

"Tomorrow's Education Today"

South Texas Educational Technologies, Inc.
Horizon Montessori Public Schools

2026 - 2027

Employee Handbook

Revised: 08/26

For District Local and Legal Policies:

https://www.hmps.net/page/hmps-policies

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SOUTH TEXAS EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES, INC.
HORIZON MONTESSORI PUBLIC SCHOOLS
EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGMENT FORM
2026-2027

Name:	
Campus/Department	
Last 4 digits of Social Security #	

Listed below are the available options for the employee handbook. Please review each option and initial by each.

	I understand that I may access an electronic copy of the handbook at www.hmps.net.
	I understand that I may request a hard copy from the HR Department or campus administration.
	I understand that a hard copy is located at each campus secretary's office and/or each campus principal's office for review.

The information in this handbook is subject to change. I understand that changes in the district policies may supersede, modify, or render obsolete the information summarized in this booklet. As the district provides updated policy information, I accept responsibility for reading and abiding by the changes.

I understand that no modifications to contractual relationships or alterations of at-will employment relationships are intended by this handbook.

I understand that I have an obligation to inform the Human Resources Department of any changes in personal information, such as phone number, address, etc. I also accept responsibility for contacting my Principal/Supervisor or the Human Resources Department if I have questions or concerns or need further explanation.

By signing this document, I hereby acknowledge that I have access to the STET/HMPS Employee Handbook. I agree to read the handbook and abide by the standards, policies, and procedures defined or referenced in this document.

Signature	
Date	

PLEASE COMPLETE AND SIGN THIS FORM AND RETURN IT TO YOUR PRINCIPAL/SUPERVISOR WHO WILL FORWARD THE ORIGINAL TO THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT.
NOTE: PLEASE FEEL FREE TO MAKE A COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND ACCESS AGREEMENT

It is the policy of South Texas Educational Technologies, Inc. (Horizon Montessori Public Schools) to protect confidentiality of sensitive information related to students, faculty, and staff. Through the course of your employment with STET/HMPS, you may have access, occasional use, or otherwise acquire confidential information. As a condition of employment, I _____, hereinafter "Employee," agrees to protect any such confidential information as set forth below.

In the course of employment with STET/HMPS, Employee may have authorized access to or inadvertently encounter "confidential information." As used in this Confidentiality Agreement, "confidential information" includes but is not limited to:

- ♦ Education records, or information in education records, pertaining to students which is confidential under federal and/or state law;
- ♦ Curriculum systems, instructional programs, curriculum solutions, student course work, computer processes, computer programs and codes, pending projects and proposals;
- ♦ Disciplinary records, or information contained therein, pertaining to students;
- ♦ All information contained in an individual's employee or applicant personnel file;
- ♦ All compensation and benefit information;
- ♦ Any medical records or medical information related to employees or students;
- ♦ Any information pertaining to a grievance or disciplinary action concerning an employee;
- ♦ Any information the disclosure of which would cause an embarrassment to an employee or constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of privacy.

Employee hereby agrees to hold STET/HMPS confidential information in the strictest confidence and not to disclose or otherwise utilize this confidential information except as necessary for Employee to perform his or her customary and regular job duties. This means that:

- ♦ Employee will only access confidential information for which Employee has a legitimate business need to know;
- ♦ With certain exceptions, Employee will have access to personally identifiable student information which is limited to the student, the parent or guardian of the student, and other persons authorized by state and federal law. Employee also understands that there are federal and state laws that protect the privacy rights of our administration, staff, and students (active or inactive).
- ♦ Employee will not in any way disclose, divulge, copy, release, review, alter or destroy any of STET/HMPS' confidential information in any form (written, oral, electronic, and/or verbal) except as properly authorized within the scope of the Employee's employment with STET/HMPS; and
- ♦ Employee will not otherwise misuse or misappropriate STET/HMPS' confidential information.
- ♦ Employee will prevent unauthorized use of confidential information and immediately report the misuse or any accidental disclosure of confidential information to their immediate supervisor.

Employee understands that if he or she has any doubt as to whether any information is confidential or whether any information should be disclosed, Employee shall request clarification from his or her immediate supervisor.

Employee understands that confidential information remains confidential both in and outside the workplace, and agrees not to discuss such information with any individual or organization that does not have a valid business reason to have access to this information. Employee acknowledges that they are subject to workplace confidentiality as a condition of employment and that failure to comply with the obligations contained in this Confidentiality Agreement will result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment and may also be subject to federal and state law repercussion(s), even if the employee does not actually benefit from the disclosed information.

I have read the information above and agree to the confidentiality requirements specified in this document.

Name (Print)	
Signature	
Date	

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PUBLIC ACCESS OPTION FORM

The Public Information Act allows employees, public officials, and former employees and officials to elect whether to keep certain information about them confidential. Unless you choose to keep it confidential, the following information about you may be subject to public release if requested under the Texas Public Information Act.

Therefore, please indicate by *circling yes or no* whether you wish to allow public release of the following information:

YES NO

PUBLIC ACCESS:

If you selected **YES** to allow public release of your information, please provide the following updated information.

Address:

_____

_____

Phone number, including personal cell:

_____

_____

Personal email address:

_____

Information that reveals if you have family members. **YES NO**

Name (print)	
Signature	
Date	

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EMPLOYEE AGREEMENT FOR ACCEPTABLE USE OF THE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS SYSTEM

You are being given access to the District's electronic communications system. Through this system, you will be able to communicate with other schools, colleges, organizations, students and people through the Internet and other electronic information systems/networks. You will have access to an abundance of websites, databases, educational programs, libraries, and computer services. With this opportunity comes responsibility. It is important that you read this policy and ask questions if you need help in understanding it. Inappropriate system use will result in the loss of the privilege of using this educational and administrative tool. Please note that the Internet is a network of many types of communication and information networks. It is possible that you may run across some material you might find objectionable. While the District will take reasonable steps to restrict access to such material, it is not possible to absolutely prevent such access. It will be your responsibility to follow the rules for appropriate use.

RULES FOR APPROPRIATE USE

- The account is to be used only for educational and administrative purposes. Limited personal use of the system is permitted if the use: imposes no tangible cost to the district, does not unduly burden the district's computer or network resources, has no adverse effect on job performance or on a student's academic performance.
- Downloading of video or audio streams for personal use is strictly prohibited. Video or audio streams may be downloaded for educational and school business use only.
- You will be held responsible at all times for proper use and the District may suspend or revoke your access if you violate the rules.
- Remember that people who receive email from you with a school address might think your message represents the school's point of view. Electronic mail transmissions and other use of technology resources are not confidential and can be monitored at any time to ensure appropriate use.

INAPPROPRIATE USES

- Using the system for any illegal purpose.
- Downloading or using copyrighted information without permission from the copyright holder.
- Posting messages or accessing materials that are abusive, obscene, sexually oriented, threatening, harassing, damaging to another's reputation, or illegal.
- Wasting school resources through improper use of the computer system.
- Gaining unauthorized access, restricted information, or resources.

CONSEQUENCES FOR INAPPROPRIATE USE

- Suspension of access to the system.
- Revocation of the computer system.
- Other disciplinary or legal action, in accordance with the District policies and applicable laws.

PERSONAL USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

Electronic communications includes all forms of social media, such as text messaging, instant messaging, electronic mail (e-mail), Web logs (blogs), wikis, electronic forums (chat rooms), video-sharing websites (e.g., YouTube), editorial comments posted on the Internet, and social network sites (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, X, Linkedin, Instagram, SnapChat, TikTok, etc). Electronic communications also includes all forms of telecommunication such as landlines, cell phones, and web-based applications.

As role models for the district's students, employees are responsible for their public conduct even when they are not acting as district employees. Employees will be held to the same professional standards in their public use of electronic media as they are for any other public conduct. We acknowledge that all employees have a First Amendment right to comment in a professional and appropriate manner on matters of public concern. We caution you that while your rights are protected, if it unreasonably and negatively affects your ability to do your job, STET/HMPS may take appropriate action due to any inability you have to perform your job. Therefore, any employee's use of electronic communications that will interfere with an employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. If an employee wishes to use a social network site or similar media for personal purposes, the employee is responsible for the content on the employee's page, including content added by the employee, the employee's friends, or members of the public who can access the employee's page, and for web links on the employee's page. The employee is also responsible for maintaining privacy settings appropriate to the content.

An employee who uses electronic communications for personal purposes shall observe the following:

- The employee may not set up or update the employee's personal social network page(s) using the district's computers, network, or equipment.
- The employee shall limit use of personal electronic communication devices to send or receive calls, text messages, pictures, and videos to breaks, meal times, and before and after scheduled work hours; unless there is an emergency or the use is authorized by a supervisor to conduct district business.
- The employee shall not use district and campus trademarks, including names, logos, mascots, and symbols or other copyrighted material on social media or in texts without express written consent.
- An employee may not share or post, in any format, information, videos, or pictures obtained while on duty or on district business unless the employee first obtains written approval from the employee's immediate supervisor. This includes any pictures or postings of students on personal social media as this is prohibited. Such pictures and postings are limited to campus and district social media pages only. Employees should be cognizant that they have access to information and images that, if transmitted to the public, could violate privacy concerns.
- The employee continues to be subject to applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative regulations, and the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas educators, even when communicating regarding personal and private matters, regardless of whether the employee is using private or public equipment, on or off campus.

These restrictions include:

- Confidentiality of student records.
- Confidentiality of health or personnel information concerning colleagues, unless disclosure serves lawful professional purposes or is required by law.
- Confidentiality of district records, including educator evaluations and private email addresses.
- Copyright law.
- Prohibition against harming others by knowingly making false claims.

PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

While STET/HMPS generally prohibits the use of personal electronic devices to perform district duties, STET/HMPS will mandate employees to have district approved software applications downloaded on personal cellular phones for safety and security purposes that will enable the employee to alert personnel of an emergency or be alerted of emergencies to include lockdowns and drills. Other personal electronic devices to include but not limited to laptops, iPads/tablets and USBs are prohibited to perform district duties but exceptions may be made upon district approval. STET/HMPS will not be responsible for any stolen or damaged personal property.

PUBLIC INFORMATION ON PRIVATE DEVICES

Employees should not maintain district information on privately owned devices. Any district information must be forwarded or transferred to the district to be preserved. The district will take reasonable efforts to obtain public information in compliance with the Public Information Act. Reasonable efforts may include:

- Verbal or written directive
- Remote access to district-owned devices and services

COPYRIGHTED MATERIALS

Employees are expected to comply with the provisions of federal copyright law and policy relating to the use, reproduction, distribution, performance, or display of copyrighted materials (i.e., printed material, videos, computer data and programs, etc.). Electronic media, including motion pictures and other audiovisual works, are to be used in the classroom for instructional purposes only. Duplication or backup of computer programs and data must be made within the provisions of the purchase agreement.

Employees acknowledge and understand that the entire right, title and interest of any and all writings, works and other creations that they may prepare, create, write, initiate or otherwise develop as part of their efforts while employed by STET/HMPS shall be considered the property of STET/HMPS. This includes, but is not limited to, the development of a curriculum. These works will be "works for hire" and shall be the sole and exclusive property of STET/HMPS, including any copyright, patent or trademark or application thereof. Employees hereby assign and transfer to STET/HMPS all right, title and interest in such works and creations, including without limitation, all patent, trademark and copyright rights that now exist or may exist in the future. Employees further agree that at any reasonable time upon request, and without further compensation or limitation, they will execute and deliver any and all papers, applications or instruments that in STET/HMPS' opinion may be necessary or desirable to secure the STET/HMPS' full enjoyment of all right, title interest and properties herein assigned. Employees agree not to charge the school for use of their copyrighted, trademarked and patented material.

PROPRIETARY INFORMATION

Proprietary information includes all information relating in any manner to the business of STET/HMPS and its schools, students, parents, consultants, customers, clients, and business associates obtained by STET/HMPS employees during the course of their work. Occasionally, in the service of STET/HMPS' mission, STET/HMPS may choose to share otherwise proprietary information (e.g., best practices) with outside parties. Such documents will be prepared specifically for publication and dissemination. If an individual employee receives a request from an outside party for either paper or electronic copies of STET/HMPS documents, that employee should direct the request to central office.

DISTRICT EMAILS

District emails will be activated for new employees by the IT Department upon the request and approval of the Human Resources Department. Should any changes need to be made to emails, such requests must be emailed to the Human Resources Department for approval. Upon an employee's resignation or termination, emails will be

deactivated by the IT Department upon the request and approval of the Human Resources Department, Assistant Superintendent, and/or the Superintendent. Electronic mail transmissions and other use of technology resources are not confidential and can be monitored at any time to ensure appropriate use. District emails are solely for the use of business related purposes and remain the property of STET/HMPS.

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYEES, STUDENTS, AND PARENTS

A certified or licensed employee, or any other employee designated in writing by the superintendent or a campus principal, may use electronic communications with students who are currently enrolled in the district. The employee must comply with the provisions outlined below. Electronic communications between all other employees and students who are enrolled in the district are prohibited. Employees are not required to provide students with their personal phone number or email address.

An employee is not subject to the provisions regarding electronic communications with a student to the extent the employee has a social or family relationship with a student. For example, an employee may have a relationship with a niece or nephew, a student who is the child of an adult friend, a student who is a friend of the employee's child, or a member or participant in the same civic, social, recreational, or religious organization. An employee who claims an exception based on a social relationship shall provide written consent from the student's parent. The written consent shall include an acknowledgement by the parent that:

- The employee has provided the parent with a copy of this protocol;
- The employee and the student have a social relationship outside of school;
- The parent understands that the employee's communications with the student are accepted from district regulation; and
- The parent is solely responsible for monitoring electronic communications between the employee and the student.

The following definitions apply for the use of electronic media with students:

- *Electronic communications* means any communication facilitated by the use of any electronic device, including a telephone, cellular telephone, computer, computer network, personal data assistant, or pager. The term includes email, text messages, instant messages, and any communication made through an Internet website, including a social media website or a social networking website.
- *Communicate* means to convey information and includes a one-way communication as well as a dialogue between two or more people. A public communication by an employee that is not targeted at students (e.g. a posting on the employee's personal social network page or a blog) is not a communication: however, the employee may be subject to district regulations on personal electronic communications. Unsolicited contact from a student through electronic means is not a *communication*.
- *Certified or licensed employee* means a person employed in a position requiring SBEC certification or a professional license, and whose job duties may require the employee to communicate electronically with students. The term includes classroom teachers, counselors, principals, librarians, paraprofessionals, nurses, educational diagnosticians, school psychologists, and athletic trainers.

An employee who communicates electronically with students shall observe the following:

- The employee is prohibited from knowingly communicating with students using any form of electronic communications, including mobile and web applications, that are not provided or accessible by the district unless a specific exception is noted below.

- Only a teacher, trainer, or other employee who has an extracurricular duty may use text messaging, and then only to communicate with students who participate in the extracurricular activity over which the employee has responsibility. An employee who communicates with a student using text messaging shall comply with the following protocol:
    - The employee shall include at least one of the student's parents or guardians as a recipient on each text message to the student so that the student and parent receive the same message;
    - The employee shall include his or her immediate supervisor as a recipient on each text message to the student so that the student and supervisor receive the same message; or
    - For each text message addressed to one or more students, the employee shall send a copy of the text message to the employee's district email address.
- The employee shall limit communications to matters within the scope of the employee's professional responsibilities (e.g., for classroom teachers, matters relating to class work, homework, and tests; for an employee with an extracurricular duty, matters relating to the extracurricular activity).
- The employee is prohibited from knowingly communicating with students through a personal social network page; the employee must create a separate social network page ("professional page") for the purpose of communicating with students. The employee must enable administration and parents to access the employee's professional page.
- The employee shall not communicate directly with any student between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. An employee may, however, make public posts to a social network site, blog, or similar application at any time.
- The employee does not have a right to privacy with respect to communications with students and parents.
- The employee continues to be subject to applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative regulations, and the Texas Educators' Code of Ethics including:
    - Compliance with the Public Information Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), including retention and confidentiality of student records.
    - Copyright law
    - Prohibitions against soliciting or engaging in sexual conduct or a romantic relationship with a student.
- Upon request from administration, an employee will provide the phone number(s), social network site(s), or other information regarding the method(s) of electronic media the employee uses to communicate with one or more currently-enrolled students.
- Upon written request from a parent or student, the employee shall discontinue communicating with the student through email, text messaging, instant messaging, or any other form of one-to-one communication.
- An employee may request an exception from one or more of the limitations above by submitting a written request to his or her immediate supervisor.
- All staff are required to use school email accounts for all electronic communications with parents. Communication about school issues through personal email accounts or text messages are not allowed as they cannot be preserved in accordance with the district's record retention policy.
- An employee shall notify his or her supervisor in writing within one business day if a student engages in an improper electronic communication with the employee. The employee should describe the form and content of the electronic communication.

VIRTUAL/DISTANCE LEARNING

STET/HMPS may provide virtual/distance learning only upon necessity and as approved by TEA and state regulations set forth at such time. This platform will be conducted either from a classroom or a location other than the school building, as approved by the Superintendent. In providing this type of instruction, educators and other staff will be using various methods of technology to ensure students are receiving adequate lessons and education.

All staff conducting virtual/distance learning or in-class instruction will be expected to abide by the *Electronic Communications Between Employees, Students, and Parents* policy.

I understand that my computer use is not private and that the District may monitor my activity on the computer system.

I have read the District's electronic communications system policy and administrative regulations and agree to abide by their provisions. Failure to do so can result in suspension of access or termination of privileges and may lead to disciplinary and legal action.

In consideration for the privilege of using the District's electronic communications system and in consideration for having access to the public networks, I hereby release the District, its operators, and any institutions with which they are affiliated from any and all claims and damages of any nature arising from my use of, or inability to use, the system, including, without limitation, the type of damages identified in the District's policy and administrative regulations.

Name (print)	
Employee Signature	
Date	

PLEASE COMPLETE AND SIGN THIS FORM AND RETURN IT TO YOUR PRINCIPAL/IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR WHO WILL FORWARD THE ORIGINAL TO THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT.

NOTE: PLEASE FEEL FREE TO MAKE A COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS.

EMPLOYEE AGREEMENT FOR ASSIGNMENT AND USE OF SCHOOL DISTRICT PROPERTY

Any and all school district property assigned is for the sole use of district related educational and administrative purposes. Property may include but not limited to desktop computers, laptops, printers, cell phones, USBs, keys, uniforms, district vehicles, buildings, furnishings, equipment, tools, supplies, etc. All employees issued school district property will be expected to sign out for such property and are expected to keep property in good working condition as you will be held financially responsible for any lost or damaged property.

If provided a school issued electronic devices to include but not limited to cellular phones, tablets, laptops, desktops, etc., STET/HMPS reserves the right to retrieve the devices at any time along with any content the devices may contain as such devices are property of the district and shall be used for district purposes only.

If approved and issued a district vehicle by central administration, the district vehicle will be used for school related functions/activities only and must remain on school premises when not in use for school related functions/activities. When issued a district vehicle, the employee must 1) Not use the district vehicle for personal errands, trips, functions, unauthorized stops, etc. 2) Keep all doors locked when the vehicle is unattended. 3) No unauthorized passengers or merchandise are allowed to be transported. 4) Abide by all safety and traffic laws to ensure the safety of students, staff, and other drivers.

