Forsyth County Schools Employee Handbook 2026-2027



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PURPOSE

This handbook is intended to serve as a guide to address frequently asked questions regarding policies, procedures, benefits, services, work rules, and other topics relevant to employees. While it aims to be as comprehensive as possible, it may not cover every situation. All district employees are expected to be familiar with and adhere to all Forsyth County Board of Education policies, administrative procedures, and operating guidelines.

FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS AT A GLANCE

FCS serves 54,000+ students and is the largest employer in the county with over 9,000 full and part-time employees and substitutes. For 2026-2027, we are home to 42 schools (23 elementary, 11 middle, 8 high) and 1 Academy of Creative Education.

FCS' VISION, MISSION, BELIEFS & GOALS

Forsyth County Schools (FCS) is proud to be one of the top districts in Georgia and the United States. This success has been accomplished with a long-standing commitment to strategic planning with staff, parents/guardians, citizens, and businesses, working to support the primary customer, the individual student.

The FCS 2022-2027 Strategic Plan is focused around five goals: (1) The Learner Experience, (2) Staff Recruitment and Development, (3) Social and Emotional Health, (4) Culture, Climate, and Community, and (5) Operational Excellence.

BOARD MEMBER INFORMATION & MEETING SCHEDULE

The Forsyth County Board of Education (FCBOE) is the governing body of Forsyth County Schools. The primary role of the Board is the legislation of school district policies, which are executed under the direction of the School Superintendent.

The FCBOE consists of five members who are elected by district to staggered four-year terms. They meet monthly at the Forsyth County Board of Education and Professional Development Center at 1120 Dahlonega Highway, Cumming.

- District #1: Wes McCall– Vice Chairperson
- District #2: Trisha Hoyes
- District #3: Dorian Usherwood
- District #4: Chris Grimes
- District #5: Mike Valdes - Chairperson

FORSYTH COUNTY SCHOOLS

STRATEGIC PLAN 2022-2027



GOAL AREAS

THE LEARNER EXPERIENCE

- Increase student achievement and growth
- Increase student engagement
- Develop and sustain consistent assessment and grading practices

STAFF RECRUITMENT & DEVELOPMENT

- Acquire and retain excellent staff
- Build and develop individual staff capacity

CULTURE, CLIMATE, & COMMUNITY

- Increase meaningful home, school, and community partnerships
- Work collaboratively with all people to promote inclusivity, school pride, & belonging

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL HEALTH

- Foster healthy digital interactions
- Expand access to mental health resources and strategies
- Promote respect, wellness, and balance for staff and students

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

- Plan and adapt for growth
- Manage financial resources
- Plan and allocate resources

VISION

A safe, connected, and thriving community for all

MISSION

To provide an unparalleled education for all to succeed

BELIEF STATEMENTS

- Respect and empathy are vital to building trust.
- All students and staff must be connected and supported.
- All students and staff must have a strong sense of purpose.
- All students and staff must be challenged to think critically and creatively.
- Family and community engagement are essential to continuous improvement.

WWW.FORSYTH.K12.GA.US

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FCS EMPLOYMENT POLICIES, PRACTICES, & PROCEDURES

Any policies that are referenced in this handbook may be modified or discontinued due to legislative updates or the implementation of Board approved policies. FCS reserves the right to modify or discontinue this information at any time. The most current FCS Board policies can be found on the FCS website.

It is important to note that this employee handbook is intended to provide general information only. This handbook is not a contract between FCS and its employees. Further, the contents of this Handbook shall not be construed as promises from FCS to its employees or as guaranteeing any fixed terms and conditions of employment. Employment with FCS is governed by the specific terms outlined in each employee's contract, and if there are no specific contractual terms specifying the duration of employment, FCS employees are considered "at-will" employees. "At-will" employees may have their employment terminated at the will of either party, for any reason, or no reason at all. O.C.G.A. 34-7-1.

Given that this handbook is intended to provide general information only, any questions about the specific applicability of certain provisions should be addressed to the employee's immediate supervisor/principal, or a member of the FCS Human Resources Department.

Any information contained in this handbook supersedes department and/or school-level guidance.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY DISCRIMINATORY COMPLAINTS

Board Policy Reference: GAAA

The Forsyth County Board of Education does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, disability, or sex in its employment practices. It is the policy of the Board of Education to comply fully with the requirements of Title VI, Title VII, Title IX, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) and all accompanying regulations.

Discriminatory Complaints Procedures

Complaints made to the School District regarding alleged discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color or national origin in violation of Title VI; religion or sex in violation of Title VII; sex in violation of Title IX; disability in violation of Section 504 or the ADA, or on the basis of age in violation of the ADEA, will be processed in accordance with GAAA-R(1), except as otherwise provided therein:.

Applicability

This policy is not intended to deprive any employee of any right they may have to file a grievance pursuant to any other policy of the local Board of Education, specifically the policy designed to implement Official Code of Georgia Annotated 20-2-989.5, where appropriate. This policy is not intended to provide an alternative process for resolving evaluation and employment disputes where there already exists a due process procedure

mandated by state law or State Department of Education regulations, specifically including, but not limited to, hearings to be conducted pursuant to the Fair Dismissal Act of Georgia. The complainant retains at all times the right to contact the Office of Civil Rights, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or any other appropriate state or federal agency with regard to any allegations that the system has violated the statutes described above.

CODE OF ETHICS FOR EDUCATORS

The **Code of Ethics for Educators** defines the professional behavior of educators in Georgia and serves as a guide to ethical conduct. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission has adopted standards that represent the conduct generally accepted by the education profession. The Code defines unethical conduct justifying disciplinary sanction and provides guidance for protecting the health, safety, and general welfare of students and educators, and assures the citizens of Georgia a degree of accountability within the education profession.

STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING

Board Policy Reference: GAC

Rationale:

The Forsyth County Board of Education believes that significant decisions about policies, instructional programs, and services as well as the allocation of funds to support these decisions, are best made with input from all stakeholders whenever feasible.

The Board of Education will solicit community and staff input whenever Board policies are composed or revised. The proposed policy or change in policy will be made available for public comment for at least the period of time until the next regularly scheduled Board meeting. An exception may be made if policies or changes in policy are required by the state or federal government. The district will also encourage community input on curriculum revisions, programs and services, by having community members serve on committees and by having input forms on the FCS website.

Local School Councils (LSCs), which are comprised of parents, teachers, business partners and the school principal, will be the official organizations to which the Board will turn for input in items as outlined in GA. O.C.G. 20-2-86. While these councils are not created for "decision-making," they certainly have a voice in the decision-making process. The Board encourages the councils to establish Ad Hoc Committees on issues of local site interest. LSCs will bring forward recommendations to the Board annually.

The Superintendent is authorized to establish such committees as necessary to recommend policies and rules for the proper functioning of the system. When committees are created, which include students, parents, employees, and other community members, the facilitator of the group will clearly define the recommendation(s) the committee has the authority to make and the ones in which they serve in an advisory capacity.

The facilitator of each committee shall also set the parameters for the work of the group and the parameters of the issues to be addressed.

The primary focus of all decision-making in Forsyth County Schools will be on enhancing the teaching and learning process and improving student achievement.

STAFF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Board Policy Reference: GAG

The purpose of this policy is to prevent and address conflicts of interest related to employment, promotion, supervision, job assignment, and evaluation of related employees, including substitutes and lay coaches.

It is the policy of the Forsyth County Board of Education that no employee may be the direct supervisor of a member of his or her household, immediate family member, or relative as those terms are defined herein. If employees become related in a form otherwise prohibited by this policy, or if a family relationship becomes disruptive or otherwise detrimental to the effective and efficient operations of the district, the district may elect to resolve such issue by transferring individuals to other work sites.

I. Definitions

A. Conflict of Interest - a conflict of interest is an employee being in a position to use his/her contacts or position in the organization to advance his/her private business or financial interests, or the private business, financial, or other interests of immediate family members.
B. Direct Supervision – shall relate to those situations in which a district employee is directly responsible for another full-time, part-time, or temporary employee's appointment, employment, promotion, demotion, job assignments, overtime/payroll authorization, or job performance evaluation. For purposes of this policy, the principal and assistant principal of a school are deemed to have Direct Supervision of all employees assigned to the school.
C. Immediate Family Member - a spouse, child, sibling, or parent or the spouse of a child, sibling, or parent.
D. Nepotism – when employees use their power or influence to favor Immediate Family, or Relatives, including but not limited to, giving a job without regard to merit or qualifications.
E. Relative- grandchild, great-grandchild, parent, grandparent, great-grandparent, brother, sister, nephew, niece, aunt, or uncle of the employee in question, and all of the same relatives of the employee's spouse; any person living in the immediate household of the employee; any person who is related by blood, marriage, or adoption.

