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# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

## What are the school rules and how do you share them?

The start of a new school year is exciting and stressful. Interactions with parents and school visitors can set a good or bad tone for the whole year. Schools need to be clear about rules and expectations to ensure a smooth start with all parties on the same page, but the way they do it can affect the perception of the school and staff — both positively or negatively.

### Rules are rules

Schools can be both welcoming and firm about following rules. It's about how you state the rules and whether your school community understands why the rules are important. Before school starts, schools and the district need to review and agree upon standard rules that will be enforced consistently at each individual school and among schools in the district.

**Setting district and school policies:** Rules are in place to ensure order, fairness and safety. Establishing rules and policies should be process-based and include perspectives from a variety of education partners. This is generally not a process that is undertaken at the start of school unless the policy is a response to an incident that arose unexpectedly. Setting or revising new policies are typically part of official school board or school site council action.

New rules and policies should be shared upon passage, and existing policies should be shared or made available regularly. Staff are key audiences for these updates. They should be clear about the rules to ensure that they can enforce them.

**Sharing why the rules are in place:** If a rule is important to the orderly and safe operation of your school, staff should be able to say that if there are questions. They should never respond that they don't know or they don't agree with the rule. All staff are part of the communications team, especially when it comes to sharing district-approved policies.

In addition to having an understanding of the rules and why they exist, staff should have access to the official board policy when more information is requested. They can keep an office hard copy on the shelf or refer questions to the policy library on the district website, which should be easy to find and updated regularly.

### Setting the tone for positive compliance

Parents are the most important audience for your school rules. They are the most frequent visitors, and they are role models for their children. While parents largely want to follow the rules, some will bristle if they feel they are treated inconsiderately or the rules are not enforced consistently. If they must follow the rules, they should be able to expect that other parents will comply as well.

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**Ask nicely:** Does your school post signs on the door that say, “Visitors must report to office!” or does it say, “Welcome! For school safety, please check in at the office.”

Do staff set a positive tone by greeting people courteously and offering help in a timely manner? Do they respond to questions brusquely or in a friendly, helpful tone? If staff see visitors wandering the halls in a confused manner without an ID badge, they should politely direct them or offer to guide them to the office. Staff in the office are often overwhelmed with demands, but the default greeting and response should be helpful and polite — even when the visitor is not. This basic customer service training can be included in professional development events throughout the year.

**Be clear:** Is it apparent where the office is? Schools often have many doors, and sometimes it isn’t clear which one is the main entry. Additionally, some school offices are buried deep in the building. School signage is essential to minimize frustration over direction and help visitors comply with the rules.

**Be firm and consistent:** Signing in is a standard requirement at schools. It is important to know who is in the building at any given time, and the visitor log is a useful record. This is the kind of rule that can be overlooked for frequent visitors, especially those who volunteer regularly. Everyone, even school or district staff, should be required to sign when they visit a school. Rules that are enforced and followed consistently become habits that visitors will follow without resistance or questioning.

### **Sample visitor policies**

When setting the tone for following the school rules, start with your visitor policies. It is an essential policy for order and school safety. It is also a helpful policy for embedding rule compliance in your school visitors. Most parents will visit their child’s school during the school year. Observing this rule in action will help them feel confident about safety, security and fairness in the building.

### **Visitor Check-in Policies and Procedures, Hurst, Euless, Bedford Independent School District, TX**

<http://bit.ly/2KWxrmT>

### **Sample district policies**

Review your district and school policies and remind staff about them before the new school year starts. If the policy is unclear or lacking, get ideas for updates from other districts. Here are a few sample policies:

### **School Visitors, McFarland School District, WI**

[www.mcfarland.k12.wi.us/community/Comm-Visit.cfm](http://www.mcfarland.k12.wi.us/community/Comm-Visit.cfm)

### **School Policies**

### **Adlai E. Stevenson Elementary School, Cleveland Metro School District, OH**

[www.clevelandmetroschools.org/Page/10967](http://www.clevelandmetroschools.org/Page/10967)

### **Saranac Elementary School, Saranac Central School District, NY**