Upon termination of employment whether voluntary or involuntary; all school district property must be returned within 10 days from the last date of employment. Failure to return such property may be considered theft of school district property and reported to the appropriate local authorities. In addition, an employee may be subject to payroll deduction of the cost of unreturned assigned school district property.

I have read the District's assignment of school district property. I acknowledge that failure to return any assigned school district property may result in payroll deduction of the cost of the assigned school district property or may be considered theft of school district property and reported to the appropriate local authorities.

Name (print)	
Signature	
Date	

PLEASE COMPLETE AND SIGN THIS FORM AND RETURN IT TO YOUR PRINCIPAL/IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR WHO WILL FORWARD THE ORIGINAL TO THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT.

NOTE: PLEASE FEEL FREE TO MAKE A COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS.

SEARCHES ACKNOWLEDGMENT

STET/HMPS reserves the right to conduct searches to monitor compliance with rules concerning safety of employees, security of company and individual property, drugs and alcohol, and possession of other prohibited items. "Prohibited items" include illegal drugs, alcoholic beverages, prescription drugs or medications not used or possessed in compliance with a current valid prescription, weapons, any items of an obscene, harassing, demeaning, or violent nature, and any property in the possession or control of an employee who does not have authorization from the owner of such property to possess or control the property. "Control" means knowing where a particular item is, having placed an item where it is currently located, or having any influence over its continued placement. In addition to STET/HMPS' premises, STET/HMPS may search employees, their work areas, lockers, and personal vehicles if driven or parked on company property, and other personal items such as bags, purses, briefcases, backpacks, lunch boxes, and other containers. In requesting a search, STET/HMPS is by no means accusing anyone of theft, some other crime, or any other variety of improper conduct.

There is no general or specific expectation of privacy in STET/HMPS' workplace, either on school premises, or while on duty. In general, employees should assume that what they do while on duty or on school premises is not private. All employees and all of the areas listed above are subject to search at any time; if an employee uses a locker or other storage area at work, including a locking desk drawer or locking cabinet, STET/HMPS will either furnish the lock and keep a copy of the key or combination, or else allow the employee to furnish a personal lock, but the employee must give STET/HMPS a copy of the key or combination. The areas in question may be searched at any time, with or without the employee being present. As a general rule, with the exception of items relating to personal hygiene or health, no employee should ever bring anything to work or store anything at work that he/she would not be prepared to show and possibly turn over to STET/HMPS officials and/or law enforcement authorities.

All employees of STET/HMPS are subject to this policy. However, any given search may be restricted to one or more specific individuals, depending upon the situation. Searches may be done on a random basis or based upon reasonable suspicion. "Reasonable suspicion" means circumstances suggesting to a reasonable person that there is a possibility that one or more individuals may be in possession of a prohibited item as defined above. Any search under this policy will be done in a manner protecting employee privacy, confidentiality, and personal dignity to the greatest extent possible. STET/HMPS will respond severely to any unauthorized release of information concerning individual employees.

No employee will ever be physically forced to submit to a search. However, an employee who refuses to submit to a search request by STET/HMPS will face disciplinary action, up to and possibly including immediate termination.

In accordance with STET/HMPS policy regarding searches, I understand that all desks, storage areas, lockers, and all vehicles owned, financed, or leased by STET/HMPS or used by it to transport employees, goods, and/or products are subject to search at any time without my knowledge, presence, or permission. With the exception of my personal vehicle, I understand I am prohibited from locking or otherwise securing any such desk, storage area, locker, or vehicle with any lock or locking device not supplied or approved by STET/HMPS. If I use my own lock on any such item, I agree to give my supervisor a copy of the key or combination to the lock so that STET/HMPS may open the lock at any time that it may deem such action necessary. In the event that a search of my personal vehicle becomes necessary, I agree to allow personnel designated by STET/HMPS to conduct such a search at any time STET/HMPS may direct during my duty shift.

I further understand that in order to promote the safety of employees and visitors of STET/HMPS, as well as the security of the facilities and residents of the facilities where STET/HMPS is located, STET/HMPS may conduct video surveillance of any portion of its premises and operations at any time, the only exception being private areas of restrooms, showers, and dressing rooms, and that video cameras will be positioned in appropriate places within and around the facilities and used in order to help promote the safety and security of people and property. I hereby give my consent to such video surveillance at any time STET/HMPS may choose.

I hereby release STET/HMPS from all liability, including liability for negligence, associated with the enforcement of these policies and/or any searches or surveillance undertaken pursuant to these policies.

_____ _____

Signature of Applicant/Employee Date

_____

Employee's Printed Name

_____ _____

District Representative Date

PLEASE COMPLETE AND SIGN THIS FORM AND RETURN IT TO YOUR PRINCIPAL/IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR WHO WILL FORWARD THE ORIGINAL TO THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT.

NOTE: PLEASE FEEL FREE TO MAKE A COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS.

WAGE DEDUCTION AUTHORIZATION AGREEMENT

I understand and agree that my employer, STET/HMPS, may deduct money from my pay from time to time for reasons that fall into the following categories:

1. My share of the premiums for STET/HMPS' group medical/supplemental plans;
2. Any contributions I may make into a retirement or pension plan sponsored, controlled, or managed by STET/HMPS;
3. If I receive an overpayment of wages for any reason, repayment to STET/HMPS of such overpayments (the deduction for such a repayment will equal the entire amount of the overpayment, unless STET/HMPS and I agree in writing to a series of smaller deductions in specified amounts);
4. The cost of personal long-distance calls I may make on STET/HMPS-owned phones or on its accounts, of personal faxes sent by me using STET/HMPS-owned equipment or its accounts, or of non-work related access to the Internet or other computer networks by me using STET/HMPS-owned equipment or its accounts;
5. The cost of repairing or replacing any of STET/HMPS' supplies, materials, equipment, money, or other property that I may damage (other than normal wear and tear), lose, fail to return, or take without appropriate authorization from STET/HMPS during my employment (except in the case of misappropriation of money by me, I understand that no such deduction will take my pay below minimum wage, or if I am a salaried exempt employee, reduce my salary below the federal FLSA minimum salary-basis amount);
6. The cost of any uniforms required in my employment with STET/HMPS that have been lost, damaged or not returned.;
7. Administrative fees in connection with court-ordered garnishments or legally-required wage attachments of my pay, limited in extent to the amount or amounts allowed under applicable laws;
8. Deductions necessary to repay my Alternative Certification Program (ACP) or substitute program;
9. The value of any time off for absences to which paid leave is not applied (non-exempt salaried employees will have all such unpaid leave deducted from their salary, while exempt salaried employees will experience salary reductions only in units of a full day or week at a time, depending upon the exact nature of the absence, unless partial-day deductions are specifically allowed under federal law); and
10. If STET/HMPS pays any insurance premiums or retirement system contributions ("payments") on my behalf that I would normally make under any applicable benefit plan offered by STET/HMPS during my employment, the amount of such payments made by STET/HMPS, such payments being an advance of future wages payable to me.

I agree that STET/HMPS may deduct money from my pay under the above circumstances, or if any of the above situations occur. I further understand that STET/HMPS has stated its intention to abide by all applicable federal and Texas wage and hour laws, and that if I believe that any such law has not been followed, I have the right to file a wage claim with appropriate Texas and federal agencies.

_____ _____

Signature of Applicant/Employee Date

_____

Employee's Printed Name

_____ _____

District Representative Date

PLEASE COMPLETE AND SIGN THIS FORM AND RETURN IT TO YOUR PRINCIPAL/IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR WHO WILL FORWARD THE ORIGINAL TO THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT.

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FRATERNIZATION POLICY

STET/HMPS defines the following:

Director, Supervisor or Manager – Director, supervisor or manager are used synonymously and mean principal, assistant principal, supervisor, manager, superior, administrator, department head, coordinator, director, executive, or any person who has authority over another person or evaluates any other person. Director, supervisor or manager shall include any person who has the authority and/or responsibility to hire, promote discipline, evaluate, assign or direct faculty, staff or employees of STET/HMPS.

Employee – Any person employed by STET/HMPS in any capacity, whether faculty or staff, full or part-time.

Fraternization – Fraternization is not a concept susceptible to precise and narrow definition. Depending on the circumstances, fraternization may span the entire spectrum of amicable human social interaction, ranging from a passing greeting on the street to intimate sexual activity.

Personal Relationship – The term "personal relationship," as used in this Policy, is defined as two (2) employees getting engaged or married, becoming domestic partners, dating, or entering into a romantic or sexual relationship or affair with each other; it is a strong, deep, or close association between two people that may range in duration from brief to enduring. This association may be based on inference, love, solidarity, regular business interactions, or some other type of social commitment. The prohibited relationships, which apply to both opposite-gender and same-gender relationships include, as an example but not limited to:

-Ongoing business relationships.

-Dating, shared living accommodations other than those directed by operational requirements, and intimate or sexual relationships.

General Rule – HMPS encourages employees to develop positive work relationships and share a spirit of teamwork and camaraderie both in the workplace and outside of work. In instituting this dating or fraternization policy, it is not HMPS' goal to interfere with the development of positive work relationships. It is the goal to help eliminate a negative impact on work. HMPS strongly discourages romantic, personal relationships between coworkers who work in the same department. Even relationships between non-managerial employees can cause friction in the workplace and real, imagined or possible claims of favoritism or sexual harassment. All employees will be held to the standards of the nondiscrimination, sexual harassment and Title IX policies at all times.

Managerial Fraternization - Dating, romantic involvement, sexual relations, undue familiarity, and close family relationships among employees with a subordinate are prohibited as the relationship can create a conflict of interest or create the appearance of a conflict of interest or would otherwise potentially inhibit the ability of any employee to perform his or her duties in an effective or efficient manner.

Furthermore, anyone employed in a managerial or supervisory role needs to heed the fact that personal relationships with employees who report to him or her may be perceived as favoritism, misuse of authority, or sexual harassment; and accordingly, managers and supervisors may not date any employee whom he or she manages or (actually or potentially) evaluates. Any fraternization with any employee who reports to a director or whose terms and conditions of employment such as pay raises, promotions, and advancement are potentially affected by the director is prohibited. If such a relationship exists, both the involved supervisor and involved employee shall report such relationship to which the supervisor reports to or to Human Resources.

Fraternization Among Non-Managerial Employees or Between Two Managers – Friendships and social contacts between employees are not a matter of concern as long as they are consistent with the following guidelines.

If two employees with no non-managerial status or two employees in supervisory positions are involved in a relationship that causes disruption to the workplace, they may be subject to remedial action including reassignment of duties and responsibilities, limiting of job functions and/or access to confidential information, but also possible

disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Married employees may not work in the same department without authorization from the Superintendent. The Superintendent may allow a married couple to work in the same department under his/her discretion when it is determined that it is in the best interest of STET/HMPS. The Superintendent's decision is not appealable.

Enforcement – If STET/HMPS finds any validity to claims of sexual harassment or favoritism, or if dissension in the workplace is created, STET/HMPS will take any action deemed necessary, up to transfer or termination. Any relationship that interferes with the district's culture of teamwork, harmonious work environment, or the productivity of employees will be addressed by applying our disciplinary policy. Adverse workplace behavior or behavior that affects the workplace that arises because of personal relationships will not be tolerated. Overall, directors, supervisors or any employee who disregards this policy will receive disciplinary actions up to and including termination of employment. Any employee who becomes aware of a relationship prohibited by this policy should report such to the Human Resources Department.

STET/HMPS recognizes that employees may have different definitions and understanding about what constitutes as a close relationship, a friendship or romantic involvement. Consequently, if you have questions or need further clarification, contact the Human Resources Department as the goal is to implement consistent and fair policies to encourage a conducive and productive work environment.

I hereby acknowledge that I have read, understand and agree to abide by the above policy.

Name (print)	
Signature	
Date	

PLEASE COMPLETE AND SIGN THIS FORM AND RETURN IT TO YOUR PRINCIPAL/IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR WHO WILL FORWARD THE ORIGINAL TO THE HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT.

NOTE: PLEASE FEEL FREE TO MAKE A COPY FOR YOUR RECORDS.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this handbook is to provide information that will help with questions and pave the way for a successful year. Not all district policies and procedures are included. Suggestions for additions and improvements to this handbook are welcomed and may be emailed to the Human Resources Department.

This handbook is neither a contract nor is it intended to alter the at-will status of non-contract employees in any way. Rather, it is a guide and a brief explanation of district policies and procedures related to employment. Each employee is expected to read this Handbook carefully and know and abide by the policies outlined herein as revised over time, throughout their employment. These policies and procedures can change at any time. The changes shall supersede any handbook provisions that are not compatible with the change. For more information, employees may refer to the policy codes that are associated with the handbook topics, confer with their principal or call the Human Resources Department.

In compliance with H.B. No. 912, the South Texas Educational Technologies, Inc. (STET) offers all STET School Board Policies online at www.hmps.net.

At each school in the district, the board shall make a copy of the board's employment policies available for inspection at a reasonable time on request.

A copy of the board's employment policies will be provided upon request.

VISION STATEMENT

TOMORROW'S EDUCATION TODAY

- •!• All Students Will Learn!
- •!• School, Homes and Community Working Together to Support Our Students!
- •!• Providing Students a 21st Century Education, Today!

The Vision of Horizon Montessori Public Schools, a division of STET, Inc., is to maximize the educational potential by blending the learning experiences to include the Montessori, STEM, and CTE programs through 21st Century classroom environments. Students will be equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Continuous learning by every student is achieved, by emphasizing critical thinking, creatively, collaboration, communication, and with the support of stakeholders. All students are provided with invaluable in and out of classroom activities to encourage global awareness, personal growth, and college and career readiness.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Horizon Montessori Public Schools, a division of STET, Inc., is to provide the highest quality education to all students, through extended learning experiences to include the Montessori, STEM, and CTE programs. To the fullest extent of their individual abilities, students will be provided the opportunity to develop the capability to think logically, independently, creatively, and to communicate effectively in a safe learning environment.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The TEAM of STET/HMPS, Board Members, administrators, teachers, staff and parents, in partnership with community and public educational agencies, is committed to provide the resources and opportunities for all students to achieve educational excellence.

District goals and objectives are as follows:

1. Professional development - learning opportunities for all employees.

2. Technology - current in all technological changes, advances, and applications.
3. Academic excellence - focus on comprehension, critical thinking, application, and problem solving.
4. Communication- clear, concise, and accurate exchange of information, and understanding and implementation of policy.
5. Parental involvement- participation of parents as partners in the education of their children.
6. Learning environment- safe, efficient, state-of-the-art facilities and resources.

Public Education Mission, Goals, and Objectives

The mission of the Texas public education system is to ensure that all Texas children have access to a quality education that enables them to achieve their full potential and fully participate now and in the future in the social, economic, and educational opportunities in our state and nation. That mission is grounded on the conviction that a general diffusion of knowledge is essential for the welfare of Texas and for the preservation of the liberties and rights of Texas citizens. It is further grounded on the conviction that a successful public education system is directly related to a strong, dedicated, and supportive family and that parental involvement in the school is essential for the maximum educational achievement of a child. The objectives of public education are:

OBJECTIVE 1: Parents will be full partners with educators in the education of their children.

OBJECTIVE 2: Students will be encouraged and challenged to meet their full educational potential.

OBJECTIVE 3: Through enhanced dropout prevention efforts, all students will remain in school until they obtain a diploma.

OBJECTIVE 4: A well-balanced and appropriate curriculum will be provided to all students.

OBJECTIVE 5: Educators will prepare students to be thoughtful, active citizens who have an appreciation for the basic values of our state and national heritage and who can understand and productively function in a free enterprise society.

OBJECTIVE 6: Qualified and highly effective personnel will be recruited, developed, and retained.

OBJECTIVE 7: Texas students will demonstrate exemplary performance in comparison to national and international standards.

OBJECTIVE 8: School campuses will maintain a safe and disciplined environment conducive to student learning.

OBJECTIVE 9: Educators will keep abreast of the development of creative and innovative techniques in instruction and administration using those techniques as appropriate to improve student learning.

OBJECTIVE 10: Technology will be implemented and used to increase the effectiveness of student learning, instructional management, staff development, and administration.

The academic goals of public education are to serve as a foundation for a well-balanced and appropriate education. The students in the public education system will demonstrate exemplary performance in:

GOAL 1: The reading and writing of the English language.

GOAL 2: The understanding of mathematics.

GOAL 3: The understanding of science.

GOAL 4: The understanding of social studies.

Education code 4001, 4002

Instructional Goals and Objectives

The District shall endeavor to maintain an educational program that will help each student to develop personal knowledge, skills, and competence to maximum capacity, and to learn behavior patterns, which will make each student a responsible member of society. In terms of their individual abilities, all students should achieve:

1. Competence in fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic in the early elementary grades, accompanied by studies in higher mathematics, science, history, free enterprise system, English, and other languages in the higher grades. These should be accompanied by a wide variety of optional courses. Skills in the logical processes of research, analysis, evaluation, and problem solving. Competence and motivation for continuing self-evaluation, self-instruction, and adaptation to a changing environment. Competence in reading, communication, and other language art skills according to grade level and individual ability.
2. Knowledge of the fundamental economic structure and processes of the American system, of the contribution of free enterprise, and of the opportunities for individual participation and success in the system. Occupational skills needed to enter and advance in the economic system or academic preparation for acquisition of technical or professional skills through post-high school training. Competence in the application of economic knowledge to practical economic functions, such as planning and budgeting for the investment of personal income, calculating tax obligations, financing major purchases, and obtaining desirable employment.
3. Knowledge about the United States and Texas systems of government and their political subdivisions. Competence in judging the merits of comparative political systems and ideologies with emphasis on democratic institutions, the American heritage, the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship, and the comparative merits of candidates for political position. Skill for communicating with public officials at different levels of government. Skill for participating in the processes of public and private political organizations and in influencing decisions made by such organizations.
4. Knowledge about the requirements of personal hygiene, nutritional consumption, and physical exercise essential to the maintenance of personal health. Knowledge of the dangers to health from addiction to harmful substances or consumption of harmful materials. Skill in sports and other forms of recreation, which will permit life-long enjoyment of physical exercise. Competence in recognizing and preventing environmental, ecological, and health problems. Knowledge and experiences to provide information and develop skills and values needed to perform daily activities in a safe manner free from injury or other losses.
5. Knowledge of the arts, music, literature, drama, and other aesthetic expressions of various cultures. Competence in the critical evaluation and appreciation of diverse cultures.
6. Knowledge of basic psychological, sociological, and cultural factors affecting human behavior. Skills in interpersonal and group relations and information of ethical and moral standards of behavior. Competence for adjusting to changes in personal status and social patterns. Skills for coping with stress and pressure. Development of a self-image that builds self-concepts of a positive nature.
7. Competence and skill in creative and responsible use of leisure time.

State Board of Education Policy 3101.1, as amended.