The Superintendent, or designee, may establish procedures and regulations needed to implement this policy.

PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL WORKING CONDITIONS

Board Policy Reference: GBR

All professional employees are expected to observe a minimum workday of eight (8) hours and a minimum work week of forty hours. Each school principal shall establish a minimum workday schedule for all personnel assigned under their supervision. These schedules shall insure that all professional employees remain on duty at their school at least eight hours per day.

As part of their workday, teachers are expected to perform such duties as teaching and teacher preparation, staff meetings, conferences with students and parents, planning conferences, related school activities in the community, and extra-class responsibilities, whether or not these activities fall into the hours during which they are required to be on duty at their school.

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK

Board Policy Reference: GAK (1)

A criminal record check will be conducted at or prior to employment on every person who is employed by the Board of Education.

For initial hiring purposes, the employee shall be fingerprinted, have a criminal record check performed, and, where applicable, provide a Clearance Certificate issued by the Professional Standards Commission.

Subsequent criminal record checks shall be conducted on all personnel in accordance with state laws, state board rules, and rules of the Professional Standards Commission. All certified personnel whose employment is continued with this School District shall have a criminal record check made upon any certificate renewal application to the Professional Standards Commission. All classified employees whose employment is continued with this School District shall have subsequent criminal record checks on a periodic basis, not to exceed every five years, using procedures and schedules to be determined by the Superintendent or designee.

Any cost of such record checks for all personnel shall be paid by the applicant, employee, or the Board.

Criminal record check information shall be used by the school district and its officials and employees only for the purpose of determining whether to grant regular employment, and in any administrative or judicial proceeding calling such employment into question. Such information shall be stored, restricted, and disposed of in such manner as may be required by federal and state authorities. A breach of confidentiality or the inappropriate use of criminal background check information may constitute a workplace violation and may be grounds for disciplinary action including, but not limited to, termination of

employment and/or reporting to the Professional Standards Commission.

The Superintendent or designee shall establish such procedures, fees and regulations needed to administer this policy.

CRIMINAL CHARGES/SELF-REPORTING

As a condition of continued employment, each employee must immediately notify their building principal or their district department supervisor of any arrest other than a minor traffic offense. Employees are also required to disclose any convictions. Failure to report criminal charges, arrests, and/or convictions may result in personnel corrective action up to termination of employment.

PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT

Board Policy Reference: GBC

The Board of Education believes that an active program of recruitment of professional personnel is essential in order to attract competent, qualified, and productive personnel.

The District posts professional job openings on the State of Georgia website. The system notifies appropriate colleges and universities annually of this posting practice. The FCBOE policies regarding employment discrimination apply to the recruitment and selection of personnel.

PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL LAY-OFF

Board Policy Reference: GBKA

The most important functions of the FCBOE are to employ personnel and manage resources within the limitations defined by the funding sources of the School District. Consequently, it shall be the prerogative of the FCBOE to abolish job positions, to reduce the length of the work year and salary, and/or reduce the number of employees when seeking to cope effectively with program changes or financial exigency.

EMPLOYEE RESIGNATION

Board Policy Reference: GBO

The Superintendent of Schools shall be authorized to accept employee resignations on behalf of the FCBOE.

Once a resignation is received by the Superintendent or designee, the resignation may not be rescinded.

PERSONNEL COMPENSATION GUIDES & CONTRACTS

Board Policy Reference: GBA

The Superintendent or designee shall establish a process for evaluating, verifying, documenting, and awarding experience for placement of certified personnel on the salary schedule in accordance with State Board of Education Rule 160-5-2-.05 and certification rules established by the Professional Standards Commission.

Certification requirements, if any, shall be specified in job descriptions for certified professional classifications and/or in any announcements that may be posted for available positions or vacancies. All reporting of personnel information shall be consistent with reporting requirements established by the Georgia Department of Education.

Salary placement for all personnel is based on State and School District guidelines with interpretation and final decision by the Human Resources Department. Step placement on any salary schedule does not necessarily equal years of creditable service; however, years of service are tracked and recorded for purposes of retirement and other benefits that are linked to years of service.

EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION

FCS is dedicated to protecting our employees' information and providing great customer service. In that effort, we have partnered with Verifent to confirm that verification of employment and/or verification of income (VOE/VOI) requests are legitimate, and a valid permissible purpose exists as defined by the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA).

Verifiers (mortgage lenders, banks, apartment complexes, and others) seeking employment and/or income information for our employees must submit VOE/VOI requests through Verifent.

Verifiers can submit requests by:

- Log in **here.** Please note that new Verifent users will need to register and create an account before proceeding.
- When prompted, enter our unique organization code: 3912F8
- Please be prepared to provide the employee's date of birth and last four digits of the Social Security Number.

Other verification requests are processed through the Human Resources Department. Please visit the FCS Human Resource website to learn more.

Certified Staff: In order for experience credit to be granted for the current school year, the Verification of Certified Work Experience form must be received no later than the last working day of the current fiscal/school year.

Classified/Non-Teaching/Private Industry Work Experience: In order for experience credit to be granted for the current school year, the Verification of Work Experience form must be received no later than the last working day of the current fiscal/school year.

E-VERIFY

Pursuant to Georgia Law, FCS has registered and participates in the federal work authorization program to verify employment eligibility of all newly hired employees. O.C.G.A. 13-10-91

INFECTIOUS DISEASES

Board Policy Reference: GANA

No student shall be denied access to, nor shall an otherwise qualified individual be denied employment in the educational programs of Forsyth County School System solely because he or she is infected with a communicable disease. Forsyth County Board of Education provides educational opportunities for its employees to become informed concerning transmission of HIV infection, procedures to reduce the risk of transmitting HIV infection as well as other communicable diseases, including precautions to be taken in handling bodily fluids and blood whenever necessary. A student or employee who is infected with a communicable disease will remain in his or her educational or employment setting unless he or she presents a significant risk of contagion as determined by the Forsyth County Board of Education after consultation with the student's or employee's physician, public health official knowledgeable about the disease, and/or the School Board's physician if in the judgment of the Superintendent it is necessary to consult a private physician.

Neither the Forsyth County Board of Education nor its employees shall disclose medical information about a student or employee with HIV infection or other communicable disease without the consent of the employee or the student or his or her parent or guardian, whichever is applicable, or only as required by law or court order.

RE-EMPLOYMENT/RIGHT TO NOT RE-EMPLOY

The District, in its sole discretion, reserves the right to re-employ or not re-employ any individual previously employed by the District.

SECLUSION OR RESTRAINT OF STUDENTS

Board Policy Reference: JGF2

The Forsyth County Board of Education shall require that all schools and programs within the district comply with State Board of Education Rule 160-5-1-.35 concerning "seclusion" and "restraint", as those terms are defined within the rule.

This policy is not intended to prevent the use of physical restraint in limited circumstances where a student exhibits behaviors that place the student or others in imminent danger and the student is not responsive to verbal directives or less intensive de-escalation techniques. The Forsyth County Board of Education recognizes that in determining when and how to implement this policy and any procedures related to it, educators will have to exercise their professional judgment and discretion. Therefore, the policy is not to be construed as imposing ministerial duties on individual employees. Further, it is not intended to interfere with the duties of law enforcement or emergency medical personnel.

For schools and programs within the district that use physical restraint as defined within the SBOE rule, the Superintendent or designee shall develop and implement written procedures governing its use, which shall include the following provisions:

1. Staff and faculty training on the use of physical restraint;

2. Written parental notification within a reasonable time, not to exceed one school day from the use of restraint, when physical restraint is used to restrain a student.

3. Procedures for observing and monitoring the use of physical restraint;

4. Documentation by staff or faculty participating in or supervising the restraint for each student in each instance in which the student is restrained;

5. Periodic review of the use of restraint and the documentation described in item 4.

State Rule 160-5-1-.35

Administrative Procedure JGF(2)

CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT POLICY

Board Policy Reference: JGI

All school system personnel and volunteers who have reason or cause to believe that suspected child abuse or neglect has occurred shall report that abuse or neglect to the principal or designee. The principal or designee must report any case of suspected child abuse and/or neglect to the appropriate child welfare agencies providing protective services in Forsyth County. A report must be made immediately to the Department of Family and Children Services, but in no case later than twenty-four (24) hours from the time the reporter has reasonable cause to believe that suspected child abuse has occurred.

