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AUTHOR Templeton, Ian  
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## ABSTRACT

This review of the literature should prove helpful to school administrators in their efforts to stay abreast of judicial limitations on their decisionmaking authority. The author cites literature that examines court decisions affecting student rights in general and publications discussing some of the court decisions that pertain to only one or two areas of student rights. In addition, the reviewer touches on literature concerned with student codes and administrative concerns. Eighteen of the 30 documents reviewed are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. (Author/JF)

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# Student Rights and Responsibilities

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Ian Templeton

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Misunderstandings about the legal rights of students must be corrected. Too frequently, school officials involved in this issue approach it from one of two extremes, neither of which bodes well. One is a lack of awareness of what the courts are saying the rights of students are in certain types of heretofore adjudicated situations. The other is a reluctance by school authorities to take reasonable stands and to gather evidence and muster appropriate constitutional arguments to support their needs in operating efficient and effective schools. If school boards and professional personnel are able to develop sound educational and legal arguments to support their actions in cases of discipline, they need not fear the courts. If they are unable to do so, they simply should not try to impose their whims, hunches, or tastes on the students.

*Reutter (1970) p. 53*

During the last decade student rights and responsibilities issues have become increasingly prominent. The prominence results from changing social and student values, increasing willingness of students (or their parents) to litigate, and changing judicial posture with respect to the rights of minors and the importance of the student's interest in education.

Historically, the courts have granted school personnel broad discretionary powers to promulgate rules and regulations affecting students. The legal bases for this delegation are the common-law doctrine of *in loco parentis* and the state delegation of administrative rule-making authority. Traditionally, there has been a strong presumption that school regulations are properly adopted and reasonably applied. Because the courts recognize the need for an

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appropriate school learning environment that will facilitate educational objectives, they have not been inclined to substitute their judgment on the efficacy of school rules and regulations for that of professional educators.

Over time this resulted in an expanded concept of *in loco parentis*. The courts deferred to school personnel who asserted that they were acting in the students' best interests, even though school rules were formulated with little regard for students' constitutional rights. Simultaneously, parents, content with the schools' authority over students, often expected schools to assume not only the responsibility for teaching basic skills but also the traditional family responsibility for instilling acceptable values, beliefs, and behaviors.

Recent judicial decisions, however, have established that broad statutory grants of authority to school personnel and the application of *in loco parentis* cannot be construed as legislative sanction for rule-making in all areas related to education; that other legislative and quasi-legislative agencies may pose conflicting rules and regulations--some having greater social value than rules promulgated by schools; and that rules must be developed within constitutional constraints.

In light of prior community expectations of schools and judicial conduct, some school personnel feel betrayed by the courts' active interest in educational policy. A review of the literature on student rights should ameliorate some of these concerns. The courts remain reluctant to become enmeshed in educational policy. It appears

they will intervene only when schools attempt to promulgate rules and regulations that are neither rationally related to an important school objective nor reasonably calculated to achieve that objective. The more closely a rule comes to infringing on a basic or fundamental constitutional right, the more closely will the courts scrutinize the rule and the greater will be the justification required to support that rule. Infringement of a student's fundamental rights (for example, free speech protected by the First Amendment) will not be allowed unless school officials can show that the rule or regulation is necessary to avoid "substantial and material interference with school work or discipline" (*Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District 1969*).

In spite of their reluctance to make decisions in an area of limited expertise, the courts will continue to review educational policy decisions. One reason for this judicial review is the recognition of what educators have long argued--education is a fundamental interest or right (*Brown v. Board of Education 1954; Serrano v. Priest 1972*). The courts will employ "fairness" as the touchstone and will increasingly require that rules conflicting with student interests be supported by more than mere opinion. In supporting these rules, the school administrator will be increasingly required to employ rationales based on empirical evidence.

This review of the literature may be helpful to school administrators in their efforts to stay abreast of judicial limitations to their decision-making authority. Eighteen of the documents reviewed are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Complete instructions for ordering these documents are given at the end of the review.

The author wishes to acknowledge that Steven Goldschmidt, assistant to the dean of the College of Education at the University of Oregon, contributed the introduction for this review.

