



Vulnerable Educators – A Three-Part Newsletter Series

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In Part I of our three-part series on Vulnerable Educators we talked about negligent supervision of students. We stressed that this is one of the most common causes of legal action against school districts and highlighted eight basic principles of supervision that educators must understand. In Part II we discussed what educators can do to avoid false accusations of misconduct being lodged against them.

Part III: "Are We There Yet?" Supervising Students During Off-Campus Activities

Supervising students and enforcing school policies on campus requires great focus and effort on the part of both staff and administrators. What makes these duties even more challenging is when students' activities occur off-campus. School districts must realize that their policies need to be enforced in all school-related activities, regardless of where they occur. The purpose of this article is to discuss the various aspects of supervising students and avoiding potentially vulnerable situations during off- campus activities.

TRANSPORTATION

Providing transportation for students to an off-campus event may be a district's most critical responsibility. Maintaining safety and security during a bus ride takes planning, organization and vigilance. Nothing replaces continuous staff monitoring. Students actually appreciate the constant presence of staff. This allows them to feel safe and secure and focus on their activities. When supervising on a bus, staff should be mindful of the following:

1. **Good supervision entails movement.** Be sure to walk through the aisle on a regular basis so you can actually observe student behavior.
2. **Adequate lighting on a bus is important.** Although when driving at night, it is a safety hazard to keep the interior lights on, the lights should briefly be turned on when walking down the aisle.
3. **Assigned seating may be necessary** if you are dealing with disruptive students. Don't be afraid to make it mandatory for such individuals to sit within close proximity of staff. Doing so will allow for better control.

AT THE EVENT

Planning is the key to appropriate supervision during activities off-campus. Understanding the venue and its layout will help determine the number of supervisors necessary and what type of supervision is reasonable. For example, when the venue is an amusement park, you need more staff and a smaller staff/student ratio than if the venue were a concert hall. When supervising at an event, it is important to consider the following:

1. Maintain an **adequate staff/student supervision ratio.**
2. Be sure to **review behavioral rules and safety measures** with students, parents, and staff prior to the event. This provides everyone with notice of what is expected and allows for easier discipline at the event.
3. **Understand district policies** such as those preventing bullying and sexual harassment,

and be sure the policies are enforced at the event. District policies are to be followed at all school-related activities, regardless of their location.

4. **Students' expectations of a safe environment** should not be lesser during an off-campus activity than during any on-campus activity, such as classroom instruction.

OVERNIGHT SUPERVISION

One disgruntled administrator once said, "Our district has finally found a way to deal with overnight trips. We don't take them!" While this approach may seem to solve some risk management issues, it clearly misses the point as to what these excursions are really about. Often we fail to realize the background of our students and their economic reality. Many of them would never have the opportunity to venture outside of their community or spend a night in a hotel unless the school district provided such an opportunity.

As educators, we should always strive to enhance a student's ability to learn inside the classroom and out. Taking them on an overnight adventure often does just that. Keeping in mind what a positive opportunity this can be for a student, it is important to consider the following safeguards regarding supervision of overnight trips:

- When planning an overnight trip, **try to stay in a hotel**, preferably on an upper floor, rather than in a motel. This will allow for easier supervision since all rooms in a hotel are only accessible through a single corridor. If possible, try to arrange for all student rooms to be on the same corridor.
- Throughout the night it is imperative to have staff supervise. As a result, it is important to **have enough staff to share overnight shifts** of one or two hours. Our supervisory responsibility does not diminish simply because we believe the students are sleeping. Some districts hire hotel security guards to supervise throughout the night. This can be a dangerous proposition if the guard falls asleep or leaves his or her post. Nothing is better than actual supervision by a district representative.
- **Mixed groups should be supervised by at least one male and one female adult.** Room checks should be made by two staff members as well, at least one of which should be the same gender of the students in the room. Room checks should be thorough and include the bathroom, closet, behind curtains and next to and underneath beds. It's not uncommon for students to attempt to hide colleagues and contraband in their room. These individuals will only be found by a complete inspection.

Supervising off-campus activities is no doubt a challenging exercise for all involved. What staff must realize is that the time put into supervising is time well spent. It may be tiring and tedious but it expands students' ability to learn and receive a quality, well-rounded education.

We have two programs designed to address the concerns of vulnerable educators and their school districts:

[McGrath Vulnerable Educators Liability Training: Minimize the Risk](#)

(Click title to request information.)

This Training includes:

- District and Individual Liability
- Duty to Supervise

- Proper Supervision and Safe Transportation Off-Campus (including overnight trips)
- Minimizing the risk of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Abuse allegations
- Volunteer selection, training and supervision
- Documentation – includes sample checklists, informed consent forms, etc.

[The McGrath Athletic Liability Training Program](#)

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This Training includes:

- Duty to Properly Instruct, Supervise, Condition Athletes
- Duty to Provide Safe, Adequate Equipment
- Duty to Maintain Accurate and Up-to-Date Records
- Duty to Warn and Inform Athletes and Parents about the Risk
- Safe Transportation Off-Campus
- Minimizing the risk of Sexual Harassment and Sexual Abuse allegations
- Employment Issues for Athletic Directors (includes use of volunteers)
- Documentation – includes sample checklists, informed consent forms, etc.

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