

Teaching Defensively: Eight things you should know

(Editor's Note: This article originally appeared in the newsletter of the Meriden Federation of Teachers, and is reprinted with the permission of the MFT)

Teachers must teach defensively in order to protect themselves from lawsuits and disciplinary actions. This publication has been developed to give you some ideas on what you should do in order to minimize the chances of being sued or disciplined. These suggestions are based on recent events and lawsuits in the State of Connecticut. They have been developed with the help of Brian Doyle, the attorney for the State Federation.

1 Never Leave Your Students Unattended

If you need to leave the classroom for any reason, make sure a staff member takes over for you.

2 Never Be In A Room Alone With A Student

If you are going to be alone in a room with a student, please make sure someone else knows about it. Several teachers in Connecticut have been falsely accused of sexual abuse.

3 Never Close Your Door When Giving Special Help

Special help is important to the development of knowledge for students. When you are giving special help, make sure you keep the door to the room opened and make sure someone knows you are giving the help.

4 Searching Book Bags

You should not search a student's bag even if you ask the student for permission. You may ask the student for an item in the book bag, and if it is given to you keep it. Then send the student and the book bag to the office separately.

When you think that a student's bag contains something that can harm others or is illegal in some way, separate the student and the bag and send each separately to the principal or an assistant principal.

5 Never Be Alone On A Field Trip

If you are going on a field trip, consider the following:

If it is an overnight field trip, make sure you are never alone with a student. Make sure another adult knows where you are at all times.

If you and others are on a bus trip, make sure you are sitting in different parts of the bus. You must be able to see what is happening to each and every student on the bus. Also, make sure you have a person to contact back at the school or at the person's home in case any problems develop on the field trip.

If you are chaperoning students at an overnight event involving housing students, you must be careful about the consumption of alcohol. After the students have been placed in their rooms after curfew, there is a tendency of adults to desire a drink. If something happens to a student while you are drinking or after you have had a drink, the law might consider that you were unable to perform your chaperoning duties and you could be fired.

6 Never Take Any School Equipment Home Without Written Permission of the Administration

If you have equipment in your possession without permission, it is a felony. Please get permission in writing.

7 Always Have A Way To Contact the Main Office

You should be aware of the telephone system in your school and the location of the nearest telephone.

Never Take Students In Your Car

You should never pick up students walking home from school. You should not travel with students in your car.