Under no circumstances may the principal or designee to whom a notification of child abuse has been made "exercise any control, restraint, modification or make other change to the information provided by the reporter, although each of the aforementioned persons (mandated reporters) may be consulted prior to the making of a report and may provide any additional, relevant, and necessary information when making the report."

School employees and volunteers are not responsible for contacting the child's family or any other person(s) to determine the cause of the suspected abuse or neglect.

It is not the responsibility of the school employee or volunteer to prove that the child has been abused or neglected, or to determine whether the child is in need of protection.

Failure to report may result in disciplinary action against the employee.

Any person or official required by O.C.G.A. §19-7-5 to report a suspected case of child abuse who knowingly and willfully fails to do so shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and may be punished. Reports covered by this policy should be made in accordance with the Child Abuse Protocol for Forsyth County.

MANDATORY REPORTING OF STUDENT CRIMES

Under the Official Code of Georgia Annotated (O.C.G.A.) § 20-2-1184, all school employees are required to report suspected student crimes occurring on school property or at school-sponsored events to the principal or site supervisor. These offenses include, but are not limited to, aggravated battery and possession of a weapon within a school safety zone or at a school function.

If the principal or site supervisor has reasonable cause to believe the report is valid, they must immediately notify the Superintendent, the appropriate law enforcement authority, and the district attorney.

HARASSMENT OF EMPLOYEES

Board Policy Reference: GAEB

SEXUAL, RACIAL AND OTHER HARASSMENT PROHIBITED

It is the policy of the Forsyth County Board of Education to prohibit any act of harassment of employees by other employees based upon race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability or pregnancy related conditions, genetic information, military service, veteran status, or any other applicable legally protected status in employment opportunities, education programs or activities, and at all times and during all occasions while at school, in the workplace or at any school event. Any such act shall result in prompt and appropriate discipline, including the possible termination of employment.

Harassment and discrimination may include any conduct which has the effect of unreasonably interfering with an employee's work based upon a protected characteristic, including conduct by school employees, students or others or as otherwise defined by law and other Board Policies.

Any employee or applicant for employment who believes he or she has been subjected to harassment or discrimination as prohibited by this policy should promptly report the same to the principal of their school or to the appropriate coordinator designated in policy GAE, who will implement the board's discriminatory complaints procedures as specified in that policy. Employees will not be subjected to retaliation for reporting such harassment or discrimination.

It is the duty of all employees to promptly report harassment forbidden by this policy. The District shall provide information through handbooks, training materials, other resources and verbally that such harassment is strictly forbidden, how it is to be reported and the consequences for violating this policy.

DISCRIMINATION/HARASSMENT REPORTING

The Forsyth County School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or gender in employment decisions or educational programs and activities, including its athletic programs. Any student, employee, applicant

for employment, parent, or other individual who believes they have been subjected to harassment or discrimination by other students or employees of the School District based upon any of the factors listed above should promptly report the same to the principal of the school or the appropriate Coordinator as listed below, who will implement the board's discriminatory complaints or harassment procedures. Students may also report harassment or discrimination to their school counselor.

Equity Coordinators for the school system are:

Title VI

- Mr. Todd Shirley (Students)
- Mr. Derrick Hershey (Personnel)

Title IX

- Mr. Todd Shirley (Students)
- Mr. Derrick Hershey (Personnel)

ADA and 504

- Ms. Kara Hudspeth (Students)
- Mr. Derrick Hershey (Personnel)

Sports Equity

- Dr. Cindy Salloum (Students)

Equity Coordinators may be contacted at:

Forsyth County Board of Education and Professional Development Center
1120 Dahlonega Highway
Cumming, Georgia 30040
770-887-2461

Students and employees will not be subjected to retaliation for reporting such harassment or discrimination. A copy of the discriminatory complaints procedure under Forsyth County School District Policy GAAA/JAA (Equal Opportunity/Discriminatory Complaints) or under Policy IDFA (Gender Equity in Sports) are located in the school district policy manual on the FCS website.

COMPLAINTS & GRIEVANCES

Board Policy Reference: GAE

I.

PURPOSE; INFORMAL RESOLUTION PREFERRED

In accordance with O.C.G.A. § 20-2-989.5, it is the policy of the Forsyth County Board of Education that certificated personnel shall have the right to present and resolve complaints relating to certain matters affecting the employment relationship at the lowest organizational level possible. The Board of Education encourages all employees

to resolve their complaints informally in a spirit of collegiality whenever possible. The procedures outlined in GAE-R(1) are available when such efforts do not succeed or, where for any other reason, the certificated employee desires to pursue this policy and its procedures.

II.

SCOPE OF COMPLAINT: EXCLUSIONS

a. Scope. Unless excluded by paragraph (b) hereof, this complaint and grievance procedure is applicable to any claim by any professional employee certificated by the Professional Standards Commission who is affected in his or her employment relationship by an alleged violation, misinterpretation, or misapplication of statutes, policies, rules, regulations, or written agreements of this school district or with which the district is required to comply.
b. Exclusions. This procedure shall not apply to:
    1. Performance ratings contained in personnel evaluation and professional development plans pursuant to Code Section 20-2-210; Procedural deficiencies on the part of the district are not excluded in the scope of complaint.
    2. Job performance;
    3. Termination, non-renewal, demotion, suspension, or reprimand of any employee, as set forth in Code Section 20-2-940;
    4. The revocation, suspension, or denial of certificates of any employee, as set forth in Code Section 20-2-790.
c. Barred Complaints. A certificated employee who chooses to appeal under Code Section 20-2-1160, shall be barred from pursuing the same complaint under this policy.

ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLAINTS

All personnel are encouraged to contact their supervisor if there are employment concerns occurring at the workplace. If the employee does not feel that a reasonable outcome has occurred after the complaint has been lodged, the employee is encouraged to contact the Human Resources Department for additional assistance.

DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE

Board Policy Reference: GAMA

The Forsyth County Board of Education declares that its workforce must be absolutely free of any person who would knowingly manufacture, distribute, sell, or possess a controlled substance, marijuana, or a dangerous drug in an unlawful manner. This prohibition specifically includes, but is not limited to, the unlawful manufacture, distribution, dispensation, possession, or use of a controlled substance in the employee's workplace.

Any employee who is convicted for the first time, under the laws of this state, the United States, or any other state, of any criminal offense involving the manufacture, distribution, sale or possession of a controlled substance, marijuana, or a dangerous drug shall be

subject to disciplinary action. At a minimum, such an employee shall be suspended for a period of not less than two months and shall be required to complete a drug abuse treatment and education program licensed under Chapter 5 of Title 26 of the Official Code of Georgia and approved by the Board. At a maximum, such an employee may be terminated from their employment with the school system.

As a condition of employment, each employee must abide by the terms of this policy and must notify the Board within five (5) days after any arrest on any drug-related criminal charge and further notify the board within five (5) days of any conviction of a drug-related offense. More details about this policy may be found on the FCS website under Board Policy GAMA.

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES FOR A DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE

Personal cars brought on campus, employee desks, and other personal or school property shall be subject to search and inspection by school authorities at all times without further notice.

DRUG SCREENING OF BUS DRIVERS

Board Policy Reference: GCRA (1)

The Forsyth County Board of Education places a high priority on ensuring the safe transportation of students on school buses.

In order to help prevent accidents and injuries resulting from misuse of alcohol and controlled substances, the Board of Education has implemented the United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Controlled Substances and Alcohol Use and Testing regulations ("regulations") as well as applicable state law and regulations promulgated thereunder.

All individuals who drive or may drive a bus for the Board of Education at any time, including, but not limited to full-time drivers, part-time drivers, substitute drivers, coaches, mechanics, and others, must participate in the controlled substance and alcohol testing program as more fully described in federal and state regulations.

The employment of any individual who is subject to controlled substance and alcohol testing under the regulations referenced in this policy shall be terminated under any of the following conditions:

1. A positive test result for controlled substances;
2. A test result revealing a blood alcohol concentration of 0.04 and above;
3. The employee refuses to submit to alcohol or controlled substance testing.

The employment of individuals whose tests results reveal blood alcohol concentrations of at least 0.02, but less than 0.04, and individuals who engage in other conduct prohibited by the regulations may, in the board of education's discretion, be terminated.

Any employee subject to testing under these regulations must inform their supervisor of any therapeutic drug use, whether such substances are obtained by prescription or "over the counter" prior to performance of any safety-sensitive function. Such an employee must prior to performing a safety-sensitive function, provide a statement from their treating physician that the substance does not adversely affect the driver's ability to perform that function.

