary education needs to be written, but this book focuses on secondary school discipline in mixed school populations. Superintendents and school board members may find that this book may help them understand the complexity of school discipline practices in the modern school. Professors of education hopefully will include school discipline as an important part of their school administration curriculum and may find this book an easy reference book for their students.

This text makes no attempt at criticism of contemporary practices of school discipline. It attempts only to describe what the common practices are and to describe practices that have been successful in recent years. The author supervised several programs for the Center for Civic Education as a grant administrator that took him to 18 states of the union. Included in those visitations were schools in inner cities, rural, and suburban areas. As a result of visiting hundreds of schools in various parts of the United States, the author believes that schools are for the most part well disciplined places where teachers can teach, and students can learn. There are

districts, however, where financial difficulty or community problems have created an atmosphere of poor morale among teachers and administrators and that has influenced school discipline practices. Frequent turnover among administrators is also a problem in some school districts. Threats of being sued or taken to court, as well as legal preparation, have discouraged some of our best school administrators from staying in the field. Despite the handicaps, most school administrators have excellent judgment and are well equipped to deal with the problems they are confronted with each school year and each school day. School administrators are to be praised for the wonderful job they do. We hope that this text provides them with a few new ideas and reinforces the practices they already have in place. We also hope that school administrators new to their jobs will find this book helpful.