

To summarize the case study, the Carterville Unified School District just sent out a zero-tolerance policy to all of the schools and told them to include it in their school plans. As the principal of Rancho Elementary school, I appointed one of the fifth-grade teachers, Ms. Idleman to lead the development of the school plan. Once, it was completed, it was sent to my desk for approval. However, I was out of town at a conference. In my absence, my assistant principal, Ms. Boxer, made the decision to move forward with the plan and send copies out to all students to take home. A few days later, a fifth-grade student brought a 19th century handgun to school in her backpack. Ms. Idleman confiscated the pistol and then returned it to her at the end of the day. The next day, a parent from that same fifth-grade classroom contacted me and demanded something be done to the student.

The first issue is that the assistant principal should not have moved forward and distributed a school plan without my approval. The AP should've waited until I returned or notified me to review it while I was at my conference. The second issue is that the teacher should have brought the student and the weapon to my office immediately. The third issue is that the teacher should have never given the gun back to the student. The fourth issue is that according to the information given, I am just finding out about the incident from a parent phone call. Again, this should have been immediately brought to my attention by the teacher.

There is a lot of communication that needs to go out to all stakeholders involved including the students, parents, staff, community members, local media, and district office. There is federal law that regulates the possession of firearms on K-12 campuses. The Gun-Free School Act requires local educational agencies to expel students from

school for a minimum period of one year if they bring a firearm to school or possess one at school. However, the GFSA also allows states to permit the chief administering officer of a local educational agency to modify an expulsion for a student, in writing, on a case-by basis (*Guns in schools 2022*).

One solution would be to expel the student from school for at least one year since they did bring a firearm to school. Another option would be to bring the students and parents in and have a conversation and ultimately choose to modify the consequences and not expel the student for an entire year. Because the situation has been mishandled from the beginning, I would choose to bring the student and parents in to have a conversation. If the correct process would have been followed, I would have been able to make changes to the school plan and identify what zero-tolerance means and I would've been able to communicate to parents and students the importance of this policy. This would have hopefully prevented the incident in the first place. I don't think zero-tolerance should mean automatic expulsion. There should be a suspension period to further assess the situation and decide on what steps need to be taken. This could potentially lead to expulsion.

The teacher should've immediately brought the firearm and the student to my office. At that point, I would've been able to communicate to the students in the classroom as well as the families what took place. Before calling home, I would've notified our school resource officer. After that, I would've called the parents of the student and had them come pick the firearm up and take the student home for the day. Since it did not happen that way, I am forced to be reactionary.

I would first address my teacher and explain to her how she should've handled the situation. She also should have never given the firearm back to the student. I don't think this deserves a letter of reprimand on file. However, this definitely displays lack of judgment and will be something I include in her eval. After I address the teacher, I would call the parents and the student and have a conversation with them. I would express to them the severity of the situation and try to gain some understanding as to why the student brought the firearm. From the little background information given in the case, I don't think the student had ill intentions and it seemed like the student wasn't even aware that this was a violation of school policy. Given the circumstances and the age of the student, I do not feel that the student should be expelled from school. However, my decision will set a precedent, so I have to hold the student and parents accountable. Before I would make a final decision, I would talk with my superintendent and SRO to get their input on the situation. My suggestion would be to suspend the student for one week with an additional week of in school suspension and make both the parents and the student follow a "return to school" protocol. This would include some form of written documentation showing that both the parents and student have an understanding of the zero-tolerance policy as well as an understanding of state and federal law regarding firearms.

After dealing with the student and parents, I would revamp our zero-tolerance policy and then have a staff meeting to discuss the situation that took place and talk about the zero-tolerance policy and what that means. With that being said, I would instruct each of my teachers to go over the policy with their classes. I would also make an appearance in that fifth-grade classroom and encourage the class and talk to them about the situation.

I would try to assure them that this is a safe environment and the situation that occurred was not an immediate and dangerous threat. I would also provide resources to anyone in that class that needed help with moving on from the incident.

References:

Guns in schools. Giffords. (2022, November 16). Retrieved January 18, 2023, from <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/guns-in-public/guns-in-schools/>