Montessori Goals

1. Respect the uniqueness of each person.
2. Preserve and nurture the innate capacity of students so they can reach their full potential as contributing world citizens.
3. Offer individually paced academic instruction and activities.
4. Provide curricula for concept development and skill acquisitions in prepared classrooms.
5. Focus on learning-by-doing.
6. Engage students in purposeful and collaborative learning.
7. Ensure students use inner discipline, concentration, and task completion for lifelong critical thinking and discovery.
8. Work in concert with students and their families

2026-2027
DIVISION OF STET
CHARTER HOLDER BOARD

Chairman	Alim U. Ansari
Vice -Chair	Hassan Ahmad, Ph. D.
Member	Randall L. Summers
Member	Aurora Saenz
Member	Thomas Herman
Member	Hitesh K. Chugani

CENTRAL OFFICE DIRECTORY

Interim Superintendent of Schools	Yolanda Cantu
Business Manager	Yasin Ansari
District Dean of Instruction	Aliza Guerra
Human Resources Coordinator	Jenilee Farias
PEIMS and Purchasing Coordinator	Tammy Garza
Child Nutrition Program Manager	Jackie Flores
Federal & Administrative Coordinator	Jessica Hernandez
Special Ed. Coordinator/Diagnostician	Onesimo Niño
Bilingual Coordinator	Emmy Diaz
Payroll and Benefits Coordinator	Tiffin Brinkman
Math Specialist	Kishwar Farooqi
Reading Specialist	Mirtha Salinas
District Technology and Safety Manager	Joseph Rizo
Accounts Payable Clerk	Perla Garcia
Human Resources Clerk	Belinda Mendoza
District PEIMS Clerk	Selma Rocha
Speech Language Pathologist Assistant	Armandina Cantu
Receptionist	Lizette Gonzalez
District Construction Supervisor	Ismael Briones
Maintenance	Argelio Mendiola, Marcos Lopez
Maintenance and Operations Facilitator	Michael Palladini
Custodian	Maria Briones

DIRECTORY AND ADMINISTRATORS

STET/HMPS CENTRAL OFFICE 2402 E. Business 83 Weslaco, TX 78596 (956) 969-3092 (Office) (956) 969-8614 (Fax)	Yolanda Cantu, Interim Superintendent
Horizon Montessori I 320 N. Main St. McAllen, TX 78501 (956) 631-0234 (956) 668-1404 (Fax)	Julie Herrera, Principal
Horizon Montessori II 1222 W. Sugarcane Drive Weslaco, TX 78596 (956) 969-0044 (Elem.) (956) 969-3500 (M.S.) (956) 969-0065 (Fax)	Genesis Montalvo, Principal
Horizon Montessori III 2802 S. 77 Sunshine Strip Harlingen, TX 78550 (956) 423-8200 (956) 423-8207 (Fax)	Paula Sanchez, Principal
Horizon Montessori IV (Pearland) 2319 N Grand Blvd Pearland, Texas 77581 (832) 930-3328	Dr. Thomas O'Neill, Principal
Title IX Coordinator Jenilee Farias Human Resources Coordinator 2402 E. Business 83 Weslaco, Texas 78596 (956) 969-3092	**ADA/Section 504 Coordinator** Onesimo Niño Special Ed. Coordinator/Diagnostician 2402 E. Business 83 Weslaco, Texas 78596 (956) 969-3092

EMPLOYMENT

Equal Employment Opportunity

In its efforts to promote nondiscrimination and as required by law, STET/HMPS does not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, gender, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, military status, pregnancy, genetic information, or on any other basis prohibited by law. Additionally, STET/HMPS does not discriminate against an employee or applicant who acts to oppose such discrimination or participates in the investigation of a complaint related to a discriminatory employment practice. Employment decisions will be made on the basis of each applicant's job qualifications, experience, and abilities.

Employees with questions or concerns about discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, or military status should contact the Human Resources Department and/or the Superintendent. Employees with questions or concerns about discrimination on the basis of a disability should also contact the Human Resources Department.

In accordance with Title IX, STET/HMPS does not discriminate on the basis of sex and is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of sex in its educational programs or activities. The prohibition against discrimination extends to employment. Inquiries about the application of Title IX may be referred to the district's Title IX Coordinator.

The district designates and authorizes the following employee as the Title IX Coordinator for employees to address concerns or inquiries regarding discrimination based on sex, including sexual harassment: Jenilee Farias, 2402 E. Business 83, Weslaco, Texas 78596, email: jenilee.farias@hmps.net or at Central Office phone number (956) 969-3092. Reports can be made at any time and by any person by mail, email, or phone. During district business hours, reports may be made in person.

The district designates and authorizes the following employee as the ADA/Section 504 Coordinator for employees for concerns regarding discrimination on the basis of a disability: Onesimo Niño, Special Education Coordinator/Diagnostician at (956) 969-3092 or at onesimo.nino@hmps.net.

Nondiscrimination Based on Religion

STET/HMPS does not discriminate on the basis of any aspect of religious observance, practice, or belief unless the school demonstrates that it is unable to reasonably accommodate the religious observance or practice of an employee or applicant without undue hardship to the district's business.

Nondiscrimination Based on Military Service

STET/HMPS will not deny initial employment, reemployment, retention in employment promotion, or any benefits of employment on the basis of membership in a uniformed service, performance in a uniformed service, application for uniformed service, or obligation to a uniformed service.

STET/HMPS will not take adverse employment action or discriminate against any person who takes action to enforce protections afforded by the Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act of 1994 ("USERRA").

American with Disabilities Act (ADA)

STET/HMPS is committed to complying fully with the ADA, as amended, and ensuring equal opportunity in employment for qualified persons with disabilities. All employment practices and activities are conducted on a non-discriminatory basis.

Hiring procedures have been reviewed and provide persons with disabilities meaningful employment opportunities. Pre-employment inquiries are made only regarding an applicant's ability to perform the duties of the position.

STET/HMPS will provide reasonable accommodations to employees with a disability if the accommodation would allow the individual to perform the essential functions of their job, unless doing so would create an undue hardship. An employee or their supervisor may initiate a request for accommodation by contacting the Human Resources Department and identifying an adjustment or change at work that is needed because of a disability. An employee also may submit a written request to HR using the ADA Accommodation Request Form, which is available at www.hmps.net or by contacting the HR Department.

Upon receiving the reasonable accommodation request, HR will meet with the employee and conduct an informal, interactive discussion to identify an accommodation that will allow the employee to perform the essential functions of the job effectively. The district may request medical information concerning the employee's disability to assist in determining what accommodation(s) may be available and appropriate. The employee will be responsible for obtaining the information from their health care provider. Medical information received will be confidential and kept separate from the employee's personnel file.

After meeting with the employee and reviewing medical documentation, HR will determine whether the employee is a qualified individual with a disability and develop a reasonable accommodation plan for the employee. Accommodations will be determined on a case-by-case basis. HR will work closely with the employee and supervisor to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided and effective.

STET/HMPS does not discriminate against qualified employees or applicants because they are related to or associated with a person with a disability.

Nondiscrimination Based on Genetic Information (GINA)

STET/HMPS will not deny initial employment, reemployment, retention in employment promotion, or any benefits of employment on the basis of genetic information, including information about an individual's genetic tests and the genetic tests of an individual's family members, as well as information about the manifestation of a disease or disorder in an individual's family members.

Job Vacancies

Job vacancies are posted on our website at www.hmps.net. Vacancies will also be posted on Region One for vacancies in the Rio Grande Valley and on Region Four for our Pearland positions. STET/HMPS will also use other employment recruitment platforms as deemed necessary.

Employment After Retirement

Individuals receiving retirement benefits from the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) may be employed under

certain circumstances on a full- or part-time basis without affecting their benefits, according to TRS rules and state law. Detailed information about employment after retirement is available in the TRS publication *Employment after Retirement*. Employees can contact TRS for additional information by calling 800-223-8778 or 512-542-6400. Information is also available on the TRS Website (www.trs.texas.gov). Individuals who are rehired after retirement will be subject to completing HMPS rehire forms.

Personnel Records and Requirements

STET/HMPS maintains a personnel file on each employee. The file includes the employee's job application, resume, records of training, documentation of performance appraisals and salary increase information (if applicable), and other employment records.

Most district records, including personnel records, are public information and must be released upon request. Employees may choose to have the following personal information withheld as per Texas Government Code Section 552.024 (Public Access Information Act).

- Address
- Phone number, including personal cell phone number
- Emergency contact information
- Information that reveals whether they have family members

The choice to not allow public access to this information may be done upon hire. To change an existing choice, an employee may submit a written request to the Human Resources Department. New or terminated employees have 14 days after hire or termination to submit a request. Otherwise, personal information can be released to the public until a request to withhold the information is submitted or another exception for release of information under law applies. An employee is responsible for notifying the district if he or she is subject to any exception for disclosure of personal or confidential information.

Upon hire, official transcripts will be required from each college or university. In order for transcripts to be official, it must come directly from the college/university to STET/HMPS or issued to a student in a sealed envelope. The envelope must remain unopened otherwise it will invalidate the official transcript. If submitting a transcript for Masters stipend purposes, the transcript will be reviewed for eligibility criteria and individuals may be prorated for stipend amount depending when the official transcript was submitted to HR.

Any misstatement, falsification, or omission of information on employment applications, resumes, transcripts, or on any other forms, requested or not, will be grounds for refusal to hire or if hired, termination, regardless of the time elapsed before discovery.

Searches and Alcohol and Drug Testing

STET/HMPS reserves the right to conduct searches to monitor compliance with rules concerning safety of employees, security of company and individual property, drugs and alcohol, and possession of other prohibited items. "Prohibited items" include illegal drugs, alcoholic beverages, prescription drugs or medications not used or possessed in compliance with a current valid prescription, weapons, any items of an obscene, harassing, demeaning, or violent nature, and any property in the possession or control of an employee who does not have authorization from the owner of such property to possess or control the property. STET/HMPS also reserves the right to conduct investigatory searches that may include drug and alcohol testing if the suspected violation relates to drug or alcohol use. "Control" means knowing where a particular item is, having placed an item where it is currently located, or having any influence over its continued placement. In addition to the school's premises, STET/HMPS may search employees, their work areas, lockers, personal vehicles (if driven or parked on school property), and other personal items such as bags, purses, briefcases, backpacks, lunch boxes, and other containers. In requesting a search, STET/HMPS is by no means accusing anyone of theft, some other

crime, or any other variety of improper conduct.

There is no general or specific expectation of privacy in the school workplace, either on school or elsewhere while on duty. In general, employees should assume that what they do while on duty or on school premises is not private. All employees and all of the areas listed above are subject to search at any time; if an employee uses a locker or other storage area at work, including a locking desk drawer or locking cabinet, STET/HMPS will either furnish the lock and keep a copy of the key or combination, or else allow the employee to furnish a personal lock, but the employee must give the school a copy of the key or combination. The areas in question may be searched at any time, with or without the employee being present. As a general rule, with the exception of items relating to personal hygiene or health, no employee should ever bring anything to work or store anything at work that he or she would not be prepared to show and possibly turn over to school officials and/or law enforcement authorities.

All STET/HMPS employees are subject to this policy. However, any given search may be restricted to one or more specific individuals, depending upon the situation. Searches may be done on a random basis or based upon reasonable suspicion. “Reasonable suspicion” means circumstances suggesting to a reasonable person that there is a possibility that one or more individuals may be in possession of a prohibited item as defined above. Any search under this policy will be done in a manner protecting employee privacy, confidentiality, and personal dignity to the greatest extent possible. STET/HMPS will respond severely to any unauthorized release of information concerning individual employees.

No employee will ever be physically forced to submit to a search. However, an employee who refuses to submit to a search request by the school will face disciplinary action, up to and possibly including immediate termination.

Workplace Violence Prevention

STET/HMPS is committed to preventing workplace violence and to maintaining a safe work environment. Given the increasing violence in society in general, STET/HMPS has adopted the following guidelines to deal with intimidation, harassment, or other threats of (or actual) violence that may occur during business hours or on school property.

All employees, including supervisors and temporary employees, should be treated with courtesy and respect at all times. Employees are expected to refrain from fighting, “horseplay,” or other conduct that may be dangerous to others. Firearms, weapons, and other dangerous or hazardous devices or substances are at all times prohibited without proper authorization.

Conduct that threatens, intimidates, or coerces another employee, student, or member of the public at any time, including off-duty periods, will not be tolerated. This prohibition includes all acts of harassment.

All threats of (or actual) violence, both direct and indirect, should be reported as soon as possible to your immediate supervisor or any other member of management. This includes threats by employees, students, vendors, solicitors, or other members of the public. When reporting a threat of violence, please be specific and as detailed as possible.

All suspicious individuals or activities should be reported as soon as possible to a supervisor. Do not attempt to interfere in a disturbance unless it is reasonably safe to do so.

STET/HMPS will promptly and thoroughly investigate all reports or threats of violence and suspicious individuals or activities. The identity of the individual making a report will be protected as much as is practical. In order to maintain workplace safety, and the integrity of its investigation, STET/HMPS may suspend employees, either with or without pay, pending investigation. Anyone determined to be responsible for threats of (or actual) violence or other conduct that is in violation of these guidelines will be subject to prompt disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment.

Health Safety Training

Nurses, athletic coaches or sponsors, PE Teachers, cheerleading coaches, and other certain employees must obtain and maintain certification in the principles and techniques of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and the use of an automated external defibrillator (AED) provided by the American Red Cross, the American Heart Association, or another authorized organization that provides equivalent training and certification. Employees subject to this requirement must submit their certification or documentation to Human Resources by the beginning of the academic year. Additionally, the district reserves the right to assign employees who need this certification.

Workload and Work Schedules

Professional employees

Professional and administrative employees regardless of certification, are employed at will and not by contract. Employment is not for any specified term and may be terminated at any time by either the employee or the district.

Professional and administrative employees are exempt from overtime pay and are employed on a 10-12 month basis, according to the work schedules set by the district. A school calendar is adopted each year designating the work schedule for teachers and all school holidays. Notice of work schedules including required days of service and scheduled holidays will be distributed each school year.

Classroom teachers will have planning periods for instructional preparation, including conferences. The schedule of planning periods is set at the campus level but must provide at least 450 minutes within each two-week period in blocks not less than 45 minutes within the instructional day. Teachers and librarians are entitled to a duty-free lunch period of at least 30 minutes. Paraprofessionals and other designated staff will supervise students during these lunch periods. The district may require teachers to supervise students during lunch one day a week when no other personnel are available and during state assessment dates. Please note, modifications and changes can be made due to special circumstances such as pandemics, natural disasters, etc.

Paraprofessional and auxiliary employees

Paraprofessional and auxiliary employees regardless of certification, are employed at will and not by contract. Employment is not for any specified term and may be terminated at any time by either the employee or the district.

Support employees will be notified of the required duty days, holidays, and hours of work for their position on an annual basis. Paraprofessional and auxiliary employees must be compensated for overtime and are not

authorized to work in excess of their assigned schedule without signed approval from their principal/supervisor and central administration and must complete the proper forms for approval.

Certification and Licenses

Professional employees whose positions require State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) certification or professional license are responsible for taking actions to ensure their credentials do not lapse. An employee may be demoted or terminated if the individual does not hold a valid certificate or fails to fulfill the requirements necessary to extend a temporary certificate, emergency certificate, probationary certificate, or permit within the given deadline provided by the district or Alternative Certification Program (ACP). Professional employees are also required to obtain Bilingual Education Supplemental or English as a Second Language Supplemental certifications depending on their assignment within the academic year. If such requirement is not met, the individual's employment status may be affected. An individual's employment may also be affected if SBEC suspends or revokes certification because of an individual's failure to comply with criminal history background checks.

Instructional aides will be required to obtain an educational aide certification with the district's recommendation within the stipulated time frame as set by the Human Resources Department. Instructional aides will be subject to fingerprint requirements as per TEA. Contact the Human Resources Department if you have any questions regarding certification or licensure requirements.

Notification of Parents Regarding Qualifications

In schools receiving Title I funds, the district is also required by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to notify parents at the beginning of each school year that they may request information regarding the professional qualifications of their child's teacher. ESSA also requires that parents be notified if their child has been assigned or taught for four or more consecutive weeks by a teacher who does not meet applicable state certification or licensure requirements.

Texas law requires that parents be notified if their child is assigned for more than 30 consecutive instructional days to an uncertified substitute, inappropriately certified teacher, or an uncertified teacher. This notice is not required if parental notice under ESSA is sent. Inappropriately certified or uncertified teachers include individuals on an emergency permit (including individuals waiting to take a certification exam) and individuals who do not hold any certificate or permit, including substitutes. Information relating to teacher certification will be made available to the public upon request. Employees who have questions about their certification status can contact the Human Resources Department.

Scope and Sequence

If a teacher determines that students need more or less time in a specific area to demonstrate proficiency in the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for that subject and grade level, the district will not penalize the teacher for not following the district's scope and sequence.

The district may take appropriate action if a teacher does not follow the district's scope and sequence based on documented evidence of a deficiency in classroom instruction. This documentation can be obtained through observation or substantiated and documented third-party information.

Additionally, instructional lessons provided by teachers should be appropriate for the classroom setting and respective grade levels at all times. Should any teachers have questions, they should consult with campus administration and/or central office administration.

Faculty/Staff Meetings

Employees are expected to attend regularly scheduled meetings whenever deemed necessary. Any absence from a meeting must have prior approval. An absent employee is expected to contact his/her supervisor for meeting details.

Recertification of Employment Authorization

At the time of hire, all employees must complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form (Form I-9) and present documents to verify identity and employment authorization. STET/HMPS is a participant of E-Verify, a web-based system that allows enrolled employers to confirm the eligibility of newly hired employees to work in the United States. Employees whose immigration status, employment authorization, or employment authorization documents have expired must present new documents that show current employment authorization. Employees should file the necessary application or petition sufficiently in advance to ensure that they maintain continuous employment authorization or valid employment authorization documents. Contact the Human Resources Department if you have any questions regarding reverification of employment authorization.

Former employees who are rehired must also complete the Employment Eligibility Verification Form if they have not completed a form with STET/HMPS within a timeframe established by the district (generally three years after the date of hire or one year after employment is terminated, whichever is later), or if their previous form is no longer retained or valid.

New Hire Reporting

Federal and state law requires that STET/HMPS provide information about all new or rehired workers to the Employer New Hire Reporting Operations Center in the Texas Office of the Attorney General.

Performance Evaluation

Evaluation of an employee's job performance is a continuous process that focuses on improvement. Performance evaluation is based on an employee's assigned job duties and other job-related criteria. All employees will participate in the evaluation process with their assigned principal/supervisor at least annually. T-Tess evaluations will be completed for certified teachers and all other employees will be evaluated with the district's approved internal rubric evaluations. Reports, correspondence, and memoranda can also be used to document performance information. All employees will receive a copy of their written evaluation, have a performance conference with their principal/supervisor, and get the opportunity to respond to the evaluation.

Staff Development

Staff development activities are organized to meet the needs of employees and the district. Staff development for instructional personnel is predominantly campus-based, and related to achieving campus performance objectives, addressed in the campus improvement plan, and approved by a campus-level advisory committee. Staff development for non-instructional personnel is designed to meet specific licensing requirements and continued employee skill development. On designated staff development days and workdays, staff are prohibited from bringing their children to work with them.

Staff will be expected to comply with continued education including yearly mandatory e-learning courses as per license and district requirements. Certificates and/or proof of continued education must be submitted to the principal/supervisor and the Human Resources Department upon completion. Failure to participate and complete staff development activities and trainings may affect performance evaluations and/or result in disciplinary action including termination.

Individuals holding renewable SBEC certificates are responsible for obtaining the required training hours and maintaining appropriate documentation. First year teachers or as otherwise designated by Central Administration/Human Resources may be mandated to attend a New Teacher Academy comprising approximately five staff development days in accordance to the staff development schedule. New Teacher Academy may be assigned to a teacher as deemed necessary or as part of a growth/action plan and approved by principal and central administration.