EMPLOYEE TOBACCO USE

Board Policy Reference: GAN

In compliance with the Pro-Children Act of 1994, smoking and use of other tobacco products, including the use of E-Cigarettes and other electronic tools and devices, shall be prohibited in any school or building used for the instruction of students.

Employees of the board of education and visitors shall be prohibited from being in possession of, smoking, or using tobacco products on school district property at any time, or while supervising students after school hours, or while operating a vehicle owned by the school district.

DISTRACTION-FREE EDUCATION POLICY

Board Policy Reference: JCDAF

Purpose

By creating environments free from the distractions of cell phones and personal electronic communication devices, Forsyth County Schools is committed to ensuring that students are provided with every opportunity to focus on learning and engage in positive interactions to support their well-being.

Guidelines

1. Elementary and Middle Schools
    - All cell phones and personal electronic devices must be turned off and stored away during the bell-to-bell school day.
    - These restrictions do not apply to school buses, bus stops, or school grounds before and after the bell-to-bell day.
2. High Schools
    - All cell phones and personal electronic devices must be turned off and stored away during the bell-to-bell school day; however, students may access cell phones and personal electronic devices during assigned lunch periods.
    - These restrictions do not apply to school buses, bus stops, or school grounds before and after the bell-to-bell day.

Expectations

1. Students must comply with staff directives and the provisions of this policy to avoid disruption of the educational environment, or they may be subject to disciplinary actions in compliance with the Code of Conduct.
2. When personal electronic devices are allowed, students should respect the privacy of others. Taking photos or videos of classmates, peers, and staff without the prior approval of an administrator or staff member is strictly prohibited on school property, including school buses, or while involved in school-related activities.

3. FCS employees will be expected to model responsible use of cell phones and personal electronic devices.

Disability and Other Accommodations
A student whose Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Section 504 plan, or medical plan explicitly mandates the use of a personal electronic device for medical or educational purposes shall be permitted to access the device as necessary to fulfill the requirements of the respective program or plan.

Notifications
Parents, guardians, and students will be informed of the policies and procedures associated with the Forsyth County Schools Distraction-Free Education policy.

The district or individual schools within the district shall not assume any responsibility or liability for the theft, loss, or damage to a personal electronic device.

INTERNET ACCEPTABLE USE

Board Policy Reference: IFBG

It is the belief of the Forsyth County Board of Education that the use of technology for the purpose of instruction and operation is an important part of preparing children to thrive in the 21st century and in providing a modern and efficient workplace for staff. The Board further believes that a technology rich environment can significantly enhance both the teaching and learning process. This technology includes, but is not limited to, computer hardware, software, wired and wireless network connectivity, and access to the internet. Due to the complex nature of these systems and the magnitude of information available via the internet, the Forsyth County Board of Education believes guidelines regarding responsible use are warranted in order to serve the educational needs of students and workplace needs of staff.

It shall be the policy of the Forsyth County Board of Education that the school system shall be compliant with the "Protecting Georgia's Children on Social Media Act of 2024" (The Act) and have in continuous operation, with respect to any devices using district-provided network resources have:

1.A qualifying "technology protection measure," as that term is defined in Section 1703(b)(1) of the Children's Internet Protection Act of 2000 (CIPA) and is compliant with The Act; and

2.Procedures or guidelines developed by the superintendent, administrators and/or other appropriate personnel which provide for monitoring the online activities of users and the use of the chosen technology protection measure to protect against access through such computers to visual depictions that are (i) obscene, (ii) child pornography, or (iii) harmful to minors, as those terms are

defined in Section 1703(b)(1) and (2) of the Children's Internet Protection Act of 2000 and The Act. Additionally, those measures will also include staff behavior on district-provided devices and services. Such procedures or guidelines shall be reasonably designed to:

a. Provide for monitoring the online activities of users to prevent, to the extent practicable, access by minors to inappropriate matter on the internet and the World Wide Web;

b. Promote the safety and security of minors when using electronic mail, chat rooms, and other forms of direct electronic communications;

c. Prevent unauthorized access, including hacking, denial-of-service, credential theft, and other unauthorized activities by minors and staff;

d. Prevent the unauthorized disclosure, use and dissemination of personal identification information regarding minors and staff; and

e. Restrict minors' access to materials "harmful to minors," as that term is defined in Section 1703(b)(2) of the Children's Internet Protection Act of 2000 and The Act.

f. Provide reasonable opportunities and procedures for parents/guardians of students to confer and collaborate with school administrators and teachers regarding appropriate internet access for such students;

g. Provide for students age-appropriate instruction regarding safe and appropriate behavior on social networking sites, chat rooms, and other internet services, behaviors that may constitute cyber bullying, and how to respond when subjected to cyber bullying.

h. Establish appropriate enforcement measures in response to:

1.Students against students and school employees who willfully intentionally violate the acceptable-use policy, whether or not such student or school employee was, at the time of such violation, on school property, on a school bus or other school vehicle, at a school related function, or elsewhere, provided that such measures include disciplinary measures; and

2.A person who is not a student or school employee who violates the acceptable-use policy, whether or not such person was, at the time of such violation, on school property, on a school bus or other school vehicle, at a school related function, or elsewhere;

i. Provide for administrative procedures to: enforce the acceptable-use policy; for administrative procedures to address complaints regarding possible violations of the acceptable-use policy which, at a minimum, require that each complaint is responded to in writing by an appropriate school or local school system official; and provide for expedited review and resolution of a claim that the application of the acceptable-use policy is denying a student or school employee access to material that is not within the prohibition prohibitions of the acceptable-use policy.

Upon written request, each parent/guardian shall be provided a copy of the school district's acceptable use policy, as well as the student Code of Conduct addressing its

enforcement and related consequences, information regarding the administrative procedures in effect to enforce the acceptable use policy, and to address complaints about such enforcement.

Social Media

In accordance with the Protecting Georgia's Children on Social Media Act, the District prohibits students from accessing social media platforms through the use of computer equipment, communications services, or internet access that is operated, owned, leased, and made available to students by the Board and District. "Social media platform" means an online forum that allows an account holder to create a profile, upload posts, view and listen to posts, form mutual connections, and interact publicly and privately with other account holders and users, and as otherwise set out in O.C.G.A. § 39-6-1.

Students may be permitted to access social media platforms:

- As directed by school personnel;
- For the exclusive purpose of accessing and utilizing age-appropriate educational resources;
- Under the supervision of school personnel; and
- During the course of a school related activity.

The Superintendent or his or her designee is authorized to establish procedures for parents and legal guardians to:

- Request information from school personnel about what social media platforms have been or are intended to be accessed with permission from the school; and
- Prohibit their child from accessing one or more social media platforms otherwise permitted by school personnel.

The District shall take steps as it deems appropriate to implement and enforce this policy, including use of software programs or other technologies reasonably designed and intended to block and monitor access to social media platforms and selection of online servers that block and monitor access to social media platforms.

The Superintendent or his or her designee is further authorized and directed to establish regulations or guidelines establishing standards for the acceptable use of School District technology resources and social media, including penalties and disciplinary action for violations of those standards.

The district's technology resources are provided for educational and instructional purposes that promote and are consistent with the instructional goals of the Forsyth County School System or are for the business operations/use by FCS staff. Use of computers and network resources outside the scope of these purposes is strictly prohibited. Students and employees accessing network services or any device utilizing those services shall comply with the district's responsible use guidelines. The district

reserves the right to monitor, access, and disclose the contents of any user's files, activities, or communications without the consent of the user.

It must also be understood that the internet is a global, fluid community, which remains largely unregulated. While it is an extremely valuable tool for instructional and operational uses, there are sections that are not commensurate with community, school, or family standards. It is the belief of the Board that the internet's advantages far outweigh its disadvantages.

Additionally, access to the internet and computer resources is a privilege, not a right. Therefore, users violating the Forsyth County Board of Education's responsible use guidelines shall be subject to revocation of these privileges and potential disciplinary action.

As a guiding framework for this, the Forsyth County Board of Education will adopt and maintain a procedure manual that outlines and mandates the operation of a reliable, safe, and secure network for all students, teachers, and staff.

INTERNET SAFETY

Board Policy Reference: IFBGE

It is the policy of Forsyth County Schools to: (a) prevent user access over its computer network to, or transmission of, inappropriate material via Internet, electronic mail, or other forms of direct electronic communications; (b) prevent unauthorized access and other unlawful online activity; (c) prevent unauthorized online disclosure, use, or dissemination of personal identification information of minors; and (d) comply with the Children's Internet Protection Act [Pub. L. No. 106-554 and 47 USC 254(h)].