### GENERAL REVIEWS OF COURT DECISIONS

A broad introduction to the history and trends in student rights is available in Gaddy's (1971) study. In addition to investigating published and unpublished literature, his study examines judicial decisions rendered by state and federal courts between 1960 and 1970. He identifies rights and freedoms of secondary and elementary public school students and discusses legal limitations or modifications that school officials can place on those rights and freedoms.

Although the Harvard Center for Law and Education (Bensfield and Peck 1970) litigation materials on student rights are prepared for attorneys, they can be of use to administrators. The document reflects a traditional concept of student rights and deals with questions involving freedom of expression, personal rights, and procedural fairness. The typical plaintiff is a junior high or high school student who has been suspended, expelled, transferred, or otherwise disciplined.

The authors present complaints and supporting legal memoranda from recent student rights cases covering recurrent constitutional arguments. Although most of the cases focus on the legal right of school officials to act as they did, others emphasize the fairness of the procedures by which the disciplinary action was handled; both issues often appear in the same case.

The National Education Association (1971b) compiled digests of 171 federal and state court decisions concerning students. The decisions covered were published in the *National Reporter System* during the 1970 calendar year and are classified under the following headings:

- admission and attendance
- school desegregation
- student discipline
- student injury
- religion/sectarian education
- transportation
- miscellaneous

Student discipline is subdivided according to dress and appearance, protests and demonstrations, publication and distribution of literature, and other disciplinary activities. Decisions on school desegregation and the permissible length of male students' hair are reported selectively.

Hollister and Leigh (1971) review federal court decisions on cases resulting from primary and secondary student challenges to school district rules, regulations, and policies. The document contains chapters on freedom of religion, freedom of expression, dress codes, and procedural rights. Each chapter includes a summary of apparent trends and federal judiciary decisions pertaining to student rights.

A collection of eight articles centering primarily on the nature and extent of legal involvement in secondary school dissent and discipline is presented by the University of Michigan Institute of Continuing Legal Education (1970). The first article views school decentralization in terms of the conflicts it creates. Another article presents relevant legal decisions clarifying the concept of constitutionally protected free speech.

Other writings deal with the significance of the *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* decision (the black armband case), three constitutional theories under which the validity of public school regulation of students' hairstyles

may be attacked, and the test of reasonableness as applied to long hair bans in public schools. In contrast to the current emphasis, a lengthy article is concerned with the nonconstitutional limits of the power of school boards to make rules governing student conduct and status. A few major trends of judicial involvement in public education are discussed in the concluding article.

A second NEA (1971a) paper describes standards for procedures and structures enabling students at the secondary and postsecondary levels to exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities in the educational institution. The paper has three main sections: (1) "The Institution's Relations to the Student," which includes the right to education, to affect organized learning activities, and to confidentiality of information; (2) "Student Affairs," which includes the right to freedom of association, to participate in institutional government, and to freedom of inquiry and expression; and (3) "Law, Discipline and Grievance," which includes the right to establish standards for discipline and grievance, and to just enforcement of standards. Extensive footnotes cite legal backing and court decisions related to the various rights and responsibilities.

Kidder (1971) searched the ERIC collection, *Dissertation Abstracts*, and the journal literature in compiling her abstracted bibliography of thirty-five documents. The documents cover defined civil rights of students and legal decisions in the area of student-school relationships.

#### NARROWER REVIEWS OF COURT DECISIONS

Several writers discuss court decisions that pertain only to one or two

areas of student rights. Among these is Brown (1972), who focuses specifically on court decisions concerning hair. He observes that circuit courts of appeals are in disagreement over the constitutionality of school hair regulations. In seventy cases dealing with the substantive issues of hair regulations, approximately forty courts of appeals have upheld regulations and thirty have not. After surveying arguments from the points of view of the student and the school board and discussing special and unusual related problems, Brown concludes:

Perhaps the most rational approach to balancing the rights between the personal freedoms of the student and the authority of the school officials is to recognize the right to govern personal appearance as constitutionally protected and require a strict standard of proof regarding material and substantial disruption, as was done in *Crews v. Clones*. This approach would simply place the burden on school authorities to show that any dangers or disruption of longer hair could not be handled through normal school procedures.