Part-Time Employees

Part-time employees are personnel employed on a regular basis for less than one-half time of the normal work schedules for that position. Part-time employees are not eligible for group insurance coverage or supplemental insurance and may not participate in the cafeteria plan. Part-time employees are not eligible to be members of the Texas Retirement System (TRS).

Temporary Employees

Temporary and seasonal employees may be hired in situations where additional staff is required. A temporary employee is defined as one who assumes duties on a full-time or part-time basis in a position for a temporary period. Individuals performing these duties will not be eligible for group insurance coverage or supplemental insurance and may not participate in the cafeteria plan. They will not receive state or local leave and are not eligible to be members of the Texas Teacher Retirement System (TRS). The campus/department needing a temporary position must submit a Temporary Employee Request form to the Human Resources Department.

Reassignment and Transfers

All personnel are subject to assignment and reassignment by the superintendent or designee when the superintendent or designee determines that the assignment or reassignment is in the best interest of the district. Reassignment is a transfer to another position, department, or facility that does not necessitate a change in the employment contract. Campus reassignments must be approved by the principal at the sending and receiving campus except when reassignments are due to enrollment shifts or program changes, the superintendent has final placement authority. Extracurricular or supplemental duty assignments may be reassigned at any time.

Employees who object to a reassignment may follow the district process for employee complaints. An employee with the required qualifications for a position may request a transfer to another campus or department. A written transfer form must be completed and signed by the employee and the employee's principal. A teacher requesting a transfer to another campus before the school year begins must submit their request during the month of May. Requests for transfer during the school year will be considered only when the change will not adversely affect students and after a replacement has been found. All transfer requests will be coordinated by the Human Resources Department and must be approved by the sending principal, receiving principal and superintendent.

Outside Employment and Tutoring

All employees are required to disclose in writing to their immediate supervisor any outside employment that *may create a potential conflict of interest with their assigned duties and responsibilities or the best interest of the district.* Supervisors and/or Superintendent will consider outside employment on a case-by-case basis and determine whether it should be prohibited because of a conflict of interest. **Teachers are not allowed to privately tutor their students for pay during the school year; however, tutoring during the summer months is acceptable.**

Administrators. An employee who has significant administrative duties relating to the operation of a school district, including the operation for a campus, program, or other subdivision of the district, is restricted from outside employment. Administrators may not receive financial benefits for performing personal services for

any business entity that conducts or solicits business with the district.

Administrators are also prohibited from receiving financial benefits for performing personal services for any education business that provides services regarding the curriculum or administration of any school district or financial benefits for performing personal services for other school districts, open enrollment charter schools, and education service centers. An exception applies to an administrator who is not a superintendent, assistant superintendent, or member of a board of managers if the board approves as required by statute. Services must be performed on the administrator's personal time. Contact HR for more information.

Employee Involvement

At both the campus and district levels, STET/HMPS offers opportunities for input in matters that affect employees and influence the instructional effectiveness of the district. As part of the district's planning and decision-making process, employees are elected to serve on district-or campus-level advisory committees. Plans and detailed information about the shared decision-making process are available in each campus office or from the Superintendent.

Breaks for Expression of Breast Milk

STET/HMPS supports the practice of expressing breast milk and makes reasonable accommodations for the needs of employees who express breast milk. A place, other than a multiple user bathroom, that is shielded from view and free from intrusion from other employees and the public where the employee can express breast milk will be provided.

A reasonable amount of break time will be provided when the employee has a need to express milk. For nonexempt employees, these breaks are unpaid and are not counted as hours worked. Employees should meet with their supervisor to discuss their needs and arrange break times.

The Providing Urgent Maternal Protections of Nursing Mothers Act (PUMP Act) requires an employee to notify the district if they believe the district is out of compliance in providing breaks for a nursing mother. The employee must give the district 10 days to come into compliance before making any claim of liability against the district. An employee with concerns should contact HR Coordinator, Jenilee Farias at 956-969-3092.

Pregnant Workers Fairness Act

The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) provides consideration of accommodations to employees who have known limitations related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions. An employee seeking a PWFA accommodation should contact HR Coordinator, Jenilee Farias at 956-969-3092 to begin the interactive process.

Safety and Security

The district has developed and promotes a comprehensive program to ensure the safety and security of its employees, students, and visitors. The safety and security program includes guidelines and procedures for responding to emergencies and activities to help reduce the frequency of accidents and injuries. Employees must follow established protocols and response to emergencies for each campus and department.

To prevent or minimize injuries to employees, coworkers, and students, and to protect and conserve district equipment, employees must comply with the following requirements:

1. Observe all safety rules.
2. Keep work areas clean and orderly at all times.

3. Lights should remain on at all times in classrooms while faculty, staff and students are present unless a curriculum lesson calls for dim lights, or if needed due to an emergency such as a lockdown. Staff should always consult with Principal should there be any questions.
4. Immediately report all accidents to their principal/supervisor.
5. Only operate equipment or machines for which they have training and authorization.

While driving on district business, employees are required to have a valid drivers' license and must abide by all state and local traffic laws. Employees driving on district business are prohibited from texting and using other electronic devices that require both visual and manual attention while the vehicle is in motion. Employees will exercise care and sound judgment on whether to use hand-free technology while the vehicle is in motion.

Staff are to refrain from having small electric appliances in classrooms which can include microwaves, toasters, conventional ovens, mini-fridges, kettles, coffee makers, etc. Such appliances in the classrooms pose a risk exposure to serious injury for students and staff members and a potential fire hazard. Therefore, these items are prohibited, and should be removed from the classroom setting. Such appliances will be restricted to cafeterias and/or designated lounges/eating areas.

In addition, all campus staff must have clearance/approval from Campus Principal/Administrator before proceeding with placing any equipment, hanging fixtures or streamers, any flammable items, etc. in their classrooms or workspace that may pose a fire hazard.

Employees with questions or concerns relating to safety programs and issues can contact their principal/supervisor.

Communicable Diseases

The following information will provide simple and effective precautions against the transmission of a communicable disease for all students and school personnel who are potentially exposed to the bodily fluids of any person. No distinction is made between bodily fluids from persons with a known disease or those from persons without symptoms or with an undiagnosed disease.

The term "bodily fluids" includes: blood, semen, drainage from scrapes and cuts, feces, urine, vomitus, respiratory secretions and saliva. Contact with bodily fluids presents a risk of infection with a variety of germs. In general, however, the risk is very low and dependent on a variety of factors including the type of fluid with which contact is made and the type of contact made with it.

Transmission of communicable disease is more likely to occur from contact with infected bodily fluids of unrecognized carriers than from contact with fluids from diagnosed individuals, because simple precautions are not always carried out.

To avoid contact with bodily fluids, the following precautions should be observed:

- Avoid direct skin contact with bodily fluids. This also includes the mucous membranes (e.g. eyes, nose, and mouth);
- Wear disposable gloves when contact with bodily fluids is anticipated (e.g. when treating bloody noses; open cuts, abrasions and other lesions; handling contaminated clothing; and cleaning up body

fluid spills);

- Always practice good personal hygiene through proper hand washing techniques;
- Request assistance from a custodian for proper cleaning of all bodily fluid spills.

Pandemic Protocol

STET/HMPS is committed to ensuring the safety of all employees, students and visitors during times of pandemic, natural disasters, and/or catastrophic events. Seeing as how such events are unpredictable and sometimes unforeseen, additional policies, protocols, and guidelines will be developed and implemented at the time of need to ensure adaptability, compliance and overall safety as STET/HMPS will continually coordinate with local and state officials for guidance. Policies, protocols, and guidelines will be issued out by the Human Resources Department to all applicable staff as necessary.

Mental Health Training

All district employees who regularly interact with students are required to complete an evidenced-based mental health training program that is designed to provide instruction regarding the recognition and support of children and youth who experience mental health or substance use issues that may pose a threat to school safety. Employees must provide a certificate of completion to the district that includes the name of the training course, along with supporting documentation confirming that the training meets the requirements of the commissioner rules for mental health training.

Campus staff required to complete the training includes, but is not limited to, teachers, coaches, librarians, instructional coaches, administrators, administrative support personnel, school resource officers, paraprofessionals, substitutes, custodians, cafeteria staff, bus drivers, crossing guards, and district special program liaisons, and supervisors of personnel who regularly interact with students.

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

Salaries, Wages, and Stipends

Employees are paid in accordance with administrative guidelines and a pay structure established for each position. The district's pay plans are reviewed by the administration each year and adjusted as needed. All district positions are classified as exempt or nonexempt according to federal law. Professional and administrative employees are generally classified as exempt and are paid monthly salaries. They are not entitled to overtime compensation. Other employees are generally classified as nonexempt and are paid based on hourly wages or salary and receive compensatory time or overtime pay for each hour worked beyond 40 in a workweek.

All employees will receive notice of work and campus calendars through the district’s website. Employees who perform extracurricular or supplemental duties may be paid a stipend in addition to their salary according to the district's extra-duty pay schedule. Employees who resign before the end of their work calendar or are terminated from employment become ineligible from stipends and incentives unless approved by central administration and/or School Board. Employees should contact the Payroll Department or the Human Resources Department for more information about the pay schedules or their own pay.

All employees will be expected to clock in and out each day or be expected to complete a timesheet, as requested. Employees clocking in and out must complete an Edit form if they forget to do so or are unable due to reporting to a different location. Failure to complete an Edit form could affect an individual's compensation. Edit forms must be completed by the employee and submitted to principal/supervisor for approval.

Any employee found tampering or forging time will be subject to disciplinary action, including up to termination as this is a serious offense and will not be tolerated. As per Texas Law, breaks are not a requirement. However, HMPS does allow restroom breaks and may allow accommodations if medically necessary. Proper medical documentation must be submitted to the HR Department for approval. Any employee asking for a break and needing to leave the campus/office for personal reasons, must seek supervisor approval and must clock out or make the notation on their timesheet.

Paychecks

All professional employees are paid on the twenty-fifth of each month. Non-exempt employees will be paid on a semi-monthly basis. All employees will be required to enroll in direct deposit. It is the employee's responsibility to ensure that they have provided the Human Resources Department with their correct address and contact information. Terminated employees with Direct Deposit will receive a paper check for their final paycheck within six calendar days of termination in accordance with the Texas Payday Act.

An employee may obtain their electronic payroll statement (check stub) which contains detailed information including deductions, withholding information, and the amount of leave accumulated through the Ascender Employee Portal. Employees are responsible for regularly reviewing the accuracy of their electronic payroll statements. Contact the Payroll/Benefits Department if you have questions about your payroll statement or for access.

Payroll Deductions

The district is required to make the following automatic payroll deductions:

- Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) or Social Security employee contributions
- Federal income tax required for all full-time employees
- Medicare tax (applicable only to employees hired after March 31, 1986)
- Child support and spousal maintenance, if applicable
- Delinquent federal education loan payments, if applicable

Other payroll deductions employees may elect include deductions for the employee's share of premiums for health, dental, life, vision insurance, annuities, higher education savings plans or other supplemental insurances. Salary deductions are automatically made for unauthorized or unpaid leave.

Administrative Pay Corrections and Overpayments

Employees are not entitled to any funds the district overpays. An overpayment occurs if an employee is paid more than the amount the employee should have been paid under the assigned pay grade and applicable supplemental pay.

In the event of an error in payment, the employee should contact the Payroll Department as soon as possible in an effort for the error to be corrected in a quick and efficient manner. Employees must inform the Payroll

Department of known overpayments on any paychecks received. If an overpayment is reported in the current fiscal year, a payment plan will be developed to recoup the payment. Generally, an overpayment will be paid in one pay cycle. However, if this creates an undue hardship for the employee, STET/HMPS has the discretion to develop a plan for regular payroll deductions in the same fiscal year. STET/HMPS will pursue all legal means to recover overpayments.

Overtime Compensation

The district compensates overtime for nonexempt employees in accordance with federal wage and hour laws. Only nonexempt employees (hourly employees and paraprofessional employees) are entitled to overtime compensation. Paraprofessional and auxiliary employees are not authorized to work beyond their normal work schedule without advance signed approval from their principal/supervisor and central administration and must complete the proper forms for approval. A nonexempt employee who works overtime without prior approval will be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Overtime is legally defined as all hours worked in excess of 40 hours in a workweek and is not measured by the day or by the employee's regular work schedule. Nonexempt employees that are paid on a salary basis are paid for the hours set by the normal work schedule. Hours worked beyond the normal schedule up to 40 hours will be paid at a regular rate of pay. Employees may be compensated for overtime (i.e., hours beyond 40 in a workweek) at time-and-a-half rate with compensatory time off (comp time).

Compensatory Time

Compensatory time otherwise known as "comp time" is accumulated when employees are compensated with time off for overtime hours in lieu of overtime pay. The following applies to nonexempt employees upon approval:

- Employees CANNOT accumulate more than 40 hours of compensatory time within the duty year.
- Compensatory time MUST be used in the duty year for which it is earned.
- Use of compensatory time may be at the employee's request with supervisor approval as workload permits. An employee must complete a compensatory form for approval by principal/supervisor and submitted to the Benefits/Payroll Department for processing.
- An employee MUST use compensatory time before using available paid leave (e.g., state, local leave).
- Compensatory time will only be paid out upon resignation or termination if applicable.
- Weekly time records will be maintained on all nonexempt employees for the purpose of wage and salary administration.

Employees should contact the Payroll/Benefits departments for further information and policies.

Approved Travel and Travel Expense Reimbursement

Before any travel expenses are incurred by an employee, the employee's principal/supervisor and the Superintendent must give approval for travel. Superintendent will give approval for travel by employee's own personal vehicle or company vehicle. For approved travel, employees will be reimbursed for mileage and other travel expenditures according to the current rate schedule authorized by the board of trustees. Employees should provide hotels with a tax exemption form. *State tax must be removed from hotel bills.* Employees must

submit receipts to be reimbursed for expenses other than mileage. If an employee is seeking to attend trainings, webinars, conferences and such are available via zoom, the employee will be expected to attend virtually unless otherwise approved.

Health Coverage Benefits

Group health insurance coverage provided is through TRS-ActiveCare, the statewide public school health insurance program. The district's contribution to employee insurance premiums is determined annually by the charter holder board. Employees eligible for health insurance coverage include the following:

1. Employees who are active, contributing TRS members.
2. Employees who are active, contributing TRS members and who are regularly scheduled to work at least 10 hours per week.

TRS retirees and employees who are not contributing TRS members that are regularly scheduled to work less than 10 hours per week are not eligible to participate in TRS-ActiveCare.

The insurance plan year is from September 1 through August 31. New employees must complete enrollment forms within the first 30 days of employment. Current employees can make changes to their insurance coverage during open enrollment or when they experience a qualifying event (e.g., marriage, divorce, birth). Detailed descriptions of insurance coverage, employee cost, and eligibility requirements are provided to all employees by the insurance carrier and/or the Benefits Department. Employees should contact the Benefits Department for more information.

Supplemental Insurance Benefits

Employees can enroll in supplemental insurance programs at their own expense upon hire or during open enrollment. The supplemental plan year is from September 1 through August 31. Premiums for these programs can be paid by payroll deductions. Employees should contact the Benefits Department for more information.

Cafeteria Plan Benefits (Section 125)

Employees may be eligible to participate in the Cafeteria Plan (Section 125) and, under IRS Regulations, must either accept or reject this benefit. This plan enables eligible employees to pay certain insurance premiums on a pretax basis (i.e., disability, accidental death and dismemberment, cancer and disease, dental, and additional term life insurance). A third-party administrator handles employee claims made on these accounts.

New employees must accept or reject this benefit during their first month of employment. All employees must accept or reject this benefit on an annual basis and during the specified time period. Insurance products purchased through Section 125 may only be canceled or dropped during the annual open enrollment period.

Workers' Compensation Insurance

The district, in accordance with state law, provides workers' compensation benefits to employees who suffer a work-related illness or are injured on the job. Benefits may help pay for medical treatment and make up for part of the income lost while recovering. Specific benefits are prescribed by law depending on the circumstances of each case. The employee does not need to miss work to be entitled to medical benefits.

All work-related accidents or injuries must be reported immediately to the principal/supervisor. An incident report as well as a First Injuries Report must be completed by the employee and submitted to the Benefits Department within the first day of injury. Employees who are unable to work because of a work-related injury will be notified of their rights and responsibilities under the Texas Labor Code. If an employee fails to report the on-the-job inquiry or accident within 30 days, the claim may be denied by the Texas Department of Insurance - Division of Workers' Compensation.

Employees receiving worker's compensation benefits may also be eligible for other leave benefits such as family and medical leave (FMLA), state personal leave, local leave, assault leave, temporary disability leave, if applicable. If the use of paid leave is not elected, the employee will only receive workers' compensation wage benefits for any absence resulting from a work-related illness or injury. STET/HMPS is not required to hold a job open for an indefinite period of time and will decide on a case-by-case basis that a particular position must be filled because of a legitimate business concern without violating state and/or federal law.

An employee who believes that his or her condition is a qualifying disability and that he or she is a qualified individual with a disability under the ADA may request and pursue accommodations under the ADA. For additional information, employees may contact the HR Department.

Unemployment Compensation Insurance

Employees who have been laid off or terminated through no fault of their own may be eligible for unemployment compensation benefits under the Texas Unemployment Compensation Act. Employees are not eligible to collect unemployment benefits during regularly scheduled breaks in the school year or the summer months if they have reasonable assurance of returning to service. Employees with questions about unemployment benefits should contact the Human Resources Department.

Teacher Retirement

All personnel employed on a regular basis for at least four and one-half months are members of the Texas Teacher Retirement System (TRS). Substitutes not receiving TRS service retirement benefits who work at least 90 days a year are also eligible for TRS membership and to purchase a year of creditable service. TRS provides members with an annual statement of their account showing all deposits and the total account balance for the year ending August 31, as well as an estimate of their retirement benefits.

Employees who plan to retire under TRS should notify the Payroll Department as soon as possible. Information on the application procedures for TRS benefits are available from TRS at Teacher Retirement System of Texas, 1000 Red River Street, Austin, TX 78701-2698, or call 800-223-8778 or 512-542-6400. TRS information is also available at www.trs.texas.gov.

LEAVES AND ABSENCES

The district offers employees paid and unpaid leaves of absence in times of personal need. This handbook describes the basic types of leave available and restrictions on leave of absences. ***Employees who have personal needs and who expect to be absent for an extended period of more than five days should call the Human Resources Department for counseling about leave options, continuation of benefits, and communicating with the district.***

Leave of Absence

Employees on an approved leave of absence other than family and medical leave may continue their insurance benefits at their ***own expense***. Health insurance benefits for employees on paid leave and leave designated under the Family and Medical Leave Act will be paid by the district as they were prior to the leave. Otherwise, the district does not pay any portion of insurance premiums for employees who are on unpaid leave. Under TRS-Active Care rules, an employee is no longer eligible for insurance through the district after six months of unpaid leave other than FMLA. If an employee's unpaid leave extends for more than six months, the district and/or its third-party administrator will provide the employee with notice of COBRA rights.

Employees must follow district and department or campus procedures to report or request any leave of absence and complete the appropriate leave request forms and/or certifications which can be obtained from the Human Resources Department. Any unapproved absences or absences beyond accumulated or available paid leave shall result in deduction from the employee's pay.