Supervision & Monitoring

It shall be the responsibility of all members of the Forsyth County Schools staff to supervise and monitor usage of the online computer network and access to the Internet in accordance with this policy and the Children's Internet Protection Act.
As required by the Children's Internet Protection Act, Forsyth County Schools will educate minors about appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking websites and in chat rooms, and cyber-bullying awareness and response.

Procedures for disabling or otherwise modifying any technology protection measures shall be the responsibility of the Chief Technology and Information Officer or designated representatives.

It is the policy of FCS to supervise and monitor usage of the online computer network and access to the Internet to prevent access to inappropriate material and inappropriate network usage.

RESPONSIBLE USE GUIDELINES

The district provides ongoing student instruction that develops graduated digital citizenship using technology as a tool. Information and communication technology is an integral part of FCS' curriculum across subjects and grades in developmentally appropriate ways, and it is aligned to the competencies listed in the district's Learner Profile which includes pursuing continuous learning, exhibiting strong personal qualities, utilizing creative and critical thinking, engage and contribute, and interact effectively.

It is important that FCS employees understand that using digital devices (whether personal or school owned) and the FCS network is a privilege and should use them according to the Responsible Use Guidelines.

Employees must:

- Use digital devices, networks, and software in school for educational purposes and activities.
- Keep personal information (including home/mobile phone number, mailing address, and user password) and that of others private.
- Show respect for self and others when using technology including social media.
- Give acknowledgement to others for their ideas and work.
- Immediately report any inappropriate use of technology by staff or students.
- Protect private and confidential information in a manner supported by the FCS Technology Department.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) GUIDELINES

AI is a powerful tool to augment - not replace - our professional expertise. Every AI-driven resource or support should involve a "human in the loop" (Greyling, 2024), ensuring educators and staff maintain and continue to develop agency over instructional decisions and maintain accountability for student learning. FCS believes thoughtfully incorporating AI means teachers are better able to streamline work-related tasks in support of high-quality instruction.

Educators should:

- Demonstrate consistency and clarity when it comes to the use of AI
- Model responsible use of AI for educational purposes only and prioritize safety and respect for all
- Review output of AI data for bias, misinformation, and sources
- Use FCS-approved AI tools
- Continue to grow your professional expertise as AI continues to be a growing presence in the work of teaching and learning

Below is additional guidance if needed and outlines specific promoted practices that expand on the five bullet points noted above. For brevity, we could also include/link the following URL as other examples of promoted practices.

https://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/district-services/technology-information-services/educational-technology-and-media/fcsai

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AI Practices

- Strategic, Grade-Appropriate AI: Use AI tools with consistency to ensure clarity and grade-level appropriateness
- AI for Enhance Instruction: Use AI in service of generating ideas and examples, lesson planning, communication, question prompts, assessment design, and rubric templates
- Clear AI Routines: Establish and communicate clear routines and expectations for AI use in your classroom.
- Transparent AI Use: Be transparent with students about when and why AI is being used.
- Vetted AI Tools and App Usage: All AI tools must be vetted through Trusted Apps. As teachers and staff discover new AI tools, please submit them for approval.
- Protect Student Data in AI: In compliance with FERPA, confidential student information should never be shared in AI platforms.
- Review AI Outputs: AI-generated content should be thoroughly vetted for bias before use. If there is any question or doubt, staff should have school administration review AI-generated content before using with students or parents.
- Educator Guidance: AI-generated content should not be used to replace professional judgment in grading, feedback, or instructional decision-making. Apply your expertise as an educator to ensure students receive thoughtful feedback.
- Reflective AI Integration: Regularly reflect on, plan for, and adjust the need for AI use based on student learning goals, engagement, and effectiveness.

SOCIAL MEDIA EXPECTATIONS

FCS has clear expectations for employees when communicating not only amongst ourselves but particularly with students and parents. Educators are strongly cautioned to keep their personal information out of public view and password protected. Never allow or encourage students or parents to access personal sites and information. It is not appropriate to "friend" or otherwise personally communicate with, share information, texts, photographs, etc. with a student on any digital platform or device. The following guidelines should be followed:

- Post nothing you would not be completely comfortable sharing with your students, their parents, or your professional colleagues.
- Never use language which may be deemed to be defamatory, obscene,

proprietary, libelous, and/or as derogatory remarks or characterizations.

- Do not discuss students, parents, or coworkers or publicly criticize school system policies or personnel.
- Do not post images on District-approved sites that include students without checking for media release notices on all students.
- With every post, consider whether it puts your effectiveness as an educator at risk.

COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

All communication with students must occur through District-approved communication platforms and tools. Staff members should not engage in one-on-one communication with students through personal devices, personal accounts, or non-approved applications, including but not limited to text messaging, WhatsApp, GroupMe, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok, or other social media or messaging platforms.

Electronic communication with students must remain professional, appropriate, transparent, and directly related to school or District business at all times. Whenever possible, communications should occur within platforms that allow parent/guardian access, administrative oversight, and record retention.

Staff members are expected to maintain appropriate professional boundaries in all interactions and communications with students, including digital communication.

Staff members should exercise professional judgment and avoid any communication that could be perceived as secretive, personal, or inconsistent with professional educator standards

EMPLOYEE CAMPAIGNING

Under Georgia Code Section 21-5-30 et al, it is a violation of the Ethics in Government Act for state agencies to contribute, directly or indirectly, to a campaign committee, political action committee, or political organization or to any candidate. The government may educate voters about an issue, but it may not contribute to a campaign committee that is promoting (or opposing) the issue or a candidate or attempting to influence the voters.

A state agency includes a school district. A contribution includes gifts, subscriptions, membership, loans, forgiveness of debts, advances or deposits of money, or anything of value conveyed or transferred by or on behalf of any agency to a campaign committee, political action committee, political organization, or any candidate for campaign purposes. A campaign committee includes an issue-oriented campaign committee or a candidate for political office. The following guidelines are recommended for school districts and school employees:

1. **Employees may only work to promote (or oppose) a SPLOST/Bond Referendum, issue, or candidate for political office as private citizens on their own time.** The First Amendment absolutely guarantees each individual the right to engage in political speech. However, employees may never campaign during school hours or in their capacity as an employee after hours.

2. **Only private resources can be used to promote (or oppose) a SPLOST/Bond Referendum, issue, or candidate for political office.** No public fund or resources can be used to promote (or oppose) the SPLOST/Bond referendum, issue, or candidate for political office. School resources include facilities, copying machines, paper, stationary, phones, audio visual equipment, computers, vehicles, and employee time.

3. **School Districts may only provide the public with objective, factual information about a SPLOST/Bond referendum or issue.** It is very important that the educational material **is factual and does not endorse a particular view.**

4. **No campaign posters, literature or signs may be displayed or distributed on school property.** Employees may not wear campaign pins or stickers on school grounds or distribute campaign materials on school premises. This would include the distribution of PTA/O newsletters containing promotional (as opposed to educational) articles that are sent home with students.

FAIR USE

A video can be a powerful tool when used to support curriculum and engage students. Teachers should follow best practices and legal policies regarding Fair Use of copyrighted materials for educational purposes. Videos should be integrated into a broader lesson plan (for example, to introduce or extend curriculum content, or to encourage class discussion). Showing a video solely for entertainment is not permitted during the school day. Lesson plans that include movies must align with valid instructional standards.
To protect instructional time and comply with Fair Use Guidelines, teachers are encouraged to use film clips. If you would like to show an entire film, you must first obtain prior administrative approval via a Video Approval Form. Online streaming services (such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+) may not be used at school because their Terms of Service prohibit viewing in any public performance venue, including educational settings.

MOVIE GUIDELINES

If a student or parent/guardian objects to viewing a particular video/DVD, a meaningful alternative or related activity should be assigned without penalty or embarrassment to the student. Alternative assignments must be useful, related to valid instructional goals, and non-punitive.

To ensure we are following copyright law, FCS has obtained a public performance license from Swank Motion Pictures, Inc. If you show a movie that:

- is not part of the essential curriculum,
- is being shown outside of a classroom, OR
- is being shown outside of school hours,

consult your school media specialist to confirm the content is covered under our license.