Brown (1972) p. 382

Donoghoe (1972) discusses court cases and the emerging rights of secondary and higher education students concerning both searches and dress and grooming regulations. She emphasizes that the courts have not provided a specific set of standards that can be used in all cases. Instead, the courts rely heavily on interpreting words and phrases to fit each situation. An important example is the various interpretations of what "reasonable" means in relation to First and Fourth Amendment rights. If a court determines that a school regulation is reasonable and due process was followed, then the court will not interfere in school regulations.

Because of the role of precedent in judicial decisions, trends in school law are subject to frequent change. Educators wanting to stay abreast of these changes must read constantly. Fortunately, many periodicals are devoted entirely to school law or include either a regular column or frequent articles on school law. The list provided below is not intended to be inclusive, but represents readily available education-oriented publications.

*American School Board Journal*

*EAR Research Bulletin*

*Inequality in Education*

*Journal of Law and Education*

*NAASSP Newsletter*

*National Elementary Principal*

*Nation's Schools*

*NOLPE Notes*

*NOLPE School Law Journal*

*NOLPE School Law Reporter*

*Phi Delta Kappan*

*School Management*

*Today's Education*

*Yearbook of School Law (NOLPE)*

In another document discussing grooming, Craig (1970) compares and contrasts federal court decisions involving student dress codes. Concerned primarily with Denver area cases, he covers code enforcement, subsequent court battles, relevant constitutional issues, and First Amendment and due process considerations. His report includes the official National Association of Secondary School Principals and American Civil Liberties Union statements on personal appearance.

Also concerned with due process as it pertains to students is Phay (1971). After examining the authority of school officials to suspend or expel students, he outlines the minimum standards of due process required in disciplinary proceedings. These procedural requirements and rights include:

- adoption of specific rules on student conduct
- presentation of proper notice to student and parents
- the right to a fair hearing
- the right to counsel
- the right to inspect evidence

- the right to have an impartial trier of fact at a hearing
- the right to cross-examine and confront witnesses
- the right to protection against self-incrimination

Phay recommends that schools provide a grievance procedure for students and faculty and establish written regulations on student conduct as well as written procedures for handling discipline cases.

A National School Boards Association (1971) report provides board policy samples and other policy resources on pregnant and/or married students. The policy samples are intended to encourage thinking in policy terms and to furnish working papers that can be edited, modified, or adapted to meet local requirements. Changing attitudes toward pregnant and/or married students and the relative conservatism of board policies on the subject are discussed. The report suggests that the function of schools is to provide education for all students and that if the boards wish to avoid litigation over restricting access to education, they

should seek legal guidance in drawing up policies on this subject.

Evers (1972a and b) offers further discussion of the rights of married and pregnant students as well as the rights of pregnant employees.

Student records is the concern of a monograph by Butler and others (1972). After reviewing the history of the right to privacy, the authors analyze constitutional and statutory provisions, legal cases, and state board of education rules to determine the legal principles that govern the inspecting, copying, and expunging of student records. The appendixes provide an up-to-date bibliography of state statutes, a tabular summary of state department of education rules concerning student records, and a graphic comparison of state and federal constitutions as they apply to the individual's privacy.

Buss (1971) summarizes methods used to investigate and prevent crime in schools and sketches possible legal claims that students might make as a result of these approaches to school crime prevention. In an extensive analysis of five court cases, he gives particular attention to the legal issues related to searches of student lockers by school law enforcement authorities.

### STUDENT CODES

A National School Boards Association (1970) kit discusses written policies basic to student rights and responsibilities, including those based on the constitution and those not. The document recommends that specific policies should be based on three basic premises:

- recognition that freedom implies the right to make mistakes as long as these mistakes

do not endanger life and property or are not seriously disruptive

- recognition that students should have the right to live under "rule by law" rather than "rule by personality"
- recognition that deviation from opinions and standards deemed desirable by the faculty is not necessarily a danger to the educational process

Source materials in the kit include representative board policies, rules, and information statements on student rights and responsibilities; the Evanston (Illinois) school district's policy on student expression, due process procedures for the exercise of disciplinary authority; and a guide to further reading.