For purposes of leave other than family and medical leave, immediate family is defined as the following:

- Spouse
- Son or daughter, including a biological, adopted, or foster child, a son- or daughter-in-law, a stepchild, a legal ward, or a child for whom the employee stands in loco parentis.
- Parent, stepparent, parent-in-law, or other individual who stands in loco parentis to the employee.
- Sibling, stepsibling, and sibling-in-law
- Grandparent and grandchild
- Any person residing in the employee's household at the time of illness or death

For purposes of family and medical leave, the definition of family is limited to spouse, parent, son or daughter, and next of kin.

Excessive Absences

The district's operation depends on consistent attendance by all of its employees. An employee's principal/supervisor reserves the right to deem absences excessive and reserves the right to address employees of such absences through conferences and/or disciplinary action, including termination. If an employee is absent for at least three consecutive days for medical reasons, the employee will need to submit a physician's excuse to their Supervisor and/or Human Resources.

An absence is considered excessive if it occurs after the employee's earned leave balance is depleted and is not protected by any state or federal law or otherwise approved by the Superintendent and/or Board. An absence may also be considered excessive if the employee is absent more than 10 days within a calendar year period unless the absences are protected by state or federal law or otherwise approved by the Superintendent and/or Board.

State Personal Leave Days

State law entitles all employees to five days of paid personal leave per year. This leave is not extended to sporadic or temporary employees. Personal leave is available for use at the beginning of the year. A day of

personal leave is equivalent to the number of hours per day in an employee's usual assignment, whether full-time or part-time. State personal leave accumulates without limit, is transferable to other Texas school districts, and generally transfers to education service centers. While this leave is transferable, this type of leave is not paid out to employees by STET/HMPS upon resignation, retirement, or termination and may not be used during a two-week notice/end of employment. In addition, the district does not have a sick leave pool or bank. Therefore, state personal days cannot be donated to another employee.

Personal leave may be used for two general purposes: nondiscretionary and discretionary.

Nondiscretionary. Leave taken for personal or family illness, family emergency, a death in the family, or active military service is considered nondiscretionary leave. Reasons for this type of leave allow very little, if any, advance planning. Nondiscretionary may be used in the same manner as state sick leave.

Discretionary. Leave taken at an employee's discretion that can be scheduled in advance is considered discretionary leave. An employee wishing to take discretionary personal leave must submit a request to his or her principal or supervisor at least 2 days in advance of the anticipated absence. The effect of the employee's absence on the educational program or department operations, as well as the availability of substitutes, will be considered by the principal or supervisor.

An employee may not be able to use more than 5 consecutive state days unless approved by the principal/supervisor and/or superintendent. Days may not be requested on standardized testing days, days scheduled for end-of-semester or end-of-year exams, the day before or after a holiday/break, or on professional development days. If such days are requested, the principal/supervisor will review case-by-case and reserves the right to deny approval and/or implement disciplinary action if absence was not approved.

As indicated on the HMPS/STET absence form, an employee must submit the request for absences two days prior to the first day of the absence. It is the employee's responsibility to fully and accurately complete the form and submit timely. The principal/supervisor reserves the right to approve or deny the request based on campus, department, and district needs. If the payroll department deems the form to be incomplete or incorrect, absences may be rejected or delayed for processing. If an employee fails to complete an absence form as required, it may result in a dock in pay.

Leave Proration. If an employee separates from employment with the district before his or her last duty day of the year, or begins employment after the first duty day, state personal leave will be prorated based on the actual time employed. When an employee separates from employment before the last duty day of the school year, the employee's final paycheck will be reduced by the amount of state personal leave the employee used beyond his or her pro rata entitlement for the school year. State days can only be used in half or whole days.

State Sick Leave

State sick leave accumulated before 1995 is available for use and may be transferred to other school districts in Texas. State sick leave may be used for the following reasons only:

- Employee illness
- Illness in the employee's immediate family

- Family emergency (i.e., natural disasters or life-threatening situations)
- Death in the immediate family
- Active military service

In addition, the district does not have a sick leave pool or bank. Therefore, state sick leave cannot be donated to another employee.

Local Leave Days

Full-time employees are eligible to receive five local leave days. These days are not accumulated and will not roll over for the next school year as they will be "lost" if they are not used. While this leave is transferable, this type of leave is not paid out to employees by STET/HMPS upon resignation, retirement, or termination and may not be used during a two-week notice/end of employment. Days may not be requested on standardized testing days, days scheduled for end-of-semester or end-of-year exams, the day before or after a holiday/break, or on professional development days. In addition, the district does not have a sick leave pool or bank. Therefore, local days cannot be donated to another employee.

As indicated on the HMPS/STET absence form, an employee must submit the request for absences two days prior to the first day of the absence. It is the employee's responsibility to fully and accurately complete the form and submit timely. The principal/supervisor reserves the right to approve or deny the request based on campus, department, and district needs. If the payroll department deems the form to be incomplete or incorrect, absences may be rejected or delayed for processing. If an employee fails to complete an absence form as required, it may result in a dock in pay.

Leave Proration. If an employee separates from employment with the district before his or her last duty day of the year, or begins employment after the first duty day, state personal leave will be prorated based on the actual time employed. When an employee separates from employment before the last duty day of the school year, the employee's final paycheck will be reduced by the amount of state personal leave the employee used beyond his or her pro rata entitlement for the school year. Local days can only be used in half or whole days.

Family Medical Leave Act

General Provisions

What is FMLA leave?

The Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) is a federal law that provides eligible employees with **job-protected leave** for qualifying family and medical reasons.

The U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division (WHD) enforces the FMLA for most employees. Eligible employees can take **up to 12 workweeks** of FMLA leave in a 12-month period for:

- The birth, adoption or foster placement of a child with you,
- Your serious mental or physical health condition that makes you unable to work,
- To care for your spouse, child or parent with a serious mental or physical health condition, and

- Certain qualifying reasons related to the foreign deployment of your spouse, child or parent who is a military servicemember.

An eligible employee who is the spouse, child, parent or next of kin of a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness ***may*** **take up to 26 workweeks** of FMLA leave in a single 12-month period to care for the servicemember.

You have the right to use FMLA leave in **one block of time**. When it is medically necessary or otherwise permitted, you may take FMLA leave **intermittently in separate blocks of time, or on a reduced schedule** by working less hours each day or week. Read Fact Sheet #28M(c) for more information.

FMLA leave is ***not*** **paid leave**, but you may choose, or be required by your employer, to use any employer-provided paid leave if your employer's paid leave policy covers the reason for which you need FMLA leave.

Am I eligible to take FMLA leave?

You are an **eligible employee** if ***all*** of the following apply:

- You work for a covered employer,
- You have worked for your employer at least 12 months,
- You have at least 1,250 hours of service for your employer during the 12 months before your leave, and
- Your employer has at least 50 employees within 75 miles of your work location

Airline flight crew employees have different "hours of service" requirements.

You work for a **covered employer** if **one** of the following applies:

- You work for a private employer that had at least 50 employees during at least 20 workweeks in the current or previous calendar year,
- You work for an elementary or public or private secondary school, or
- You work for a public agency, such as a local, state or federal government agency. Most federal employees are covered by Title II of the FMLA, administered by the Office of Personnel Management

How do I request FMLA leave?

Generally, to request FMLA leave you *must*:

- Follow your employer's normal policies for requesting leave,
- Give notice at least 30 days before your need for FMLA leave, or
- If advance notice is not possible, give notice as soon as possible.

You **do *not* have to share a medical diagnosis** but must provide enough information to your employer so

they can determine whether the leave qualifies for FMLA protection. **You *must* also inform your employer if FMLA leave was previously taken** or approved for the same reason when requesting additional leave.

Your **employer *may* request certification** from a health care provider to verify medical leave and may request certification of a qualifying exigency.

The FMLA does not affect any federal or state law prohibiting discrimination or supersede any state or local law or collective bargaining agreement that provides greater family or medical leave rights.

State employees may be subject to certain limitations in pursuit of direct lawsuits regarding leave for their own serious health conditions. Most federal and certain congressional employees are also covered by the law but are subject to the jurisdiction of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management or Congress

What does my employer need to do?

If you are eligible for FMLA leave, your employer ***must***:

- Allow you to take job-protected time off work for a qualifying reason,

- Continue your group health plan coverage while you are on leave on the same basis as if you had not taken leave, and

- Allow you to return to the same job, or a virtually identical job with the same pay, benefits and other working conditions, including shift and location, at the end of your leave.

Your **employer *cannot* interfere with your FMLA rights** or threaten or punish you for exercising your rights under the law. For example, your employer cannot retaliate against you for requesting FMLA leave or cooperating with a WHD investigation.

After becoming aware that your need for leave is for a reason that may qualify under the FMLA, your employer ***must* confirm whether you are eligible or not eligible** for FMLA leave. If your employer determines that you are eligible, **your employer *must* notify you in writing**:

- About your FMLA rights and responsibilities, and

- How much of your requested leave, if any, will be FMLA-protected leave.

Where can I find more information?

Call 1-866-487-9243 or visit dol.gov/fmla to learn more.

If you believe your rights under the FMLA have been violated, you may file a complaint with WHD or file a private lawsuit against your employer in court. Scan the QR code to learn about our WHD complaint process.





Local Procedures for Implementing FMLA Provisions

Eligible employees can take up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave in the 12-month period measured forward from the date an individual employee's first FML begins.

Medical Certification

Any employee, who is absent more than five days because of a personal or family illness, must submit a medical certification from a qualified health care provider confirming the specific dates of the illness, the reason for the illness, and—in the case of personal illness—the employee's fitness to return to work.

The district may require medical certification due to an employee's questionable pattern of absences or when deemed necessary by the supervisor or superintendent. The district may also request medical certification when an employee requests FMLA leave for the employee's serious health condition, a serious health condition of the employee's spouse, parent, or child, or for military caregiver leave. Forms can be obtained from the Human Resources Department.

Use of Paid Leave

Employees may choose what type of leave they wish to use such as state, state sick leave (if applicable), and/or local days and may use it concurrently with FMLA leave but must indicate such on the leave request form. If an employee chooses to not use such days or does not have any available accrued days, the employee will incur a dock in pay that could affect remaining monthly/bi-monthly paychecks. FMLA may also run concurrently with temporary disability leave, compensatory time, assault leave, and absences due to a work-related illness or injury.

Employer Responsibilities

The Human Resources Department will determine if an employee meets the criteria and requirements. If so, the Human Resources Department will notify the employee if he or she is eligible for the leave and will designate the as FMLA leave and how much leave will be designated as FMLA leave. The HR Department will provide a notice of rights and responsibilities under FMLA. The employee will be expected to submit a medical certification form from a qualified health care provider within 15 days of receiving it. Other forms that will be required will be a Request Leave Form and a Fitness for Duty Form. At this time, HR will provide additional documentation as deemed necessary and will review in detail FMLA protocol, available leave, intermittent and/or reduced-schedule leave, return to work requirements, American with Disabilities Act (ADA) and any other applicable guidelines as this policy is simply a summary. If the employee is not eligible for FMLA, the employer must provide a reason for ineligibility.

The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA) prohibits covered employers from requesting

or requiring genetic information of an individual or family member of the individual, except as specifically allowed by this law. To comply with this law, we ask that employees and health care providers do not provide any genetic information in any medical certification. 'Genetic information,' as defined by GINA, includes an individual's family medical history, the results of an individual's or family member's genetic tests, the fact that an individual or an individual's family member sought or received genetic services, and genetic information of a fetus carried by an individual or an individual's family member, or an embryo lawfully held by an individual or family member receiving assistive reproductive services.

Combined Leave For Spouses

Spouses who are employed by the same district are limited to a combined total of 12 weeks of FMLA to care for a parent with a serious health condition; or for the birth, adoption, or foster placement of a child.

Military caregiver leave for spouses is limited to a combined total of 26 weeks. Eligible spouses who work for the same employer are also limited to a combined total of 26 workweeks of leave in a single 12-month period to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness (commonly referred to as "military caregiver leave") if each spouse is a parent, spouse, son or daughter, or next of kin of the servicemember. When spouses take military caregiver leave as well as other FMLA leave in the same leave year, each spouse is subject to the combined limitations for the reasons for leave listed above.

Intermittent Leave

When medically necessary or in the case of a qualifying exigency, an employee may take leave intermittently or on a reduced schedule and does not need to use leave in one block. The district does not permit the use of intermittent or reduced-schedule leave for the care of a newborn child or for adoption or placement of a child with the employee.

Fitness for Duty

An employee that takes FMLA due to the employee's own serious health condition shall provide, before resuming work, a fitness-for-duty certification from the health care provider. When leave is taken for the employee's own serious health condition, the certification must address the employee's ability to perform essential job functions. The district shall provide a list of essential job functions (e.g., job description) to the employee with the FMLA designation notice to share with the health care provider. Fitness for duty is not required when an employee returns to work following leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition; to care for a child following birth, adoption, or foster care placement; or for qualifying exigency leave.

Failure to Return

If, at the expiration of FMLA, the employee is able to return to work but chooses not to do so, the district may require the employee to reimburse the district's share of insurance premiums paid during any portion of FMLA when the employee was on unpaid leave. If the employee fails to return to work for a reason beyond the employee's control, such as a continuing personal or family serious health condition or a spouse being unexpectedly transferred more than 75 miles from the district, the district may not require the employee to reimburse the district's share of premiums paid.

While an employee may have job protection under FMLA, if it is discovered that the employee has violated policies and procedures that are grounds for termination, in accordance with the employee handbook, the employee will be subject to those consequences and will not have their position restored as the termination was based on misconduct and not on the premise of having taken FMLA.

Assault Leave

This type of leave provides extended income and job protection to any STET/HMPS employee who is injured as a result of a physical assault suffered during the performance of his or her job. The maximum period of leave is two years from the date of assault to recuperate. Entitlement to such leave is contingent if the medical certification demonstrates several indicators including that the job could not be done because of the injury, returning to work would worsen the injury, or additional days would facilitate the healing process. An employee's ability to perform his or her job while complying with the doctors restrictions ends the assault leave and intermittent absence for follow-up doctor visits or other therapy does not qualify as assault leave.

An assault under the law requires an action that is purposeful or reckless. An injury is treated as an assault if the person causing the injury could be prosecuted for assault or could not be prosecuted because of the person's age or mental capacity renders the person not responsible.

Upon the request of this type of leave, STET/HMPS will assign the employee assault leave and will begin an investigation to determine if the incident meets the criteria for assault leave. If the investigation shows there is an injury which entitles the employee to assault leave, the employee remains on paid leave for recuperation until release to return to work by his or her doctor. The employee will also be provided a notice of their rights to take such leave. If it is determined that the incident was not an assault, STET/HMPS may change the assault leave status and use the employee's accrued paid leave or deduct pay if paid leave is not available. Such type of leave may run concurrently with worker's compensation, if applicable. For further information regarding assault leave and how pay is calculated, employees should contact the HR or Payroll departments.

Temporary Disability Leave

Certified Employees

Any full-time employee whose position requires certification from the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC) is eligible for temporary disability leave. The purpose of temporary disability leave is to provide job protection to full-time educators who cannot work for an extended period of time because of a mental or physical disability of a temporary nature. Temporary disability leave must be taken as a continuous block of time. It may not be taken intermittently or on a reduced schedule. STET/HMPS is not required to continue to contribute to health insurance premium unless this leave runs concurrently with paid leave or FMLA. Pregnancy and conditions related to pregnancy are treated the same as any other temporary disability.

Employees must request approval for temporary disability leave. An employee's notification of need for extended absence due to the employee's own medical condition shall be accepted as a request for temporary disability leave. The request must be accompanied by a physician's statement confirming the employee's inability to work and estimating a probable date of return. If disability leave is approved, the length of leave is

no longer than 180 calendar days.

If an employee is placed on temporary disability leave involuntarily, he or she has the right to request a hearing before the charter holder board. The employee may protest the action and present additional evidence of fitness to work.

When an employee is ready to return to work, the employee's principal and the Human Resources Department should be notified at least 30 days in advance. The return-to-work notice must be accompanied by a physician's statement confirming that the employee is able to resume regular duties. Certified employees returning from leave will be reinstated to the school to which they were previously assigned if an appropriate position is available. If an appropriate position is not available, the employee may be assigned to another campus, subject to the approval of the campus principal. If a position is not available before the end of the school year, the employee will be reinstated to a position at the original campus at the beginning of the following school year.

Military Leave

Paid Leave for Military Service. Any employee who is a member of the Texas National Guard, Texas State Guard, reserve component of the United States Armed Forces, or a member of a state or federally authorized Urban Search and Rescue Team is entitled to 15 days of paid leave per fiscal year when engaged in authorized training or duty orders by proper authority. An additional seven days of leave per fiscal year are available if called to state active duty in response to a disaster. In addition, an employee is entitled to use available state and local personal or sick leave during a time of active military service.

Reemployment after Military Leave. Employees who leave the district to enter into the United States uniformed services or who are ordered to active duty as a member of the military force of any state (e.g., National or State Guard) may return to employment if they are honorably discharged. Employees who wish to return to the district will be reemployed provided they can be qualified to perform the required duties. Employees returning to work following military leave should contact the HR Department. In most cases, the length of federal military service cannot exceed five years.

Continuation of Health Insurance. Employees who perform service in the uniformed services may elect to continue their health plan coverage at their own cost for a period not to exceed 24 months. Employees should contact the Benefits or HR Departments for details on eligibility, requirements, and limitations.

Jury Duty

The district provides paid leave to employees who are summoned to jury duty including service on a grand jury. The district will not discharge, threaten to discharge, intimidate, or coerce any regular employee because of juror or grand juror service or for the employee’s attendance or scheduled attendance in connection with the service in any court in the United States. Employees who report to the court for jury duty may keep any compensation the court provides. An employee should report a summons for jury duty to his or her principal/supervisor as soon as it is received and will be required to provide the district a copy of the summons to document the need for leave.

An employee may be required to report back to work as soon as they are released from jury duty. Some jury

assignments are not continuous and jurors are released for significant periods of time in which they shall return to work.

Compliance with a Subpoena

Employees will be allowed to comply with a valid subpoena to appear in a civil, criminal, legislative, or administrative proceeding. Employees will not be subject to discharge, discipline or any other penalty for complying with a subpoena. If an employee has been subpoenaed for personal reasons, an employee may use any available paid leave for such days. Employees who do not have paid leave available will be docked for any absence required because of the court appearance. If an employee has been subpoenaed for school-related reasons, the district will provide paid leave to the employee.

Truancy Court Appearance

An employee who is a parent, guardian of a child, or a court-appointed guardian ad litem of a child who is required to miss work to attend a truancy court hearing may use personal leave or compensatory time for the absence. Employees who do not have paid leave available will be docked for any absence required because of the court appearance.

Religious Observance

Federal law does not include special leave provisions for religious holidays or observance. However, federal law does require districts, including STET/HMPS, to reasonably accommodate an employee's request for absence to participate in religious observances. Accommodations such as changes to work schedules or granting of leave will be reviewed and granted, unless they pose an undue hardship to the district. Each request for leave for religious observance must be submitted to the principal/supervisor, which in turn may be submitted to the Human Resources Department for final review. The employee may use any accumulated personal leave for this purpose. Employees who have exhausted applicable paid leave may be granted an unpaid day of absence.