STAFF REMUNERATION GUIDELINES

All employees, including coaches, athletic directors, sponsors, and directors of any school program may not solicit students or parents of students to purchase equipment, supplies, or services from the employee or to participate in activities that financially benefit the employee unless approved by Forsyth County School System Board of Education or an authorized designee. The employee should not accept gifts from vendors or potential vendors for personal use or gain where there may be the appearance of a conflict of interest. Coaching, instructing, promoting athletic camps, summer leagues, tutoring and other activity that involves students from Forsyth County Schools and from whom the employee receives remuneration is not allowed unless approved by the Forsyth County School System Board of Education or an authorized designee. These types of activities must be in compliance with all rules and regulations of the Georgia High School Association.

The principal may authorize the payment of an appreciation gift or gratuity to be funded by a booster club or support organization for school system employees, including lay coaches, who receive a system, school or booster funded supplement. These appreciation gifts or gratuity payments must be approved and processed through Human Resources and paid through the district finance office per established procedures. Head coaches, head sponsors, and head directors may receive a maximum of up to an additional $6,000 per fiscal year per responsibility. All assistant coaches, lay coaches, assistant sponsors, and assistant directors may be authorized to receive up to an additional $5,500 per fiscal year per responsibility. Each amount pertains to each individual per responsibility, as determined by the principal, or the principal's designee. Employees, including coaches, sponsors, or directors, shall not, under any circumstances, expect or imply expectation of an appreciation gift or gratuity, nor should there be any appearance of a conflict of interest or undue influence in relation to the appreciation gift or gratuity.

All employees including coaches, athletic directors, sponsors, and directors of school programs may not accept booster club funded or externally funded appreciation gifts or gratuities or other gifts that fall outside of the limited amounts of appreciation gifts or gratuities as defined above. An exception will be made for a one time (per school year) nominal gift. For example, a gift (check) not to exceed $250 in value (plus FICA) may be given. An email should be sent to Human Resources requesting approval of the gift. Once approved, a check from the school, Booster Club, or support organization should be submitted to the Board of Education Finance Department, who will in turn, process the payment for the employee.

The principal may submit a request via email to pay certified employee(s) for performing “extra” responsibilities during the year. These funds from the local school will be sent to finance before employees will be paid.

The Board of Education funded supplement and any appreciation gift or gratuity will cover all work done in a fiscal year per responsibility, with the exception of parks and recreational programs. The Superintendent has the authority to authorize a larger gift or

gratuity to be accepted by an employee in the event of an exceptional circumstance or emergency, e.g. health issue, loss of home, family emergency.

All employees shall adhere to the entire Professional Standards Commission Code of Ethics, with particular attention to Standard 6: Remunerative Conduct, and the Forsyth County School System Booster Club Guidelines.

EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT GUIDELINES

FCS reimburses employees for reasonable and necessary expenditures incurred in connection with approved travel on its behalf. All reimbursement forms and guidelines can be found on the Finance & Business webpage.

All employees are required to fill out a travel expense statement once they have completed their travel on School District business. Normal reimbursement payments are the 12th and 25th of each month if forms are submitted to Finance at least three business days prior to these dates. Holidays/breaks may impact this schedule.

The Overnight/Out of State Travel Request form should be completed for all overnight or out- of-state travel prior to your travel date.

SOLICITATION OF FUNDS AND MONEY HANDLING BY STAFF

Solicitation on the part of a business, industry, organization, or individual to sell a product, service, or membership to employees, students, or their parents through the students shall be prohibited on school grounds. This prohibition includes the distribution of flyers, cards, or any other items that could constitute advertising by naming or promoting the business, industry, organization, or individual that would profit from such advertising.

Employees entrusted with public funds and property should honor that trust with a high level of honesty, accuracy, and responsibility. Unethical conduct includes misusing funds or property; failing to account for funds collected from students or parents; and/or submitting fraudulent requests for reimbursement of expenses. E-mail accounts and access to the FCS network, intranet, or Internet system should not be used for personal gain, personal business activities, or to solicit for non-school system business. Broadcasting of unsolicited messages is prohibited.

STAFF PROFESSIONAL DRESS CODE

Employees This dress code is designed to support a professional, respectful, safe, and productive learning environment.

All employees are required to wear their district-issued identification badge and Centegix badge while on campus. Badges must be worn above the waist on an appropriate lanyard worn around the neck or securely clipped to a collar and must always remain clearly visible. Lanyards are to be used for badges only and should not include additional items such as keys, face shields, or other accessories. Badges may not be altered, defaced, or decorated with stickers, writing, or any other additions.

Clothing must be appropriate for a school setting. Appropriate dress for school is business casual, except for spirit days approved by the principal. Clothing should allow staff to safely and effectively perform their job responsibilities throughout the school day.

Business casual includes slacks, khakis, professional jeans, dresses, skirts, blouses, collared shirts, sweaters, and appropriate footwear.

The following items are not acceptable in the school environment:
- Clothing with offensive, disruptive, or inappropriate designs, logos, or text.
- Torn clothing or any clothing with holes.
- Casual t-shirts that are not school-issued or spirit wear.
- Leggings worn as standalone attire.
- Shorts, flip flops, tank tops, and hats inside the building.
- Athletic clothing, except for physical education staff during their scheduled classes or approved activities.

Exceptions may be made for staff working in specialized instruction classes or for approved spirit days and designated school activities.

Administration reserves the right to determine the appropriateness of attire and to address situations not specifically outlined in this policy. These guidelines represent the minimum requirements; school leaders and administrators may establish additional expectations as appropriate for their campus.

STUDENT RECORDS

Board Policy Reference: JR

It is the policy of the Forsyth County Board of Education that the School District shall comply with the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) the Pupil Protection Rights Amendment (PPRA), and the Student Data Privacy, Accessibility, and Transparency Act. The Board has developed and adopted student privacy policies in accordance with federal law. Additionally, parents will be directly notified of these policies at least annually via the Student/Parent Handbook issued to students at the beginning of the school year or at the student's time of enrollment.

LEAVES & ABSENCES

Board Policy Reference: GARH

This policy shall apply to all employees of the Forsyth County Board of Education. All District employees are required to follow the appropriate work calendar established for their positions and may take leave from work only in accordance with this policy or other leave policies enacted by the Board of Education.

ACCRUAL OF SICK LEAVE AND ABSENCE FOR MEDICAL AND RELATED REASONS

In accordance with Georgia law, employees will be entitled to annual sick leave with pay to be accrued at the rate of one and one quarter (1 ¼) days for each completed contract month. All employees' unused sick leave shall be accumulated from one (1) fiscal year to

the next up to a maximum of one hundred twenty (120) days. All certified employees may bring forty-five (45) unused sick leave days from another system. If an employee needs to utilize unearned sick leave, advance leave may be granted. The advance leave shall not exceed the number of days the employee would accumulate through the end of the fiscal year. If an employee fails, for any reason, to complete a fiscal year, sick leave used but not yet earned will be deducted from the employees' final check.

The leave provided for under this policy is available only for personal illness, injury or exposure to contagious diseases, or for absences necessitated by illness in the employee's immediate family. For the purpose of absences for medical and related reasons, members of the immediate family are defined as an employee's child, spouse, grandchild, grandparent, parent, in-law equivalents, brother, sister, other relatives living in the household, or any dependent as shown in the employee's most recent tax return.

For any absence in which sick leave is used, the superintendent shall have the right to require a physician's certificate stating that the employee is ill and is unable to perform his or her duties. In the event that sick leave is used to care for a member of the immediate family, the superintendent shall have the right to require a physician's certificate stating that the employee is needed to care for the sick family member.

School personnel shall not be charged sick leave for the first seven (7) workdays of absence due to an injury caused by a physical assault while the individual was engaged in the performance of his/her duties.

Organ/Bone Marrow Donor Leave

Pursuant to Georgia law, District employees shall be entitled to the following leave without the loss of pay, not deducted from annual or sick leave, and counted towards retirement or pension benefits.

1. Up to seven (7) days for bone marrow donation.
2. Up to thirty (30) days for organ donation.

In order to qualify for this leave, District employees must provide a statement from a medical practitioner or hospital administrator confirming the donation, submitted to the District at least seven (7) days before the leave.

Personal Leave

Five (5) days of any accumulated sick leave may be utilized during each school year for personal reasons provided prior approval of the absence is given by the Superintendent or their authorized representative, and provided the presence of the employee requesting absence is not essential for effective school operation. A leave form must be filed and approved five (5) working days prior to leave. Personal leave will not be granted during pre-planning, post- planning, in-service days, or on the day before or day after holidays. Employees are not required to disclose the purpose for which such an absence is sought.

The Superintendent or his designee may refuse to allow an employee to take personal or professional leave if qualified substitutes are not available.

