Avoiding Trouble: Top 20 Ways to Stay Out of “Hot Water”

1. Do your job as well as possible. Incompetence = unemployment! Watch your attendance, too. It’s hard to do a good job when you’re absent too much.

2. Comply with any “reasonable” directives from your supervisors. Don’t be insubordinate. When in doubt, get guidance or permission from an administrator in advance.

3. Don’t be negligent. Appropriately and adequately supervise your students at all times. Protect them from foreseeable injury. Avoid dangerous activities. Don’t drive students in your vehicle.

4. Keep your private life private. Don’t engage in any “immoral” conduct, especially publicly or on the net.

5. Obey all state and federal laws, as well school board policies (ignorance is no excuse). At the very least, no felonies whatsoever, and no misdemeanors involving drugs or “moral turpitude.” Commission of a crime is as bad as a conviction. Marijuana is off limits.

6. Hands off the students, especially in a disciplinary situation! Try not to touch students unless it is absolutely necessary. Do not make any offensive, injurious, or abusive contact with students. If you must restrain or physically redirect a student, only use “reasonable force” as a very last resort to prevent harm, preferably with an adult witness.

7. Be very careful about what you say to, about, or around students. Avoid anything that could be seen as inappropriate, verbally abusive, insulting, or threatening. Watch your language and topics.

8. Don’t do anything that even looks like you might be dating or having sex with a student. Unless you are a counselor, don’t discuss dating, romantic life, sex life, etc., with students. Obviously, don’t solicit or engage in any sort of inappropriate relationship with a student!

9. Refrain from being alone with a student. If you must, keep the door open and have a valid reason. Don’t meet students outside of school, especially without parent permission.

10. Don’t email, text, chat, or Facebook friend students unless absolutely necessary for school business. You can be friendly, but don’t be their friend.

11. Don’t use alcohol, illegal, or unauthorized drugs at anything even vaguely school-related. Don’t let students use them either. Don’t discuss your alcohol or drug use with students.

12. Be honest! Don’t lie or provide false information/dates, including on any forms, reports, or documents.

13. Be very careful with money. Don’t commingle funds, make sure to account for everything.

14. Don’t tutor your own students. Don’t solicit. Get permission in writing for all camps, fundraisers, etc.

15. Keep confidential information confidential, e.g., FERPA, medical, psych, IEP, discipline, etc.

16. Don’t abandon your contract or refuse to do what your contract requires.

17. Make all required reports A.S.A.P., and within 24 hours at the most. Report anything that you even possibly suspect to be child abuse or neglect the same work day. Document! C.Y.A.

18. Be very careful with testing, especially erasures. Follow the directions, don’t violate the protocols or test security. Report and document all irregularities. When in doubt, ask your local school testing coordinator.

19. Keep your conduct “professional” at all times. This can include almost anything.....

20. Join a professional organization, e.g., Educators First.

To join, call (678) 881-0844 or go to www.educatorsfirst.org