Funeral Leave

In the event of a death in the immediate family, an employee may take a paid leave of absence of up to a maximum of (5) five days. If leave should need to be extended, the district can approve or deny at its discretion an unpaid extended leave. Such leave will be used at time of death/funeral and cannot be used at another time to supplement other existing absences. "Immediate family" is defined as the employee's:

- Husband / Wife
- Father / Mother
- Brother / Sister
- Son / Step Son / Son-In-Law / Daughter / Step Daughter / Daughter-In-Law
- Father-In-Law / Mother-In-Law
- Brother In-Law / Sister-In-Law
- Grandfather / Grandmother

EMPLOYEE CONDUCT AND WELFARE

Standards of Conduct

All employees are expected to work together in a cooperative spirit to serve the best interests of the district and to be courteous to students, one another, and the public. Employees are expected to observe the following standards of conduct:

1. Recognize and respect the rights and property of students, parents, other employees and members of the community.
2. Engage in professional communications and behavior toward students, fellow employees, service providers, and other STET/HMPS stakeholders.
3. Maintain confidentiality in all matters relating to students and coworkers.
4. Report to work according to the assigned schedule.
5. Notify their immediate principal/supervisor as early as possible (preferably in advance) in the event that they must be absent or late. Unauthorized absences, chronic absenteeism, tardiness, and failure to follow procedures for reporting an absence may be cause for disciplinary action, including termination.
6. Know and comply with department and district-policies and procedures.
7. Express concerns, complaints, or criticisms through appropriate channels.
8. Observe all safety rules and regulations and report injuries or unsafe conditions to a principal/supervisor immediately.
9. Use district time, funds, and property for authorized district business and activities only.

All district employees should perform their duties in accordance with state and federal law, district policies and procedures, and ethical standards. Violation of policies, regulations, or guidelines including intentionally making a false claim, offering false statements, or refusing to cooperate with a district investigation may result in disciplinary action, including termination. Alleged incidents of certain misconduct by educators, including having a criminal record, must be reported to SBEC by the superintendent.

The Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators, adopted by the State Board for Educator Certification (TAC Title 19, Part 7, Chapter 247, Rule §247.2), which all district employees must adhere to, is reprinted below:

Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators

Statement of Purpose

The Texas educator shall comply with standard practices and ethical conduct toward students, professional colleagues, school officials, parents, and members of the community and shall safeguard academic freedom. The Texas educator, in maintaining the dignity of the profession, shall respect and obey the law, demonstrate personal integrity, and exemplify honesty. The Texas educator, in exemplifying ethical relations with

colleagues, shall extend just and equitable treatment to all members of the profession. The Texas educator, in accepting a position of public trust, shall measure success by the progress of each student toward realization of his or her potential as an effective citizen. The Texas educator, in fulfilling responsibilities in the community, shall cooperate with parents and others to improve the public schools of the community. This chapter shall apply to educators and candidates for certification. (19 TAC 247.1(b))

Professional Standards

1. Professional Ethical Conduct, Practices and Performance

Standard 1.1 The educator shall not intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly engage in deceptive practices regarding official policies of the school district, educational institution, educator preparation program, the Texas Education Agency, or the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) and its certification process.

Standard 1.2 The educator shall not knowingly misappropriate, divert, or use monies, personnel, property, or equipment committed to his or her charge for personal gain or advantage.

Standard 1.3 The educator shall not submit fraudulent requests for reimbursement, expenses, or pay.

Standard 1.4 The educator shall not use institutional or professional privileges for personal or partisan advantage.

Standard 1.5 The educator shall neither accept nor offer gratuities, gifts, or favors that impair professional judgment or to obtain special advantage. This standard shall not restrict the acceptance of gifts or tokens offered and accepted openly from students, parents of students, or other persons or organizations in recognition or appreciation of service.

Standard 1.6 The educator shall not falsify records, or direct or coerce others to do so.

Standard 1.7 The educator shall comply with state regulations, written local school board policies, and other state and federal law.

Standard 1.8 The educator shall apply for, accept, offer, or assign a position or a responsibility on the basis of professional qualifications.

Standard 1.9 The educator shall not make threats of violence against school district employees, school board members, students, or parents of students.

Standard 1.10 The educator shall be of good moral character and be worthy to instruct or supervise the youth of this state.

Standard 1.11 The educator shall not intentionally or knowingly misrepresent his or her employment history, criminal history, and/or disciplinary record when applying for subsequent employment.

Standard 1.12 The educator shall refrain from the illegal use or distribution of controlled substances and/or abuse of prescription drugs and toxic inhalants.

Standard 1.13 The educator shall not consume alcoholic beverages on school property or during school activities when students are present.

Standard 1.14 The educator shall comply with the prohibitions on diversity, equity, and inclusion duties in Texas Education Code (TEC), §11.005.

Standard 1.15 The educator shall comply with the prohibitions on assistance with social transitioning in TEC, §11.401.

Standard 1.16 The educator shall comply with the restrictions on instruction regarding sexual orientation and gender identity in TEC, §28.0043.

Standard 1.17 The educator shall comply with the requirements to provide full information to a parent concerning a student in TEC, §26.008.

Standard 1.18`The educator shall not promote, advocate, or encourage, in a manner that is reasonably accessible or visible to students, illegal conduct:

I. described by TEC, §22A.201(a); or

II. directly related to student behavior or school property.

2. Ethical Conduct Toward Professional Colleagues

Standard 2.1 The educator shall not reveal confidential health or personnel information concerning colleagues unless disclosure serves lawful professional purposes or is required by law.

Standard 2.2 The educator shall not harm others by knowingly making false statements about a colleague or the school system.

Standard 2.3 The educator shall adhere to written local school board policies and state and federal laws regarding the hiring, evaluation, and dismissal of personnel.

Standard 2.4 The educator shall not interfere with a colleague's exercise of political, professional, or citizenship rights and responsibilities.

Standard 2.5 The educator shall not discriminate against or coerce a colleague on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, gender, disability, family status, or sexual orientation.

Standard 2.6 The educator shall not use coercive means or promise of special treatment in order to influence professional decisions or colleagues.

Standard 2.7 The educator shall not retaliate against any individual who has filed a complaint with the SBEC or who provides information for a disciplinary investigation or proceeding under this chapter.

Standard 2.8 The educator shall not intentionally or knowingly subject a colleague to sexual harassment.

3. Ethical Conduct Toward Students

Standard 3.1 The educator shall not reveal confidential information concerning students unless disclosure serves lawful professional purposes or is required by law.

Standard 3.2 The educator shall not intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly treat a student or minor in a manner that adversely affects or endangers the learning, physical health, mental health, or safety of the student or minor.

Standard 3.3 The educator shall not intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly misrepresent facts regarding a student.

Standard 3.4 The educator shall not exclude a student from participation in a program, deny benefits to a student, or grant an advantage to a student on the basis of race, color, gender, disability, national origin, religion, family status, or sexual orientation.

Standard 3.5 The educator shall not intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly engage in physical mistreatment, neglect, or abuse of a student or minor.

Standard 3.6 The educator shall not solicit or engage in sexual conduct or a romantic relationship with a student or minor.

Standard 3.7 The educator shall not furnish alcohol or illegal/unauthorized drugs to any person under 21 years of age unless the educator is a parent or guardian of that child or knowingly allow any person under 21 years of age unless the educator is a parent or guardian of that child to consume alcohol or illegal/unauthorized drugs in the presence of the educator.

Standard 3.8 The educator shall maintain appropriate professional educator-student relationships and boundaries based on a reasonably prudent educator standard. Factors that may be considered in context and on the totality of the circumstances in assessing whether appropriate boundaries were maintained include, but are not limited to:

I. physical proximity or physical contact beyond the professional role or that the student has indicated is unwelcome, unless such contact is professionally required;

II. contacting or meeting the student beyond the professional role or making efforts to gain access to or time alone with a student with no discernible professional purpose;

III. transporting the student without permission from the student's legal guardian or in violation of school board policy, unless for an emergency;

IV. taking or possessing a photo or video of the student beyond the professional role or in violation of school board policy; and

V. showing favoritism or isolation through gifts, rewards, or privileges.

Standard 3.9 The educator shall refrain from inappropriate communication with a student or minor, including, but not limited to, electronic communication such as cell phone, text messaging, email, instant messaging, blogging, or other social network communication. Factors that may be considered in context and on the totality of the circumstances in assessing whether the communication is inappropriate include, but are not limited to:

I. the nature, purpose, timing, and amount of the communication;

II. the subject matter of the communication;

III. whether the communication was made openly, or the educator attempted to conceal the communication;

IV. whether the communication could be reasonably interpreted as soliciting sexual contact or a romantic relationship;

V. whether the communication was sexually explicit;

VI. whether the communication involved discussion(s) of the physical or sexual attractiveness or the sexual history, activities, preferences, or fantasies of either the educator or the student; and whether the communication could be reasonably interpreted as threatening the welfare and/or safety of the student.

Fraud, Dishonesty and False Statements

No employee or applicant may ever falsify any application, medical history record, student paperwork, employee paperwork, time sheet, time card, investigative questionnaires or any other document. Any employee found to have engaged in résumé fraud, or who made material misrepresentations or omissions on their employment application, will be subject to immediate termination of employment. Violations of this policy should be immediately reported to the appropriate supervisor.

Insubordination

All employees have duties to perform. It is against STET/HMPS policy for an employee to refuse to follow the directions of a supervisor or other school official. Employees must cooperate fully with investigations into potential misconduct. Refusal to disclose information during the course of an investigation constitutes insubordination and is subject to possible disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

In the event a supervisor directs an employee to perform an illegal or immoral act/task, the employee should immediately notify the Principal or designee.

Progressive Disciplinary Action

STET/HMPS has the right to terminate employment at-will, with or without cause or advance notice. STET/HMPS may use progressive discipline at its discretion.

Disciplinary action may include, but is not limited to, any of the following:

1. Verbal warning.

2. Conference with a supervisor and/or the Principal.
3. Written warning.
4. Implementation of an employee growth plan / performance improvement plan. This may be implemented by Principal, Curriculum Coordinators, Central Administrator, and/or Superintendent.
5. Suspension with or without pay otherwise known as administrative leave. The amount of administrative leave will depend on the investigation and outcome of the case. An employee may be placed on administrative leave by Human Resources, Central Administrator, and/or Superintendent.
6. Termination of employment.

The progression of these steps depends upon the severity of the problem and the number of occurrences. There may also be circumstances when one or more steps are bypassed.

Dress and Grooming

All employees will comply with set dress and grooming guidelines which are minimum standards for professional dress, appearance and appropriate for the educational workplace environment. The dress and grooming of District employees shall be clean, neat, in a manner appropriate for their assignments, and in accordance with any additional standards established by their assignments, and in accordance with any additional standards established by their principal/supervisor and approved by the Superintendent. Since STET/HMPS employees serve as role models for the students and as representatives of our organization, dress and grooming policies have been implemented to instill an image of professionalism. Such policies are to also promote employee safety, comfort and a professional impression on our students and our community by portraying a positive image of our organization and mission. With this in mind, such policies are not imposed to discriminate or infringe on freedom of speech as HMPS feels there is an appropriate time and place for such.

STET/HMPS reserves the right to determine at its discretion what is and is not appropriate workplace attire and to address issues as they arise. Consistent with these roles, all employees, volunteers and substitutes shall dress professionally and appropriately. Employees will also be expected to dress appropriately and professionally on staff development days as they are considered work days.

Certain staff are provided district-issued uniforms and are required to wear the uniform while on duty. All employees are prohibited from wearing uniforms or any clothing with a district logo while off duty, except for commuting to and from work.

The Child Nutrition Program (CNP) staff will be required to wear district-issued uniforms and safety shoes while on duty. Torn uniforms are not acceptable. The CNP department may be allowed to wear spirit campus shirts on approved days under CNP Manager approval and discretion.

ATTIRE AND GROOMING FOR MEN	ATTIRE AND GROOMING FOR WOMEN
The following **are permissible** for men:	The following **are permissible** for women:
✔ Collared shirts, polo style shirts, sport shirts. Shirt tails should be tucked in.	✔ Dressy blouses and shirts
✔ Neatly-trimmed mustaches/beards and sideburns	✔ Knee length dresses and skirts
✔ Hair shall be neatly groomed	✔ Dressy capris
	✔ Ear piercings in a reasonable amount
✔ Dress shoes, casual shoes, boots, canvas shoes	
✔ Dressy slacks	
✔ Undergarments should be worn at all times.	
✔ Professional jeans for campus/central on approved days only. (Must not be faded or torn).	
The following **are prohibited** for men:	The following **are prohibited** for women:
Plain, collarless t-shirts of any color	Clothing that is strapless, having spaghetti straps, bare midriff, cut-out blouses, or having provocative/low-cut necklines
Muscle shirts or sleeveless t-shirts	Dresses/skirts that are more than 2” above the knee cap, with slits on the side, rear or front exposing 2” above the knee cap
Piercings on body or ears	Leggings in lieu of pants (including spandex); yoga style pants
sleeveless shirts and/or sleeveless blouses	
warm-ups and windbreaker suits	
shorts (Unless approved for sport activities/physical education classes. If approved by principal/supervisor, must be dressy and appropriate). *See exceptions	
low-rise pants	
See-through, translucent apparel	
Distracting hairstyles and/or hair color	
Flip flops, slippers, sandals without a backstrap, or croc style shoes	
Attire shall not be tight/binding	
Tattoos or body art shall not be visible	

Exceptions:
Physical Education staff must wear appropriate attire approved by the principal/administration during the physical education period(s).
Auxiliary employees in maintenance, custodial, food service and positions requiring uniforms must abide by such guidelines or as specified by immediate supervisor.

Harassment, Discrimination, Retaliation

Employees shall not engage in prohibited harassment, including sexual harassment, of other employees, unpaid interns, student teachers, or students. While acting in the course of their employment, employees shall not engage in prohibited harassment of other persons, including board members, vendors, contractors, volunteers, or parents. A substantiated charge of harassment will result in disciplinary action.

Harassment of a coworker or of a student motivated by race, color, religion, national origin, disability, or age is a form of discrimination and is prohibited by law. The term harassment includes repeated unwelcome and offensive slurs, jokes, or other oral, written, graphic or physical conduct relating to an individual's race, color, religion, national origin, disability or age that creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational or work environment.

Employees who believe they have been harassed, discriminated or retaliated against are encouraged to promptly report such incidents to the campus principal/supervisor and/or the Human Resources Department. If the campus principal, supervisor, or district official is the subject of a complaint, the employee should report the complaint directly to the superintendent. A complaint against the superintendent may be made directly to the school board.

Any district employee who believes that he or she has experienced prohibited conduct based on sex, including sexual harassment, or believes that another employee has experienced such prohibited conduct, should immediately report the alleged acts. The employee may report the alleged acts to his or her supervisor, the campus principal, the Title IX coordinator, or the superintendent. The district's Title IX coordinator's name and contact information is listed in the Equal Employment Opportunity section of this handbook.

Harassment of Students

Sexual and other harassment of students by employees are forms of discrimination and are prohibited by law. Romantic or inappropriate social relationships between students and district employees are prohibited.

Employees who suspect a student may have experienced prohibited harassment are obligated to report their concerns to the campus principal or other appropriate district official. Any district employee who suspects or receives direct or indirect notice that a student or group of students has or may have experienced prohibited conduct based on sex, including sexual harassment, of a student shall immediately notify the district's Title IX coordinator, the ADA/Section 504 coordinator, or superintendent and take any other steps required by the district.

All allegations of prohibited harassment or abuse of a student will be reported to the student's parents and promptly investigated. An employee who knows of or suspects child abuse must also report his or her knowledge or suspicion to the appropriate authorities, as required by law.

Sexual Harassment

Employee-to-employee

Sexual harassment of a co-worker is a form of discrimination and is prohibited by law. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct under the following conditions:

- Submission to such conduct is explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of employment.
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct is used as the basis for employment decisions.
- The conduct unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Employees who believe they have been sexually harassed by another employee are encouraged to come forward with complaints to their principal/supervisor and/or the Human Resources Department. STET/HMPS will promptly investigate all allegations of sexual harassment and will take prompt appropriate disciplinary action against employees found to have engaged in conduct constituting sexual harassment of other employees.

Employee-to-student

Sexual and other harassment of students by employees is a form of discrimination and are prohibited by law. Sexual harassment of students includes any welcomed or unwelcomed sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other oral, written, physical or visual conduct of a sexual nature. Romantic or inappropriate social relationships between district employees and students are strictly prohibited. Other prohibited conduct includes the following:

- Engaging in sexually oriented conversations for the purpose of personal sexual gratification.
- Telephoning students at home or elsewhere and engaging in inappropriate social relationships.
- Engaging in physical contact which would reasonably be construed as sexual in nature.
- Enticing or threatening students to get them to engage in sexual behavior in exchange for grades or other school-related benefits.

In most instances, sexual abuse of a student by an employee violates the student's constitutional right to bodily integrity. Sexual abuse may include, but is not limited to, fondling, sexual assault, or sexual intercourse.

Title IX Procedures

STET/HMPS prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, including sexual harassment, by an employee, volunteer, or student.

Sexual harassment means conduct on the basis of sex that satisfies one or more of the following:

1. A school employee conditioning the provision of aid, benefit, or service on an individual's participation in unwelcome sexual conduct;
2. Unwelcome conduct determined by a reasonable person to be so severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive that it effectively denies a person equal access to STET/HMPS' educational programs or

activities;

3. Sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking (as those offenses are defined in the Clery Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1092(f), and the Violence Against Women Act, 34 U.S.C. § 12291(a)).

Examples of sexual harassment may include, but are not limited to, touching private body parts or coercing physical contact that is sexual in nature; sexual advances; jokes or conversations of a sexual nature; sexually-motivated physical, verbal, or nonverbal conduct; or other sexually motivated conduct, communications, or contact.

Romantic or inappropriate social relationships between students and school employees are prohibited. Any sexual relationship between a student and a school employee is always prohibited, even if consensual.

General Definitions

A "complainant" means an individual who is alleged to be the victim of conduct that could constitute sexual harassment.

A "respondent" means an individual who is reported to be the perpetrator of conduct that could constitute sexual harassment.

A "formal complaint" means a document filed by a complainant or signed by the Title IX Coordinator alleging sexual harassment against a respondent and requesting that STET/HMPS investigate the allegation of sexual harassment.

"Supportive measures" means non-disciplinary, non-punitive individualized services offered appropriate and without fee or charge to the complainant or the respondent before or after the filing of a formal complaint or where no formal complaint has been filed. Such measures are designed to restore or preserve equal access to STET/HMPS' educational program or activity without unreasonably burdening either party, including measures designed to protect the safety of all parties or STET/HMPS' educational environment, or deter sexual harassment. Examples of supportive measures include, but are not limited to, counseling, extensions of deadlines or other course-related adjustments, modifications of class schedules, mutual restrictions on contact between the parties, and other similar measures.

Reporting Sexual Harassment

Any person may report sex discrimination, including sexual harassment (whether or not the person reporting is the person alleged to be the victim of conduct that could constitute sex discrimination or sexual harassment), in person, by mail, by telephone, or by email, using the contact information listed for the Title IX Coordinator in this Handbook, or by any other means that results in the Title IX Coordinator receiving the person's verbal or written report. Such a report may be made at any time, including during non-business hours, by using the telephone number or email address, or by mail to the office address, listed for the Title IX Coordinator.

STET/HMPS' response to a report of sexual harassment must treat complainants and respondents equitably by offering supportive measures and by following a grievance process before the imposition of any disciplinary sanctions or other actions that are not supportive measures against a respondent.

After a report of sexual harassment has been made, the Title IX Coordinator must promptly contact the complainant to discuss the availability of supportive measures, consider the complainant's wishes with respect to supportive measures, inform the complainant of the availability of supportive measures with or without the filing of a formal complaint, and explain to the complainant the process for filing a formal complaint.

