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# School's Policies & Procedures Guide

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Policies and procedures are an important part of running a school productively, just as they are for any type of business or organization. Some might be required by legislative instances or governing bodies, while others might be optional.

Policies and procedures should be documented and shared with applicable people, including staff members, faculty, parents and students. These tools make expectations clear and help avoid inefficiencies, conflicts and lawsuits.

This guide covers policies and procedures to consider when opening a new school.

# Why do schools have policies & procedures?

Procedures and other documented expectations in a school setting, should aim at creating an environment that is safe and supportive for students and that gives them the space to do their best in their studies and lives.

Policies and procedures are essential documents that cover every part of school life. They help set frameworks, so everyone knows what to do and what to expect from the school in various situations. These documents also ensure that everyone applies the school's values consistently.

The school can define policies and procedures for different audiences. Some may apply to students and/or their legal representatives, while some apply to staff and/or governors.

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# Main purposes of school policies are:

- Sharing the school's values and principles with people involved with the school
- Supporting staff members with their duties
- Keeping the school's operations running smoothly
- Making a safe, productive space for both students and staff
- Creating consistency regarding the way the school handles concerns
- Attracting new students and parents, as well as staff and governors

Some school policies are required by laws or accreditation authorities, while others may be optional and decided upon by the governing bodies of the school, such as proprietors or governors.

# The hierarchy of the school's system: Building the school's internal normative framework

Keep in mind that there is a hierarchy to the school's governing system, and the tiers go beyond the school itself.

The top of the hierarchy includes guidelines set by the government.

There are also often state and local rules that need to be followed, depending on where the school is located.

The bottom of the hierarchy is through the school itself, with its own hierarchy of administrators, teachers and other staff members.

Each school should have policies, bylaws and operating procedures laid out and shared with everyone.

These documents provide the guidelines that help the school operate. But, they need to actually be known and followed.

All students, parents and school staff need to know and understand them. The expectations for following them, and the consequences of disregarding them, should be clear to everyone.

These steps minimize problems and increase the chance of everyone correctly following the set framework.

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# Bylaws: The rules for the governance of your school

A school may need bylaws in addition to other policies and procedures. These are generally required for registered non-profit schools.

## What are bylaws?

Bylaws are school rules that have the purpose of designating legal parameters related to the governance and operation of the school.

## How are bylaws created?

Generally, the school board creates bylaws. A school board is in place to help create a good environment for learning, well-being and community.

Nonetheless, the school board also has the power to delegate another authority figure to create bylaws. These figures could include the principal or other staff members of the school.

## Can bylaws be changed?

Bylaws are not necessarily set in stone forever. It's possible to change them when needed, as schools and culture change over time. The school board or delegated authority could amend bylaws to better run the school or for specific reasons, such as legal or safety concerns. When the bylaws are amended, the changes should be shared with all stakeholders..

# Policies: Setting students & parents' expectations

Policies are essential for a school to maintain control.

## How are policies distinct from other documents?

These are rules that school leadership creates to define expectations of students and their parents, as well as staff members. They contribute to establish a shared culture and consistent behaviors within the school.

They should include values and expectations, and they help create a consistent culture within the school.

Policies give staff members a way to manage a variety of situations that occur within a school environment, including ones related to health, behavior, welfare and discrimination. Policies also offer a framework for dealing with situations when the rules are violated.

Policies should include:
- Student safety and welfare
- Staff concerns
- Teaching and learning practices

These documents should be accurate and accessible, allowing everyone within the school community to work together toward a productive and safe environment.

They are also helpful for attracting new students, staff members and leaders. It may make a difference to a parent what the school's policies are on certain issues, such as cyberbullying.

Similarly, a person considering becoming a staff member may want to know school policies regarding performance assessment as part of making the decision on whether to accept a position.