Observance of Religious Holidays

Employees may use personal leave for the observance of recognized religious holidays. If an employee desires to take leave for the observance of recognized religious holidays in excess of the days allowed for personal leave, the employee may take unpaid leave for such purposes provided that such leave is not excessive and does not interfere with fulfilling the obligations of the job.

Jury and Witness Leave

Each person employed by the Forsyth County School System shall be allowed leave of absence without deduction of pay from personal, professional, or sick leave for the purpose of attending any court as a juror or when subpoenaed to testify in a case arising out of the person's duties as an employee. No employee utilizing jury or witness leave for these purposes shall be required to pay the cost of employing a substitute for such leave.

Military Leave

Full-time employees of the Forsyth County School System shall be entitled to take military leave for "ordered military duty" with full employment and reinstatement rights as provided by law. The term "ordered military duty" shall mean any military duty performed in the service of the state or of the United States, including but not limited to, attendance at any service school or schools conducted by the armed forces of the United States by an employee as a voluntary member of any force of the organized militia, or any reserve force or reserve component of the armed forces of the United States pursuant to orders issued by the competent state or federal authority, without the consent of the employee.

An employee shall be paid their regular salary for a period or periods of absence while engaged in the performance of ordered military duty and while going to and returning from such duty, not to exceed a total of 18 days in any one federal fiscal year. A request for military leave (paid or unpaid) must be submitted to the employee's supervisor and the appropriate personnel administrator with a copy of the official military orders.

Bereavement Leave

Up to five days of sick leave may be used for absence due to death of members of the immediate family which are defined as an employee child, spouse, grandchild, grandparent, parent, in-law equivalents, brother, sister, other relatives living in the household, or any dependent as shown in the employee's most recent tax return.

Maternal Birth Leave

The Board of Education shall make paid maternal birth leave equally available to all eligible employees of the Board of Education. Maternal birth leave is defined as a period of time off from work necessary to recuperate as a result of a qualifying life event. For purposes of this section, a 'qualifying life event' means giving birth to one or more children in a single or multiple pregnancy.

1. District employees may be eligible for 120 hours of paid maternal birth leave for qualifying life events upon satisfying the following criteria:
    a. The employee is classified as full-time by the District and is eligible to participate in the TRS (Teacher Retirement System of Georgia) or the PSERS (Public School Employees Retirement System); and
    b. The employee has six (6) continuous months of employment with the District, regardless of eligibility for paid or unpaid leave under federal law. An employee paid on an hourly basis must have worked a minimum of seven hundred (700) hours over the six (6)-month period immediately preceding the requested paid maternal birth leave date.
2. If taken, maternal birth leave shall only be taken during the three-week period immediately following the eligible employee's qualifying life event to recuperate from such birth and shall precede the taking of any paid parental leave.
3. Unused paid maternal birth leave shall have no cash value at the time of the eligible employee's separation from employment with the District.
4. Paid maternal birth leave under state law shall run concurrently with any leave provided under federal law.
5. If a paid state holiday takes place during the eligible employee's maternal birth leave, such eligible employee shall only be compensated for the state holiday.
6. Documentation may be required to administer maternal birth leave and establish the existence of a qualifying life event.

Paid Parental Leave

The Board of Education shall make paid parental leave equally available to all eligible employees of the Board of Education under the following terms:

1. An employee of the Board of Education shall be eligible for paid parental leave for qualifying life events upon satisfying the following criteria:
a. The employee is classified as full-time by the District and is eligible to participate in the TRS (Teacher Retirement System of Georgia) or the PSERS (Public School Employees Retirement System); and
b. The employee has six (6) continuous months of employment with the Board, regardless of whether he or she is eligible for paid or unpaid leave under federal law. An employee paid on an hourly basis must have worked a minimum of seven hundred (700) hours over the six (6)-month period immediately preceding the requested paid parental leave date.
2. A qualifying life event means:
a) The birth of a child of an eligible employee;
b) The placement of a minor child for adoption with an eligible employee; or
c) The placement of a minor child for foster care with an eligible employee.
3. The maximum amount of paid parental leave that may be taken by an eligible employee during a rolling twelve (12) month period is two hundred forty (240) hours,

regardless of the number of qualifying life events that occur during such period.
a) The rolling twelve (12) month period shall be measured backward from the date an eligible employee first uses parental leave.
b) Parental leave may be taken in increments of eight (8) or four (4) hours as needed based on the FCS usual and customary practice for other types of leave.
c) Any unused paid parental leave that remains twelve (12) months after the qualifying event shall not carry over for future use.
d) Unused paid parental leave shall have no cash value at any time of the eligible employee's separation from employment with the Board of Education.
4. Paid parental leave under state law shall run concurrently with any leave provided under federal law.
5. Documentation may be required to administer paid parental leave and establish the existence of a qualifying life event.

Prospective Teacher Leave

Any regular full-time employee of the Forsyth County Board of Education who has completed two (2) or more consecutive years of service during the current period of employment and whose service is fully satisfactory may be authorized by the Superintendent or designated official to take a leave of absence without pay for the purpose of completing certain degree requirements for initial professional teaching certification subject to the following terms and conditions:
1. Leave is for the purpose of completing student teaching and/or the curriculum block preceding student teaching;
2. The leave period is compatible with the needs and interests of the district and does not place an undue burden on meeting the needs of our students.
3. Leave does not exceed two semesters on the Forsyth County Schools student calendar.
4. The leave period does not begin earlier than the Monday preceding or coinciding with the first day of the college course(s) or end later than the Friday preceding or coinciding with the final day of courses;
5. The courses to be taken are explicitly required as part of a program of study for teacher preparation at a regionally accredited college or university; and
6. The employee satisfactorily completes the courses.

Any request to take Prospective Teacher Leave should be submitted prior to registration to ensure the leave period is compatible with the needs and interests of the district and is, therefore, acceptable to the district.
If there is interruption in the required coursework during the approved leave, the employee may request to return to work temporarily before resuming leave, but the district will reserve the right to deny this request.
The employee must contact Human Resources at least ten (10) days prior to the scheduled ending date of the leave of absence to indicate whether or not he or she desires to return to work.
The request for leave accompanied by the following documentation should be submitted to Human Resources for coordination of approval:

1. A description by the college or university of the specific courses to be completed during the absence and the overall program of study being pursued; and
2. The precise dates (individual or inclusive, as applicable) on which the employees attendance at events required by the courses would preclude attendance at the employees' regular job. If the employee requests intermittent dates for a leave of absence, the district can mandate that the requested leave be contiguous.

While the district will endeavor to return the employee to his or her former position and site, the district must reserve the right to assign or reassign the employee upon return, or, if deemed necessary by the district, to postpone or deny the employee's return to work.

Continuation of coverage under each of the district's various employee benefit plans while on this type of leave is determined by the provisions, terms and conditions governing the operation of each plan. Simply applying for this leave will not mean it is granted; it is based on the requirements listed above, the discretion of the Superintendent or his/her designee and needs of the District.

Administrative Leave and Associated Expectations

Any employee may be placed on administrative leave from work during the course of a personnel investigation. While on administrative leave, the employee is expected to be available during the employee's normally scheduled working hours for on-site meetings or calls to ensure the investigation can be completed in a timely manner.

While on administrative leave, the employee is directed not to contact any faculty, students, or parents, and is to remain off any Forsyth County campus or worksite.

Annual Leave

Annual leave is granted only to 12-month, annual (240-day) employees. Effective July 1, 2008, annual leave shall be accumulated based on the number of verified continuous, consecutive years of service with the system.

CONSTRUCTION WITH THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

To the extent that any provision in this policy conflicts with or is superseded by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the regulations promulgated there under, or other federal law, the provision of the FMLA, its regulations or other laws, as the case may be, control pursuant to District policy GBRIG.

EMPLOYEE CALENDARS

Work schedules are coordinated by Employee Calendars to ensure essential district needs are addressed effectively and efficiently. This calendar designates weekdays that every employee covered by it is expected to perform designated duties and responsibilities at the assigned work site unless excused in accordance with applicable laws, policies, procedures or directives. Attendance at work is especially important on certain dates

during the year designated by the district as "CRITICAL DAYS." The use of PERSONAL LEAVE is NOT permitted on these critical days: the day before or the day after a holiday; during pre-planning and post planning; or on in-service days. NOTE: CALENDARS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE DUE TO BUDGET OR WEATHER.

THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT (FMLA)

Board Policy Reference: GBRIG

(To the extent that any provision in this policy conflicts with or is superseded by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), the regulations promulgated there under, or other federal law, the provision of the FMLA, its regulations or other laws, as the case may be, control.)

