MODEL POLICY #17

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

Why Adopt This Policy?

School boards should establish a clear policy regarding classroom observation to address ambiguity and confusion often experienced by parents. Many existing policies lack sufficient detail, leading to uncertainty and frustration when parental requests for classroom observation are denied without explanation. This policy aims to provide transparent guidelines for parental classroom observation, ensuring compliance with federal law while implementing safeguards to prevent misuse of the privilege.

Policy

Parental engagement in their child's education is essential to their success. To ensure the involvement of parents in the educational setting, parents shall be allowed the opportunity to observe classroom activities. But in order for the educational program to continue undisturbed when visitors are present, it is necessary to establish visitor guidelines.

Any parent wishing to observe their child's class shall contact the principal and teacher of the respective class to request to observe the classroom. Unless there are extenuating circumstances, the request for visitation shall be granted. A response to the request must be provided as soon as reasonably possible, but at least within one week of receipt of the request.

If the request is approved, a date and time for observation shall be selected through mutual agreement between the parent and the teacher or building principal and shall be established as follows: The building principal or teacher shall provide a suggested date and time within one week for observation within one week. The parent may request a different date or time. Once a date and time are agreed upon, the teacher or building principal shall confirm the details in writing or through email.

It is important for schools to communicate clearly with parents about any circumstances that may affect their ability to observe classroom activities and to provide alternative ways for parents to stay engaged in their child's education. If a request for classroom visitation is denied, the parent shall be provided notice and a reason why.

Acceptable reasons for denial of a visit may include:

1. **Excessive Visitation:** Teachers should have discretion to deny a parent request to observe their classroom based on excessive visitation in the past, to maintain a productive learning environment free from unnecessary distractions. In considering whether excessive visitation has occurred, teachers may consider the frequency of parent visits (such as multiple visits per week) and the duration of each visit (such as whether visits consistently extend for long periods and disrupt the normal flow of instruction or cause distractions to students).
2. **Instructional Disruption:** The parent has previously been asked to leave or removed for a disturbance during a classroom visit.

3. **Student Privacy:** If the presence of a parent in the classroom could compromise the privacy or confidentiality of other students during discussions about sensitive topics or individual student assessments.
4. **Safety and Security:** If there are safety concerns related to allowing visitors in the classroom, such as during emergency drills, if the parent is a sex offender, or if the visitation would violate other school policies.
5. **Legal Restrictions:** In cases where there are legal restrictions or requirements that prevent or limit parental observation, such as court orders or custody arrangements.

Denial of parental classroom observation shall not be based on any of the following reasons:

1. **Discrimination:** Discriminating against certain parents or families based on personal biases, socioeconomic status, race, national origin, sex, religion, or other factors.
2. **Maintaining Control:** The potential for classroom disturbance, when no disturbance with that parent has ever occurred and there are no reasonable grounds to believe it would.

During the visit, the parent may not create a disturbance in the classroom and may only interact with other students and classroom activities with the permission of the teacher ahead of the visit. If the presence of the parent is detrimental to the good order of the class or the school, the parent will be asked to leave. If such individual refuses to leave the school grounds or creates a disturbance, the school district is authorized to request from the local law enforcement agency whatever assistance is required to remove the parent, and that parent will not be allowed back for further classroom visits.

For purposes of this policy, the term "parent" includes a legal guardian or other person who is legally responsible for the welfare of the child (such as a grandparent or stepparent with whom the child lives). Rights under this policy transfer from the parents to a student who is 18 years old or emancipated under state law.

Legal Analysis — National

Federal law requires public schools to implement policies and procedures to ensure the involvement of parents in the educational setting. These policies and procedures include creating a policy that gives parents the opportunity for "observation of classroom activities." 20. U.S.C § 6318(d)(2)C. This is part of the "Every Student Succeeds Act" or "ESSA." According to ESSA, parents have a limited right to classroom observation, but that may be restricted by the school district in a uniform policy that applies equally to all parents. The determination process for parents wanting to observe should be clear and nondiscriminatory, so if a request is denied they know why.

Additionally, the "Family Education Rights and Privacy Act" (FERPA) or "student privacy," are not valid reasons to deny a parent access to observe her child's classroom. FERPA does require that sensitive information about students may not be released without parental consent. However, what information is protected under this law matters. In the U.S. Supreme Court's decision *Owasso v. Falvo*, the Court said that peer-grading or calling out other student's scores in class was not a violation of FERPA, as those things did not satisfy the definition of an "educational record." As such, a parent observing a classroom, even if a student's scores on an assignment are read out, would not violate FERPA.

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