## Procedure: The consistent processes for running your school

Procedures create a system for managing school operations. Schools are complex organizations with many moving parts. This is why procedures are so helpful. They help set forth how to address issues when they come up.

Being proactive in this way guides teachers and administrators through problems, and also lets parents know what to expect.

Procedures ensure students are all treated the same way in response to problems, and they help the school run as smoothly as possible even in difficult or unexpected circumstances.

# How & by whom are school policies created?

Policies should be written with a clear audience in mind, such as students, teachers or support staff.

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When students are the intended audience, the language should speak to and be understood by the age range of the students.

Further, good policies should be written, so they are clear, informative and to-the-point. They should also be current.

The school policies should be drafted/developed by a team of staff members while consulting any school parties who would be interested in or affected by a policy. For instance, it makes sense to consult with a school nurse about school health policies. These consultations can inform any revisions to the draft.

After school policies are drafted, they do not always need to be signed off by the full governing body, so a school should determine this process based on the policies being created.

When it is required by law, the team should submit the draft policy to the full governing body to review it for approval. When this step is not required, a member of the school staff, a committee of staff members or a single governor may be delegated to make the decision of approval.

After adoption, the school should continue to review the policy regarding its effectiveness and impact.

# What are the different types of school policies?

Overall, school policies cover school operations, education and governance. Nonetheless, many also cover topics that relate to students, faculty and programs. These are the main categories for school policies:

- Statutory policies that are legally required
- Discretionary policies that are not legally required but the school may want
- Curriculum policies that cover certain parts of the curriculum; some of these are statutory while the rest are discretionary

Statutory policies may include - depending on the school location:

- Student protection
- School admissions
- Curriculum
- Complaints
- Charging
- Equal opportunities
- Health and safety
- Performance management
- Teachers' pay and conditions
- School behavior
- Bullying
- Special Educational Needs
- Staff discipline, conduct, capability and grievance procedures

School policies may grow and change over time. For example, most schools put in place policies regarding cyberbullying or mobile phone usage during exams.

When does the full governing body need to approve policies and procedures?

In some cases, it is legally required for the full governing body to approve the policies and procedures. The list may include the staff discipline, conduct and grievance policies, the admissions policy, the student protection policy and the instrument of government policy.

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# How & when should school policies be reviewed?

The school should regularly review all policies, yet the frequency will vary. Some policies come with the requirement of reviewing them annually.

These can include the student protection policy, the admissions policy, the special educational needs (SEN) report and the teachers' pay policy.

The data protection policy usually needs reviewing every two years at minimum, while the accessibility plan requires a review every three years. Some reviews need to happen as needed.

For instance, an ICT (information and communications technology) policy needs to be reviewed continually as technology evolves.

Another example is how Covid affected schooling and required adjustments to policies. Policies may also need review when relevant legislation changes, and consistent reviews help ensure that current legislation is being followed.

Whenever an amendment to a policy occurs, or at minimum once a year, the school needs to update relevant information on its website. Policies should include the date the current version was written, as well as the date of the next pending review.

It's helpful to determine a review date for each policy when it is approved.

Sometimes, a review is also brought forward by the governing body if monitoring shows a review is needed.

When there is not a set requirement for the length of time between reviews, the governing body or responsible staff member or faculty can set a review frequency.

How does the review process work?

The review should consider how well the policy has achieved what it set out to do in regard to those impacted by it, such as students or staff members.

It should consider whether the current objectives in the policy remain relevant or need adjustments. The review should also look at the effectiveness of a policy for supporting any associated policies.

# What school policies should be displayed on the school's website?

The school needs to publish certain policies on the school's website and then offer paper copies of the published information to parents on request free of charge.

The applicable policies in this case can include: the school behavior policy, the curriculum policy, the school admissions policy, charging and remissions policies, and the special educational needs report.

Requirements will vary depending on the country, type of school and governing bodies.