Notice of Allegations

Upon receipt of a formal complaint, STET/HMPS must provide the following written notice to the parties who are known:

- Notice of STET/HMPS' grievance process, including any informal resolution process.
- Notice of the allegations of sexual harassment, including, to the extent known, the identity of the parties, the conduct allegedly constituting sexual harassment, and the date and location of the alleged

incident.

- Notice that the respondent is presumed not responsible for the alleged conduct and that a determination regarding responsibility is made known at the conclusion of the grievance process.
- Notice that the parties may have an advisor of their choice, who may be, but is not required to be, an attorney.
- Notice that the parties may inspect and review evidence related to the complaint.
- Notice that STET/HMPS prohibits knowingly making false statements or knowingly submitting false information during the grievance process.

If, during an investigation, STET/HMPS decides to investigate allegations about the complaint or respondent that are not included in the initial notice of the complaint, STET/HMPS must provide notice of the additional allegations to the parties whose identities are known.

Grievance Process

At the time of filing a formal complaint, a complainant must be participating in or attempting to participate in the education program or activity of STET/HMPS.

The following guidelines apply when STET/HMPS receives a formal complaint of sexual harassment. This process is designed to incorporate due process, principles, treat all parties fairly, and to assist STET/HMPS reach reliable responsibility determinations.

- STET/HMPS will require an objective evaluation of all relevant evidence – including both inculpatory and exculpatory evidence – and credibility determinations may not be based on a person's status as a complainant, respondent, or witness.
- Any individual designated by STET/HMPS as a Title IX Coordinator, investigator, decision-maker, or to facilitate an informal resolution process must not have a conflict of interest or bias for or against complainants or respondents generally or an individual complainant or responsible. STET/HMPS will ensure that Title IX Coordinators, investigators, decision-makers, and anyone who facilitates an informal resolution process receive appropriate training related to the requirements of Title IX and STET/HMPS' sexual harassment policy.
- STET/HMPS recognizes a presumption that the respondent is not responsible for the alleged conduct until a determination regarding responsibility is made at the conclusion of the complaint process.
- STET/HMPS shall attempt to complete an investigation of reported sexual harassment within 60 calendar days[A1] of receiving a complaint. However, the investigation process may be delayed or extended for a limited time for good cause with written notice to the complainant and the respondent of the delay or extension. Good cause may include considerations such as absence of a party, a party's advisor, or a witness; concurrent law enforcement activity; or the need for language assistance or accommodation of disabilities.
- Students found to have engaged in sexual harassment are subject to disciplinary action as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct.
- STET/HMPS shall employ the <<preponderance of the evidence or the clear and convincing evidence>>[A2] standard to determine responsibility when reviewing formal complaints.
- STET/HMPSmay not require, allow, rely upon, or otherwise use questions of evidence that constitute, or seek disclosure, of information protected under a legally recognized privilege, unless the person holding such privilege has waived the privilege.

Consolidating Formal Complaints

STET/HMPS may consolidate formal complaints as to allegations of sexual harassment against more than one respondent, or by more than one complainant against one or more respondents, or by one party against the other party, where the allegations of sexual harassment arise out of the same facts or circumstances.

Dismissal of Formal Complaints

STET/HMPS must investigate the allegations in a formal complaint.

STET/HMPS ***must*** dismiss a formal complaint if the conduct alleged in the formal complaint:

- Would not constitute sexual harassment, even if proved;
- Did not occur in STET/HMPS' education program or activity; or
- Did not occur against a person in the United States.

STET/HMPS *may* dismiss a formal complaint or any allegations therein if, at any time during the investigation:

- A complainant notifies the Title IX Coordinator in writing that the complainant would like to withdraw the formal complaint or any allegations therein;
- The respondent is no longer enrolled or employed by STET/HMPS; or
- Specific circumstances prevent STET/HMPS from gathering evidence sufficient to reach a determination as to the formal complaint or allegations therein.

Upon a dismissal, STET/HMPS must promptly send simultaneous written notice to the parties of the dismissal and the reason(s) for the dismissal. Dismissal of a formal complaint does not preclude STET/HMPS from taking appropriate action under the Student Code of Conduct or any other school policy that may apply to the alleged conduct.

Investigating Formal Complaints

The following guidelines apply during the investigation of a formal complaint and throughout the grievance process.

- STET/HMPS will ensure the burden of proof and the burden of gathering evidence sufficient to reach a determination regarding responsibility rests on STET/HMPS and not on the parties.
- STET/HMPS cannot access, consider, disclose, or otherwise use a party's records that are made or maintained by a physician, psychiatrist, psychologist, or other recognized professional or paraprofessional acting in the professional's or paraprofessional's capacity, or assisting in that capacity, and which are made and maintained in connection with the provision of treatment to the party, unless STET/HMPS receives that party's voluntary, written consent to do so.
- STET/HMPS will provide an equal opportunity for the parties to present witnesses, including fact and expert witnesses, and other inculpatory and exculpatory evidence.
- STET/HMPS will not restrict the ability of either party to discuss the allegations under investigation or to gather and present relevant evidence.
- STET/HMPS will provide the parties with the same opportunities to have others present during any grievance proceeding, including the opportunity to be accompanied to any related meeting or proceeding by the advisory of their choice, and not limit the choice or presence of an advisor for either the complainant or respondent in any meeting or grievance proceeding. STET/HMPS may establish restrictions regarding the extent to which the advisor may participate in the proceedings, as long as the restrictions apply equally to both parties.
- STET/HMPS will provide to a party whose participation is invited or expected written notice of the date, time, location, participants, and purpose of all investigative interviews or other meetings with sufficient time for the party to prepare to participate.
- STET/HMPS will provide both parties an equal opportunity to inspect and review any evidence obtained as part of the investigation that is directly related to the allegations raised in a formal complaint, including the evidence upon which the recipient does not intend to rely in reaching a determination regarding responsibility and inculpatory or exculpatory evidence whether obtained from a party or other source, so that each party can meaningfully respond to the evidence prior to conclusion of the investigation.
- Prior to completing an investigative report, STET/HMPS must send to each party and the party's advisor, if any, the evidence subject to inspection and review in an electronic format or a hard copy, and the parties must have at least 10 days to submit a written response, which the investigator will consider prior to completing the investigative report.
- STET/HMPS must create an investigative report that fairly summarizes relevant evidence and, at least 10 days prior to a determination regarding responsibility, send to each party and the party's advisor, if any, the investigative report in an electronic format or a hard copy, for review and written response.
- After sending the investigative report to the parties and before reaching a determination of responsibility, the decision-maker(s) must afford each party the opportunity to submit written relevant questions that a party wants asked of any witness, provide each party with the answers, and allow for

additional, limited follow-up questions from each party. Questions and evidence about the complainant's sexual predisposition or prior sexual behavior are not relevant, unless such questions and evidence about the complainant's prior sexual behavior are offered to prove that someone other than the respondent committed the conduct alleged by the complainant, or if the questions and evidence concern specific incidents of the complainant's prior sexual behavior with respect to the respondent and are offered to prove consent. The decision-maker(s) must explain to the party proposing the questions any decision to exclude a question as not relevant.

Determination Regarding Responsibility

The decision-maker(s) making a determination regarding responsibility cannot be the same person(s) as the Title IX Coordinator or the investigator(s). The decision-maker(s) must review the investigation report and make a written determination, based on the <<preponderance of the evidence or the clear and convincing evidence>> standard, regarding responsibility. The written determination must include:

- Identification of the allegations potentially constituting sexual harassment;
- A description of the procedural steps taken from receipt of the formal complaint through the determination, including any notifications to the parties, interviews with parties and witnesses, site visits, or methods used to gather other evidence;
- Findings of fact supporting the determination;
- Conclusions regarding application of STET/HMPS' Code of Conduct to the facts;
- A statement of, and rationale for, the result as to each allegation, including a determination regarding responsibility, any disciplinary sanctions imposed on the respondent, and whether remedies designed to restore or preserve equal access to STET/HMPS' education program or activities will be provided to the complainant; and
- STET/HMPS' procedures and permissible bases for the complainant and respondent to appeal.

STET/HMPS must provide the written determination to the parties simultaneously. The determination becomes final either on the date STET/HMPS provides the parties with the written determination of the result of the appeal, if an appeal is filed, or if an appeal is not filed, the date on which an appeal would no longer be considered timely.

The Title IX Coordinator is responsible for effective implementation of any remedies.

Appeals

STET/HMPS will offer both parties an appeal from a determination regarding responsibility, and from STET/HMPS' dismissal of a formal complaint or any allegations therein, on the following bases:

- Procedural irregularity that affected the outcome of the matter;
- New evidence that was not reasonably available at the time the determination regarding responsibility or dismissal was made, that could affect the outcome of the matter; and
- The Title IX Coordinator, investigator(s), or decision-maker(s) had a conflict of interest or bias for or against complainants or respondents generally or the individual complainant or respondent that affected the outcome of the matter.

As to appeals, STET/HMPS will ensure that the decision-maker(s) for the appeal is not the same person as the decision-maker(s) that reached the determination regarding responsibility or dismissal, or the investigator(s), or the Title IX Coordinator. STET/HMPS will provide both parties a reasonable equal opportunity to submit a written statement in support of, or challenging, the outcome.

The decision-maker(s) for the appeal will issue a written decision, based on the <<preponderance of the evidence or the clear and convincing evidence>> standard, describing the result of the appeal and the rationale for the result, and provide the written decision simultaneously to both parties.

A party who is dissatisfied with the appeal decision may file an appeal to the Board of Directors through the process outlined in STET/HMPS grievance procedures.

Emergency Removals

STET/HMPS is able to remove a respondent from STET/HMPS' education program on an emergency basis, provided that STET/HMPS undertakes an individualized safety and risk analysis, determines that an immediate threat to the physical health or safety of any student or other individual arising from the allegations of sexual harassment justifies removal, and provides the respondent with notice and an opportunity to challenge the decision immediately following the removal. STET/HMPS' ability to do so may not be construed to modify any rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504, or the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Informal Resolution

At any time prior to reaching a determination regarding responsibility, STET/HMPS may facilitate an informal resolution process, such as mediation, that does not involve a full investigation and adjudication. However, STET/HMPS may not require as a condition of enrollment or continuing enrollment, or employment or continued employment, or enjoyment of any other right, waiver of the right to an investigation and adjudication of formal complaints. Additionally, <STET/HMPS may not require the parties to participate in an informal process and may not offer an informal resolution process unless a formal complaint is filed.

Prior to facilitating an informal resolution process, STET/HMPS must:

- Provide to the parties a written notice disclosing the allegations and the requirements of the informal resolution process including the circumstances under which it precludes the parties from resuming a formal complaint arising from the same allegations. The notice must also inform that, at any time prior to agreeing to a resolution, any party has the right to withdraw from the informal resolution process and resume the grievance process with respect to the formal complaint, as well as of any consequence resulting from participating in the informal resolution process, including the records that will be maintained or could be shared.
- Obtain the parties' voluntary, written consent to the informal resolution process.

STET/HMPS may not offer or facilitate an informal resolution process to resolve allegations that an employee sexually harassed a student.

Retaliation Prohibited

Neither STET/HMPS nor any other person may intimidate, threaten, coerce, or discriminate against any individual for the purpose of interfering with any right or privilege secured by Title IX, or because the individual has made a report or complaint, testified, assisted, or participated or refused to participate in any manner in an investigation or proceeding under this policy.

Examples of retaliation may include, but are not limited to, intimidation, threats, coercion, or discrimination.

Complaints alleging retaliation may be filed according to the grievance procedure described above.

Confidentiality

STET/HMPS must keep confidential the identity of any individual who has made a report or complaint of sex discrimination, including any individual who has made a report or filed a formal complaint of sexual harassment, any complainant, any individual who has been reported to be the perpetrator of sex discrimination, any respondent, and any witness, except as may be permitted by FERPA or as required by law, or for purposes related to the conduct of any investigation, hearing, or judicial proceeding arising under the Title IX regulations.

Non-Sexual Harassment Sex Discrimination

The formal complaint investigation and resolution process outlined above in this <<Section __>> applies only to formal complaints alleging sexual harassment as defined by Title IX, but not to complaints alleging sex discrimination that do not constitute sexual harassment. Complaints of non-sexual harassment sex

discrimination may be filed with the Title IX Coordinator and will be handled under the process described in <<Section __>> of this Handbook.

Discrimination and harassment of students by employees are forms of discrimination and are prohibited by law. Employees who suspect a student may have experienced prohibited harassment are obligated to report their concerns to the Principal or other appropriate STET/HMPS official. All allegations of prohibited harassment of a student by an employee or adult will be promptly investigated. An employee who knows of or suspects child abuse or neglect must also report his or her knowledge or suspicion to the appropriate authorities, as required by law.

STET/HMPS shall take appropriate disciplinary action against employees who have engaged in discrimination or harassment of students, up to and including termination of employment.

Retaliation against anyone involved in the complaint process is a violation of STET/HMPS policy and acts of retaliation may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination.

Sexual Harassment of Students

Sexual harassment of students includes any unwelcome verbal or physical sexual advances, including but not limited to engaging in sexually oriented conversations; making comments about a student's potential sexual performance; requesting details of a student's sexual history; requesting a date, sexual contact, or any activity intended for the sexual gratification of the employee; engaging in conversations regarding the sexual problems, preferences, or fantasies of either party; inappropriate hugging, kissing, or excessive touching; suggestions that a romantic relationship is desired after the student graduates, including post-graduation plans for dating or marriage; telephoning or texting students at home or elsewhere to solicit unwelcome social relationships; physical contact that would reasonably be construed as sexual in nature; threatening or enticing students to engage in sexual behavior in exchange for grades or other school-related benefit; requests for sexual favors; sexually motivated physical, verbal, or nonverbal conduct when the conduct affects the student's ability to participate in or benefit from a program or activity; or conduct of a sexual nature that creates an intimidating, threatening, hostile or offensive educational environment.

Sexual harassment of students by employees is always a violation of law and will result in appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination from employment and referral to appropriate law enforcement authorities.

STET/HMPS employees are generally encouraged to report an action or suspected action that is illegal or in violation of any adopted Board policy. Good faith reports may be made without fear of reprisal.

Any sexual or romantic relationship between a student and a STET/HMPS employee is always prohibited, even if consensual.

Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

All employees with reasonable cause to believe that a child's physical or mental health or welfare has been adversely affected by abuse or neglect, as defined by Texas Family Code §261.001, are required by state law to make a report to a law enforcement agency, the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), or appropriate state agency (e.g., state agency operating, licensing, certifying, or registering the facility) within **24 hours** after the employee first has reasonable cause to believe that the child has been abused or neglected. Law enforcement agency includes the Texas Department of Public Safety, a municipal police department, a county sheriff's office, or a county constable's office and does not include the district police.

If the alleged or suspected abuse or neglect involves a person responsible for the care, custody, or welfare of a child (including a teacher), the report of alleged abuse or neglect must be made to DFPS even if a report is made to law enforcement.

Employees are also required to make a report if they have cause to believe that an adult was a victim of abuse or neglect as a child and they determine in good faith that the disclosure of the information is necessary to protect the health and safety of another child, elderly person, or person with a disability.

Reports to DFPS can be made using the Texas Abuse Hotline https://www.txabusehotline.org/Login/Default.aspx or (800-252- 5400). State law specifies that an employee may not delegate to or rely on another person to make the report.

Under state law, a person reporting or assisting in the investigation of reported child abuse or neglect is immune from liability unless the report is made in bad faith or with malicious intent. In addition, the district is prohibited from retaliating against an employee who, in good faith, reports child abuse or neglect or who participates in an investigation regarding an allegation of child abuse or neglect.

An employee's failure to make the required report may result in prosecution as a Class A Misdemeanor. The offense of failure to report by a professional may be a state jail felony if it is shown the individual intended to conceal the abuse or neglect. In addition, a certified employee's failure to report suspected child abuse may result in disciplinary procedures by SBEC for a violation of the Educators Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators.

Employees who suspect that a student has been or may be abused or neglected should also report their concerns to the campus principal. This includes students with disabilities who are no longer minors. Employees are not required to report their concern to the principal before making a report to the appropriate agencies. Reporting the concern to the principal does not relieve the employee of the requirement to report to the appropriate state agency.

In addition, employees must cooperate with child abuse and neglect investigators. Interference with a child abuse investigation by denying an interviewer's request to interview a student at school or requiring the presence of a parent or school administrator against the desires of the duly authorized investigator is prohibited.

Sexual Abuse and Maltreatment of Children

As an employee, it is important for you to be aware of warning signs that could indicate a child may have been or is being sexually abused or otherwise maltreated. If providing distance/virtual learning, please remain diligent in identifying and reporting suspicions of child abuse and neglect that may surface while providing this platform of instruction.

Abuse in the Texas Family Code is defined to include any sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including conduct that constitutes the offense of continuous sexual abuse of a young child or disabled individual, indecency with a child, improper relationship between an educator and a student, sexual assault, or encouraging a child to engage in sexual conduct, as well as a failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct with a child. Maltreatment is defined as abuse or neglect. Anyone who has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been or may be abused or neglected has a legal responsibility under state law for reporting the suspected abuse or neglect following the procedures described above in *Reporting Suspected Child Abuse*.

Reports to the Texas Education Agency (TEA)

The conduct of an employee must be reported to TEA **within 48 hours** if there is evidence that the employee was involved in any of the following:

- Any form of sexual or physical abuse of a minor, or any other unlawful conduct with a student or a minor
- Soliciting or engaging in sexual contact or a romantic relationship with a student or minor
- Engaged in inappropriate communication with a student or minor
- Failed to maintain appropriate boundaries with a student or minor

For a certified employee the conduct below must also be reported not later than the seventh business day after termination or resignation or notice from the principal:

- The possession, transfer, sale, or distribution of a controlled substance
- The illegal transfer, appropriation, or expenditure of district or school property or funds
- An attempt by fraudulent or unauthorized means to obtain or alter any certificate or permit for the purpose of promotion or additional compensation
- Committing a criminal offense or any part of a criminal offense on district property or at a school-sponsored event.

The reporting requirements above are in addition to the superintendent's ongoing duty to notify TEA when a certified employee or an applicant for certification has a reported criminal history or engaged in conduct violating the assessment security procedures established under TEC §39.0301. "Reported criminal history" means any formal criminal justice system charges and dispositions including arrests, detentions, indictments, criminal information, convictions, deferred adjudications, and probations in any state or federal jurisdiction that is obtained by a means other than the Finger print-based Applicant Clearinghouse of Texas (FACT).

Reporting Crime

The Texas Whistleblower Act protects district employees who make good faith reports of violations of law by the district to an appropriate law enforcement authority. The district is prohibited from suspending, terminating the employment of, or taking other adverse personnel action against, an employee who makes a report under the Act. State law also provides employees with the right to report a crime witnessed at the school to any peace officer with authority to investigate the crime.

Fraud and Financial Impropriety

All employees should act with integrity and diligence in duties involving the district's financial resources. The district prohibits fraud and financial impropriety, as defined below. Fraud and financial impropriety includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Forgery or unauthorized alteration of any document or account belonging to the district.
2. Forgery or unauthorized alteration of a check, bank draft, or any other financial document.
3. Misappropriation of funds, securities, supplies, or other district assets, including employee time.
4. Impropriety in the handling of money or reporting of district financial transactions.
5. Profiteering as a result of insider knowledge of district information or activities.
6. Unauthorized disclosure of confidential or proprietary information to outside parties.