Various kinds of student codes are discussed by the Center for Education and Law (Harvard University 1971). The document presents needs for such codes and outlines court challenges of them. Guidelines for drafting student codes are supplemented by sample codes including eight citywide codes, four statewide policy statements, and selected model codes.

The Los Angeles City Schools (1972) handbook suggests that students be given the greatest amount of freedom allowable under the law commensurate with adult responsibility for student health, safety, and welfare. The text presents a broad spectrum of student rights and responsibilities as well as questions often raised by student groups. These guidelines are based on the concept that student rights entail the acceptance of self-discipline and responsibility.

A New York State Department of Education publication ([1972]) suggests guidelines for formulating local policies governing relations among the various groups and individuals who make up the school community. The content focuses on the

personal responsibilities of school boards, administrators, teachers, parents, students, and the general public. The discussion is organized under the following topics: student involvement, student government, student inquiry and expression, student press, extracurricular activities and clubs, personal appearance, counseling, student record files, discipline, search by school personnel, police in schools, and grievance and appeals.

Although not specifically on student codes, two Washington State Legislature (1969 and 1970) publications discuss state legislation as it applies to student discipline and student rights. The publications propose legislation that would conform to recent court cases and guarantee the substantive legal rights of students.

#### ADMINISTRATIVE CONCERNS

The literature gives great, but not exclusive, attention to student rights. Reutter (1970) for example, is concerned with the rights of school authorities. He reviews and analyzes relevant court decisions dealing with the control of student activities by public school authorities. His report focuses on recent decisions that reaffirm, amplify, or extend entrenched constitutional and common-law principles undergirding the public educational system in the United States. After setting the legal framework for control of student activities, Reutter discusses the law relevant to married students and mothers; rights of parents and students; rules of conduct, dress, and appearance; expression of opinion; secret societies; and determination of punishments.

Also of interest to administrators is the effect that court decisions have had on school authorities. Maready (1971) expresses concern that federal court de-

isions have centered on interpreting the Constitution rather than on interpreting board policies. In his opinion, federal judges had in the past increasingly assumed the role of educational policymakers in decisions covering such topics as dress codes, flying of the flag, freedom of speech, unwed mothers, underground newspapers, hair length, location of school buildings, and school bus transportation. Maready does note an increasing restraint on the part of the courts in influencing education policy.

Sealey (1971) is also concerned with the judiciary. However, his concern is with what causes various judges to select a particular precedent or criterion to resolve a student-school authority conflict. He notes that the answer might be mitigating and enhancing judicial observations that could be reflective of attitudes, philosophies, and other personality dynamics associated with individual judges. It is the phenomena of personality dynamics that, in a court of equity or law, determine what a student right is in the concrete form. Most treatises on school law are void of either precedent (case law) or statutory or constitutional law, which may very well determine what a student right is in reference to a particular set of circumstances that were adjudicated. To advise students and others in the educational community, more consideration should be given to those cases or laws that arise outside the public school domain but have relevancy within the public schools.

As Dolce (1971) points out, educators disagree about the proper definitions of student rights and responsibilities. Factors that prompt such disagreements include the particular era of the definition, role perspectives, values held, anticipated consequences, and implicit concepts held concerning the nature of education.



Dolce calls for an expansion of student rights balanced against institutional (social) needs. He argues that students should have the right to wide latitude in personal dress and appearance, due process, and free expression of their religious, political, and philosophical beliefs.

A National Organization on Legal Problems of Education publication edited by Nolte (1971) provides superintendents with a perspective on the complexities of school law problems. Nine experts on school law comment within four broad topic areas, including collective bargaining and freedom of speech as they affect the superintendent.

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For each order, indicate the ED numbers of the desired publications, the type of reproduction desired (paper or microfiche), and the number of copies being ordered.

Payment must accompany orders under \$10.00. Postage, at book rate or library rate, is included in the price of the document. If first class mailing is desired or if shipment is outside the continental United States, the difference between book rate or library rate and first class or foreign postage will be billed at cost. All orders must be in writing.

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