# How should school policies be communicated to staff, students & parents?

Communicating the policies should be done through means that help the audience clearly understand the policies. This may vary by the age group and types of policies, while some policies have specific communication requirements like staff policies during onboarding.

First, each school should always have an updated - reviewed annually - school policy handbook available. It needs to be distributed and published on the school's website and intranet, to make them easily accessible.

A benefit of the website is that it can provide updated information throughout the year, whereas a handbook may become outdated after a policy review and amendment.

The school should consider the age group when communicating the policies. For primary school students, a school may want to provide simple signs and/or pictures to help make the policies clear to a younger crowd. For high school students, the communication style may simply be a set of written rules. In addition, the teachers may want to explain the policies in age-appropriate ways to help students understand, and take questions to provide clarity.

Also, it's essential to make policies accessible to all. For instance, the school could adapt communications to those with learning disabilities, offer translations and provide paper copies for those who need them.

## Policies for Students

The student handbook becomes an essential resource for students and parents, as well as teachers and staff members, to know expectations. It acts as the main policy book and a set place everyone can use to ensure policies are being followed, and disciplinary actions are happening fairly and consistently.

The handbook will change, especially in the first years of a new school, and needs to be updated as policies change. At the very least, a new handbook should be made available to parents at the start of every school year.

The student handbook should include aspects of school life like:

- Academic expectations and support
- Committee and activity participation expectations
- Code of conduct
- Safety and security
- Rights and responsibilities
- Allowed and prohibited items

- Attendance expectations
- Mission and values statement
- Alcohol and drug policies
- Campus policies and facilities
- Community living
- Discrimination and discriminatory harassment
- Disciplinary actions
- Financial policies
- Dining services
- Relationships and sexual misconduct
- Use of campus services/resources

## Policies for Staff

It is also helpful to have a staff handbook to clearly communicate the professional expectations of staff members. In this case, it is recommended to have an attorney review the staff handbook to ensure it follows relevant laws, especially pertaining to human resources policy.

Staff handbooks generally include aspects like:

- Human resources policies like payroll processing, benefits, vacation and sick leave, and other employment terms
- Interactions with students and parents
- Health and safety
- Equal opportunities
- Dress standards
- Extracurricular activity expectations
- Internet policies
- Data protection
- Additional relevant policies

## Writing School Policies

It makes sense for a staff member who is responsible for certain curriculum or school operation domain to write the designated policy while also following certain policy requirements.

# Procedures: School operations manual

A school is similar to a business or other organization in that it has many tasks and working parts that happen continuously to keep it running successfully.

An effective operation manual officially documents the way everything should be carried out for proper school operations. The manual acknowledges the many team players who are a part of making the school run effectively, and it shares agreed-upon ways to carry out tasks in a school.

The operations manual basically takes processes that are happening in the school and documents them in a clear, easy-to-understand way, so there is a standard to the task. This is helpful for referring back as needed, and also for educating new staff and temporary staff on processes.

For example, an attendance document in the operations manual may lay out aspects of the task like:

- When and how often attendance is taken
- When a student is considered late
- How attendance is recorded
- How and when attendance needs to be reported to the front office
- What steps are taken when attendance is reported to the front office

# Generating your operations manual

Similar to policies and procedures, the operations manual needs to be written out and updated over time.

It becomes challenging to document all operations at once and to keep up with changes.

Here is some advice to help:

**Simplify:**
Start simply by documenting just the essentials of what, when and how to carry out tasks. Over time, the school can add to the operations manual to include more information.

**Add Over Time:**
The original version of this document can include the basic processes that are part of school operations. In time, staff may come up with additional processes to add.

**Gain Support:**
No single person should write out the operations manual. Instead, it's helpful to have staff members write out the steps for the processes they carry out.

**Publish:**
An operations manual needs to be a living document that is continually updated and also accessible. For this reason, it is best to share it on the staff intranet instead of printing new editions.

# Ready to start defining & implementing your school's Policies & Procedures?

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