

## **Employee Handbooks**

**Q:** Our school is considering providing a staff handbook to all employees. Can we just take portions of the board's policies and procedures manual and use it? What types of things should we include in the employee manual?

**A:** This question points to a basic difference between a policies and procedures manual and an employee handbook. Although the handbook may repeat some policies, its purpose focuses on the need to explain in clear, concise language the expectations and requirements that the school has for its employees. These may range from grading scales to Christian role model requirements to relations with students and parents. Usually, the policy is broader and less specific, whereas the explanation of that policy to employees should be specific and detailed. In most cases, the policy provides the rationale for the specific requirement. Thus, the school may use the board policy manual as a guideline in drafting the employee handbook but may direct the handbook topics to the actual day-to-day operation of the school.

The question then turns to what major areas the school should address in an employee manual. Some topics will depend on the audience. For example, is the school drafting a manual only for teachers or for all school staff? (Note: My suggestion is that the school provide manuals for all employees.) Generally, the school should include the following topics: (1) explanation of the vision, mission, and philosophy of the school; (2) lifestyle statement and Christian role model requirements; (3) notice of privacy concerns, including phone, e-mail, and computer usage as well as personnel file information; (4) vacation and sick leave or FMLA policy; (5) discrimination policy and full statement of antiharassment policy and investigation procedure; (6) performance evaluation and termination procedure, including any appeal procedure to the board; (7) attendance and leave requirements; (8) overtime, jury duty, and miscellaneous work obligations; and (9) benefit explanations.

This list is not exhaustive; it provides a general checklist of items to include. Finally, the handbook should contain a statement that the school reserves the right to change any policy or procedure at any time, when, in the sole discretion of the board, it determines the change to be in the best interest of the school.

When the school provides its handbook to staff, I suggest that the school also give each employee a form stating that the employee has received and read the handbook. Employees should sign the form each school year, whether or not the school has changed the handbook. The form

should also contain a disclaimer statement advising that the handbook is not a contract for employment but that the handbook only contains a statement of the school's procedures and expectations for carrying out the mission of the school. The school should then place the signed forms in the employees' personnel files.

Editor's note: ACSI offers a notebook entitled *Developing School Handbooks*. The three-ring binder has 140 pages of material regarding parent/student handbooks and employee handbooks, including extensive checklists of topics that these handbooks should normally address. The ACSI member price is \$40.75. Please call 800-367-0798 to obtain more information or to order.

Vol. 18.3