(Board Policy GBRIG sets out a summary of the provisions of the Family and Medical Leave Act ("ACT") as adopted by the U. S. Congress on February 5, 1993, and which became effective August 5, 1993. This board does not intend by this policy to create any additional rights to leave not provided by the Act. The board does intend to elect certain options as the Act authorizes. Any portion of this policy inconsistent or contrary to the Act is unintentional and shall not be given effect. As to the interpretation of this policy, the board's employees should look to the Act itself and its regulations.)

Eligibility

- Employees of the Forsyth County Board of Education who have been employed by the Board for at least 12 months and who have worked at least 1250 hours for the board of education during the 12 month period immediately prior to requesting leave are eligible to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA").

- An eligible employee may request leave for one or more of the following reasons:
    - Birth of a son or daughter and to care for the newborn child;
    - Adoption or foster placement with the employee of a son or daughter and to care for the newly placed child;
    - To care for the employee's spouse, son, daughter or parent, if that person has a serious health condition;
    - Serious health condition of the employee that prevents the employee from performing his/her job functions;
    - Any qualifying exigency arising from the fact that the employee's family member (the covered military member) is on active duty or has been notified of an impending deployment in support of a contingency operation. Qualifying exigencies are defined as short-notice deployment (seven or less calendar days); military events and related activities; childcare and school activities; financial and legal arrangements; counseling; rest and recuperation (up to five days per instance); post-deployment activities; additional activities where the employer and employee agree that the leave is an exigency and agree to

both timing and duration of the leave; and

- Military caregiver leave to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness if the employee is the spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin of the servicemember.
- An employee's in-laws, grandparents, siblings, and other extended family members are not covered under FMLA.
- If both parents work for the District, they are entitled to a combined total of 12 weeks of FMLA.

In the event of the birth, adoption, or foster placement of a son or daughter, all leave must be completed within twelve months after the birth, adoption, or foster placement.

Except as otherwise provided, an employee may take a total of 12 weeks leave during any twelve-month period. The 12-month period shall be measured backward from the date the employee begins using any FMLA leave.

Employees should contact Human Resources to apply for FMLA. If the need for FMLA leave is foreseeable, an employee requesting leave must provide at least 30 days advance notice. If such advance notice is not possible, the employee must give notice to their immediate supervisor as soon as practicable, ordinarily within one or two working days of learning of the need for leave. When planning medical treatment, the employee should make a reasonable effort to schedule the treatment, subject to the approval of the health care provider, so that any corresponding leave will not unduly disrupt the operations of the school district.
Upon return from leave, the employee is entitled to be reinstated to a position equivalent to the one the employee held when they left on FMLA leave, with equivalent pay, benefits and other terms and conditions of employment. Upon proper notice, however, the Board of Education may deny reinstatement under this policy to an employee whose salary is in the highest 10% of the employees employed by the school district if such denial is necessary to prevent substantial and grievous economic injury to the District's operation, as determined by the Board of Education.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)

FCS seeks to assure its employees that no individual will be discriminated against due to a disability. Under the ADA, the term disability means: "(a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of an individual, (b) a record of such an impairment, or (c) being regarded as having such an impairment." Having a disability does not ensure ADA coverage.

FCS further seeks to ensure that individuals with a disability are hired, are retained, and have reasonable access to district facilities. An "ADA Reasonable Accommodation" may be provided to qualified employees. What constitutes a reasonable accommodation will vary from case to case depending on the needs of the position and of the qualified employee. There is no guarantee that a reasonable accommodation will exist for every situation.

To request an ADA accommodation, the employee should contact their direct supervisor and/or Human Resources who will then engage the employee in an interactive process to determine the individual's precise job-related limitations, determine how they can be overcome with reasonable accommodation, identify potential accommodations, and assess the effectiveness of each. Human Resources, with input from the employee, the appropriate administrator, and other necessary professionals, will determine whether a reasonable accommodation is possible and recommend an appropriate accommodation whenever possible.

WORKERS' COMPENSATION

Employees of FCS are eligible for the benefit of Workers' Compensation as required by Georgia law. Workers' Compensation is an accident insurance program paid by FCS which may provide employees with medical, rehabilitation, and income benefits if the employee is injured on the job. These benefits are provided to help employees return to work.

Any employee injured on the job must immediately report it to their supervisor. If professional medical care is needed for the injury, the law requires the employee to select from an approved physician's panel posted at the school or facility. Should an employee choose to receive medical care from a physician that is not on the approved panel, such care would be considered unauthorized, and the school system would not be responsible for the cost.

Employees/supervisors should report injuries within 24 hours of the incident; however, immediate reporting is preferable. Forms and paperwork can be found on the District's website under the Finance & Business or Staff Resources tab. If medical care is needed for an on-the-job injury, please contact the Workers' Compensation Program Manager – Sheila Fairfield at 770-887-2461 Ext. 202140, for authorization of treatment from one of the panel physicians.

Workers' Compensation leave runs concurrently with FMLA.

RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS

In accordance with federal and state laws and FCS policy, the District prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion. FCS provides reasonable accommodations for sincerely held religious beliefs and/or practices unless doing so would impose an undue hardship on the District. A reasonable religious accommodation is an adjustment to the work environment that will allow an employee to comply with their religious beliefs. An employee seeking a reasonable religious accommodation should initially approach their immediate supervisor to discuss the request. If the employee is not satisfied with their supervisor's response, the employee can forward the request to the Human Resources Department for review.

PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT (PWFA) AND PUMP FOR NURSING MOTHERS ACT

In compliance with the components of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), FCS will provide 1.) reasonable accommodations to a worker's known limitations related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions, and 2.) provide a reasonable amount of break time and a space to express milk as needed by the nursing employee, for up to one year following the birth of the employee's child. Please contact your immediate supervisor and/or Human Resources for more assistance.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT (ACA)

In accordance with the Employer Mandate of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), if benefit-eligible employees do not enroll in medical coverage through the State Health Benefit Plan within 31 days of hire, coverage is waived, and eligibility may be affected for subsidized insurance coverage on the state or federally funded health exchange. Refer to the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Acknowledgement in the New Employee Welcome Package.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)

Forsyth County Schools offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to all benefits eligible employees through MetLife. Please use this link for more information.
https://www.benefitsdetails.com/forsyth-plan-info/employee-assistance-program

EMPLOYEE SELF-SERVICE FOR BENEFITS

Visit the FCS Benefit Site at https://www.benefitsdetails.com/forsyth which includes information and access to:

- State Health Benefit Plan
- Dental
- Vision
- Life
- Disability
- Accident & Critical Illness
- Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA)
- Genomic Life
- Pet Insurance
- Retirement Plans
- Employee Assistance Program

SOCIAL SECURITY INFORMATION

For employees of the Forsyth County School System, Social Security taxes are withheld from your paycheck, and you are earning credits toward federal retirement, disability, or survivor benefits under Title II of the Social Security Act.

You are also enrolled in a pension/retirement plan: either TRS, PSERS, or ERS. If you're

unsure of your status, review your paycheck or reach out to your Payroll Department for more information. More information on the retirement plans is available here:

- TRS: https://www.trsga.com/
- PSERS: https://www.ers.ga.gov/public-school-employees-retirement-system
- ERS: https://www.ers.ga.gov/

RETIREMENT PLANS

Eligible employees must participate in one of the designated retirement systems for their employed position. Contributions are payroll deducted.

- Teachers Retirement System (TRS)

All employees who are employed 50% or more in a covered position with a state school system are enrolled in the Teacher's Retirement System. The current required employee contribution is 6%.

Covered positions currently include, but are not limited to: Teachers, Administrators, Supervisors, Clerical, Paraprofessionals. Visit the TRS website at www.trsga.com.

- Public School Employees Retirement System (PSERS)

Permanent employees who are eligible to participate in PSERS are enrolled in the Public School Employees Retirement System. Covered positions include Bus Drivers, Warehouse Support, Custodians, and School Nutrition Assistants. Contribution rates are currently either $4 or $10, depending on date of hire. Visit the PSERS website at www.ers.ga.gov/public-school-employees-retirement-system.

- Employees' Retirement System (ERS)

Any new employee who is a vested member (10 years of service or more) with Employees' Retirement System (ERS) may elect to remain a member of ERS. The election to stay with ERS must be made in writing, by the employee, to the Board of Trustees no later than sixty (60) days from the first day of employment with FCS in a position covered by Teachers Retirement. This election is irrevocable.