7. Unauthorized disclosure of investment activities engaged in or contemplated by the district.
8. Accepting or seeking anything of material value from contractors, vendors, or other persons providing services or materials to the district, except as otherwise permitted by law or district policy.
9. Destroying, removing, or inappropriately using records, furniture, fixtures, or equipment.
10. Failing to provide financial records required by federal, state or local entities.
11. Failure to disclose conflicts of interest as required by state law or district policy.
12. Failure to comply with requirements imposed by law, the awarding agency, or a pass-through entity for state and federal awards.
13. Any other dishonest act regarding the finances of the district.

Conflict of Interest

Employees are required to disclose to their principal/supervisor any situation that creates a potential conflict of interest with proper discharge of assigned duties and responsibilities or creates a potential conflict of interest with the best interests of the district. This includes the following: A personal financial interest, a business interest, any other obligation or relationship, or non-school employment. An employee with a substantial interest in a business entity or interest in real property must disclose the interest to the district prior to the award of a contract or authorization of payment. This is done by filing an affidavit with the Business Manager/Superintendent. An employee is also considered to have substantial interest if a close family member (e.g., spouse, parent, child, or spouse's parent or child) has a substantial interest.

Loans, Advances, Fundraisers

In an effort to avoid conflicts of interest, employees are prohibited from asking or forcing coworkers, superiors or central administration for personal loans or advances. Personal fundraisers must need central administration approval. Central Administration reserves the right to deny fundraising requests if such fundraiser poses a conflict of interest, is unethical or unlawful, or creates a hardship for the district.

Gifts and Favors

Employees may not accept gifts or favors that could influence, or be construed to influence, the employee's discharge of assigned duties. The acceptance of a gift, favor, or service by an administrator or teacher that might reasonably tend to influence the selection of textbooks, electronic textbooks, instructional materials or technological equipment may result in prosecution of a Class B misdemeanor offense. This does not include staff development, teacher training, or instructional materials, such as maps or worksheets, that convey information to students or contribute to the learning process.

Associations and Political Activities

The district will not directly or indirectly discourage employees from participating in political affairs or require any employee to join any group, club, committee, organization or association, employees may join or refuse to join any professional association or organization.

An individual's employment will not be affected by membership or a decision not to be a member of any employee organization that exists for the purpose of dealing with employers concerning grievances, labor disputes, wages, rates of pay, hours of employment, or conditions of work. Use of district resources including work time for political activities is prohibited.

The district encourages personal participation in the political process, including voting. Employees who need to be absent from work to vote during the early voting period or on election day must communicate with their principal/supervisor prior to the absence and must use any available leave.

Alcohol and Drug-Abuse Prevention

STET/HMPS is committed to maintaining an alcohol-and drug-free environment and will not tolerate the use of alcohol or illegal drugs in the workplace and at school-related or school-sanctioned activities on or off school property. Employees who use or are under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs as defined by the Texas Controlled Substances Act during working hours may be terminated.

Tobacco and Nicotine Products and E-Cigarette Use

State law prohibits smoking, using, or possessing e-cigarettes or tobacco products on all district-owned property and at school-related or school-sanctioned activities, on or off school property. This includes all buildings, playground areas, parking facilities, and facilities used for athletics and other activities. Drivers of district-owned vehicles are prohibited from smoking, using tobacco products, or e-cigarettes while inside the vehicle. Notices stating that smoking is prohibited by law and punishable by law and punishable by a fine are displayed in prominent places in all school buildings.

"E-cigarette" means an electronic cigarette or any other device that simulates smoking by using a mechanical heating element, battery, or electronic circuit to deliver nicotine or other substances to the individual inhaling from the device or a consumable liquid solution or other material aerosolized or vaporized during the use of an electronic cigarette or other device, regardless of whatever the liquid solution or material contains nicotine. The term does not include a prescription medical device, prescription medication, or other prescribed substance unrelated to the cessation of smoking. The term "e-cigarette" includes:

1. A device regardless of whether it is manufactured, distributed or sold as an e-cigarette, e-cigar, or e-pipe or under another product name or description; and
2. A component, part, or accessory for the device, regardless of whether the component, part, or accessory is sold separately from the device.

Employees are prohibited from possessing or using any type of nicotine product, including nicotine pouches, regardless of whether the product contains tobacco, while on school property or while attending an off-campus school-related activity. Exceptions may be made for smoking cessation products with supervisor approval.

Criminal History Background Checks

All employees are subject to a review of their criminal history record information at any time during employment. National criminal history checks based on an individual's fingerprints, photo, and other

identification will be conducted and entered into the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Clearing house. This database provides the district and SBEC with access to an employee's current national criminal history and updates to the employee's subsequent criminal history.

Prohibition Against Employing Individuals Convicted of Certain Offenses

STET/HMPS may not hire an individual who is prohibited from serving as an officer or employee of an open-enrollment charter school under Texas Education Code § 12.120(a). Additionally, STET/HMPS shall discharge or refuse to hire an employee or applicant for employment if it obtains information through a criminal history review that:

1. The employee or applicant has been convicted of or placed on deferred adjudication community supervision for an offense for which a defendant is required to register as a sex offender under Chapter 62, Code of Criminal Procedure; or:
2. The employee or applicant has been convicted of:
    1. A felony under Penal Code Title 5, if the victim of the offense was under 18 years of age at the time the offense was committed, or
    2. An offense under the laws of another state or federal law that is the equivalent to an offense under item 1 above (relating to registration as a sex offender).

However, while STET/HMPS may not be required by law to discharge or refuse to hire an employee or applicant if the person committed an offense under Title 5, Penal Code, and:

1. The date of the offense is more than 30 years before:
    1. June 15, 2007 in the case of an employee's employment by STET/HMPS as of that date; or
    2. The date the applicant's employment will begin, in the case of a person applying for employment with STET/HMPS after June 15, 2007; and
2. The employee or applicant for employment satisfied all terms of the court order entered on conviction.

STET/HMPS may make employment decisions in accordance with its policy regarding employment of personnel with criminal histories (or arrested or charged with a criminal offense). STET/HMPS' policy regarding employment of personnel with criminal histories is as follows:

As allowed by Commissioner of Education rule, a person may not serve as a STET/HMPS officer or employee if the person has been convicted of:

1. A misdemeanor involving moral turpitude or any felony;
2. An offense listed in Texas Education Code § 37.007(a); or
3. An offense listed in Code of Criminal Procedure, Article 62.001(5).

Additionally, STET/HMPS shall discharge or refuse to hire a person listed on the registry of persons not

eligible for employment in Texas schools, as maintained and made available by the Texas Education Agency ("TEA").

STET/HMPS may discharge an employee if it obtains information of the employee's conviction of a felony or misdemeanor involving moral turpitude that the employee did not disclose to STET/HMPS or the State Board of Educator Certification ("SBEC").

Except as required by state or federal law or as determined by STET/HMPS to be in the best interest of student and employee safety (and in accordance with applicable law), STET/HMPS does not automatically prohibit employment or refuse to consider an application for employment solely on the grounds that an applicant/employee has a prior criminal record. STET/HMPS does not prohibit employment or refuse to consider an application for employment based solely on the grounds that the applicant/employee has been arrested. Instead, STET/HMPS reviews these circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

STET/HMPS reserves the right to annually (or more frequently) perform criminal history record checks on current employees.

Fingerprinting

In accordance with state law, STET/HMPS requires all employees to complete the fingerprinting process implemented by the SBEC and the Texas Department of Public Safety ("TDPS") prior to employment.

Employee Arrests and Convictions

An employee must notify his or her principal or immediate supervisor within three calendar days of any arrest, indictment, conviction, no contest or guilty plea, or other adjudication of any felony, any offense involving moral turpitude, and any of the other offenses listed below:

1. Crimes involving school property or funds
2. Crimes involving attempt by fraudulent or unauthorized means to obtain or alter any certificate or permit that would entitle any person to hold or obtain a position as an educator
3. Crimes that occur wholly or in part of school property or at a school-sponsored activity
4. Crimes involving moral turpitude. Moral turpitude includes, but is not limited to, the following:
    a. Dishonesty
    b. Fraud
    c. Deceit
    d. Theft
    e. Misrepresentation
    f. Deliberate violence
    g. Base, vile, or depraved acts that are intended to arouse or gratify the sexual desire of the actor
    h. Crimes involving any felony possession or conspiracy to possess, or any misdemeanor or felony transfer, sale, distribution, or conspiracy to transfer, sell or distribute any controlled

substance

i. Felonies involving driving while intoxicated (DWI)
j. Acts constituting abuse under the Texas Family Code

If an employee is arrested or criminally charged, the superintendent is also required to report the educator's criminal history to the Division of Investigations at TEA.

The superintendent and directors are required to report the misconduct or criminal history of an employee to TEA. Information about misconduct or allegations of misconduct of an employee obtained by a means other than the criminal history clearinghouse will be reported to TEA.

Possession of Firearms and Weapons

Employees, visitors, and students, including those with a license to carry a handgun, are prohibited from bringing firearms, knives, clubs, or other prohibited weapons onto school premises (i.e., building or portion of a building) or any grounds or building where a school sponsored activity takes place. A person, including an employee, who holds a license to carry a handgun may transport or store a handgun or other firearm or ammunition in a locked vehicle in a parking lot, garage, or other district provided parking area, provided the handgun or firearm or ammunition is properly stored, and not in plain view. To ensure the safety of all persons, employees who observe or suspect a violation of the district's weapons policy should report it to their principal/supervisor immediately.

Visitors in the Workplace

All visitors are expected to enter any district facility through the main entrance and sign in or report to the building's main office. Authorized visitors will receive directions or be escorted to their destination. Employees who observe an unauthorized individual on the district premises should immediately direct him or her to the building office or contact the administrator in charge. Visitors of employees are not allowed during instructional time or during office work hours. STET/HMPS also reserves the right to deny visitors in the workplace during pandemics and other natural disaster cases for safety and precautionary measures.

Pest Control Treatment

Employees are prohibited from applying any pesticide or herbicide without appropriate training and prior approval of the district. Any application of pesticide or herbicide must be done in a manner prescribed by law and the district's integrated pest management program.

Notices of planned pest control treatment will be posted in a district building 48 hours before the treatment begins. In addition, individual employees may request in writing to be notified of pesticide applications. An employee who requests individualized notice will be notified by telephone, written, or electric means.

Technology Resources

The district's technology resources, including its networks, computer systems, email accounts, devices connected to its networks, and all district-owned devices used on or off school property, are primarily for

administrative and instructional purposes. Limited personal use is permitted if the use:

• Imposes no tangible cost to the district.
• Does not unduly burden the district's technology resources.
• Has no adverse effect on job performance or on a student's academic performance.
• Artificial intelligence (AI) should only be used as a support tool to improve student outcomes, not to replace the decisions made by teachers or students

Electronic mail transmissions and other use of technology resources are not confidential and can be monitored at any time to ensure appropriate use. Employees are required to abide by the provisions of the district's acceptable use agreement and administrative procedures. Failure to do so can result in suspension of access or termination of privileges and may lead to disciplinary and/or legal action. Employees with questions about computer use and data management can contact the HR or IT Departments.

Assignment of School District Property

Any and all school district property assigned is for the sole use of district related educational and administrative purposes and is expected to be maintained and cared for. Property may include but not limited to desktop computers, laptops, printers, cell phones, keys and uniforms. Upon termination of employment whether voluntary or involuntary, all school district property must be returned within 10 days from the last date of employment. Failure to return such property may be considered theft of school district property and reported to the appropriate local authorities. In addition, an employee may be subject to payroll deduction of the cost of unreturned assigned school district property.

If provided a school issued electronic device(s) to include but not limited to cellular phones, tablets, laptops, desktops, etc., STET/HMPS reserves the right to retrieve the devices at any time along with any content the devices may contain as such devices are property of the district and shall be used for district purposes only.

Collection of Personal Property Upon Separation of Employment

Upon the separation of employment, the former employee must contact the principal/supervisor, Human Resources, and/or Superintendent to schedule a mutually agreeable date and time to retrieve personal property. For security and operational reasons, former employees may not enter district facilities without prior authorization. A district representative may accompany the former employee while retrieving personal belongings. If circumstances prevent the former employee from entering the facility, the STET/HMPS may collect and package personal items for pickup, unless another shipping method has been agreed by both parties. STET/HMPS may maintain documentation of the property returned to the former employee and any district property returned by the former employee.

Phone and Airpods (Earphones) Use

School telephones are to be used for school business only. Personal long distance calls charged to the school are not allowed. Personal cellular phone use is prohibited during working hours. If the employee has to make an emergency call, then the principal/supervisor should be notified; emergency phone calls are allowed in the office. The use of AirPods (earphones) during working hours is prohibited as this can cause a distraction to an employee not making them aware of an arising emergency or cause an overall distraction to

work production. Personal cell phone and AirPods (earphones) use should be limited to breaks.

Personal Business

No employee of STET/HMPS is to conduct personal business during business hours. This includes soliciting business from employees or students/parents and use of cell phones or company phones in order to conduct business unrelated to STET/HMPS. Any employee that violates this regulation will be subject to disciplinary action including termination.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

Student records are confidential and protected from unauthorized inspection or use. Employees with access to student information and/or performance data will consistently and uniformly maintain the privacy and confidentiality of this information in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA").

HIPAA

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 ("HIPAA") established rules for protecting individual Personal Health Information ("PHI"). HIPAA provides individuals certain rights regarding their PHI, and requires employers and other individuals to adhere to restrictions on how PHI is disclosed. Every employee should respect the rights of others and only disclose PHI about themselves and others to those with a need to know. Disclosure of PHI without the written approval of the individual is a violation of federal law.

GENERAL PROCEDURES

Bad Weather Closing

The district may close schools because of severe weather, epidemics, or other emergency conditions. When such conditions exist, the superintendent will make the official decision concerning the closing of the district's facilities. In the event that school is delayed for a one or two hour postponement, personnel should follow the listed procedures.

1. Food service, custodians and maintenance personnel shall report to work as directed by their principal/supervisor.
2. Aides, clerical, teachers and central office personnel will report at the adjusted start time.
3. Campus administrators will report at the normally scheduled time.

When it becomes necessary to open late, to release students early, or to cancel school, district officials will post a notice on the district's website, social media platforms, and notify the following television stations:

- KGBT-TV (CBS)
- KRGV-TV (ABC)

Staff members are required to notify their campus administrator in the event of any extenuating circumstances that would prevent them from adhering to the above procedures. For documentation purposes, staff members will need to indicate their absence(s) due to weather or other reasons on the district/campus approved absence form.

Emergencies

All employees should be familiar with the safety procedures for responding to emergencies, including a medical emergency. Employees should locate evacuation diagrams posted in their work areas and be familiar with shelter in place, lockout, and lockdown procedures. Emergency drills will be conducted to familiarize employees and students with safety and evacuation procedures.

Fire extinguishers are located throughout all district buildings. Employees should know the location of the extinguishers nearest their place of work and how to use them.

Name and Address Changes

It is important employment records be kept up to date. Employees must notify the Human Resources Department if there are any changes or corrections to their name, home address, home telephone number, marital status, emergency contact, or beneficiary. A copy of the employee's social security card is required for all name changes. Forms to process a change in personal information can be obtained from the school website or from the HR Department.

Service Record Requests

Service Record requests made by current employees, former employees, or school districts must be submitted to the Human Resources Department by completing the Service Record Request Form found on the HMPS Human Resources webpage. Service records may take up to 30 days from the date of the request or the final working day (whichever came first) for processing and completion.

Purchasing Procedures

All requests for purchases must be submitted to the Purchasing Department on an official electronic requisition form with the appropriate approval signatures. No purchases, charges, or commitments to buy goods or services for the district can be made without a Purchase Order number issued by the STET/HMPS Accounts Payable Department. The school district will not reimburse employees or assume responsibility for purchases made without authorization. Additionally, employees are not permitted to purchase supplies or equipment for personal use. Contact STET/HMPS Purchasing Department for additional information on purchasing procedures. Only the Superintendent or assigned designee may sign contracts or negotiate grants.

District Mail

All district mail will be opened by designated staff. No personal mail or packages are to be mailed or received through the district mail.

Building Use

Employees who wish to use district facilities after school hours must follow established procedures. The Superintendent or designee is responsible for scheduling the use of facilities after school hours. Contact the Superintendent to request the use of school facilities and to obtain information on fees charged.

Parking on School Property

STET/HMPS is not responsible for any damage or theft to vehicles parked on school district property.

Use of Personal Vehicles

Employees conducting school-related business in their personal vehicles are expected to be in compliance with all state laws related to vehicle insurance coverage requirements. If involved in an accident while on school-related business, personal vehicle insurance takes precedence.

Grievance Policy

South Texas Educational Technologies, Inc.
108802 (Local Policy)

PERSONNEL-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS: Employee Complaint/Grievances

GUIDING PRINCIPLES INFORMAL PROCESS
The Board encourages employees to discuss their concerns and complaints through informal conferences with their principal or other appropriate administrator.

Concerns should be expressed as soon as possible to allow early resolution at the lowest possible administrative level.

DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH BOARD MEMBERS
Employees shall not be prohibited from communicating with a member of the Board regarding District operations except when communication between an employee and a Board member would be inappropriate because of a pending hearing or appeal related to the employee.

FORMAL PROCESS
If an informal conference regarding a complaint fails to reach the outcome requested by the employee, he or she may initiate the formal process described below by timely filing a written complaint form.

Even after initiating the formal complaint process, employees are encouraged to seek informal resolution of their concerns. An employee whose concerns are resolved may withdraw a formal complaint at any time.

The process described in this policy shall not be construed to create new or additional rights beyond those granted by law or Board policy, nor to require a full evidentiary hearing or "mini-trial" at any level.

The District shall inform employees of this policy.

NOTICE TO EMPLOYEES FREEDOM FROM RETALIATION
Neither the Board nor any District employee shall unlawfully retaliate against an employee for bringing a concern or complaint.

COMPLAINTS AGAINST
Complaints alleging a violation of law by a supervisor may be made to the Superintendent or designee. Complaints alleging a violation of law by the Superintendent may be made directly to the Board or designee.

COMPLAINTS
In this policy, terms "complaint" and "grievance" shall have the same meaning. This policy shall apply to all employee complaints, except as provided below.

EXCEPTIONS
This policy shall not apply to:

1. Complaints alleging discrimination,including violations of Title IX (gender), Title VII (sex, race, color, religion, national origin), ADEA (age) or Section 504 (disability)
2. Complaints alleging certain forms of harassment, including harassment by a principal and violations of Title VII.
3. Complaints concerning retaliation relating to discrimination and harassment
4. Complaints concerning instructional materials
5. Complaints concerning a commissioned peace officer who is an employee of the District

FILING
Complaint forms and appeal notices may be filed by hand-delivery, by electronic communication (including e-mail and fax), or by U.S. Mail. Hand-delivered filing shall be timely filed if received by the appropriate administrator or designee by the close of business on the deadline. Filings submitted by electronic communication shall be timely filed if they are received by the close of business on the deadline, as indicated by the date/time shown on the electronic communication. Mail filing shall be timely filed if they are postmarked by U.S. Mail on or before the deadline and received by the appropriate administrator or designated representative no more than three days after the deadline.

SCHEDULING CONFERENCES
The District will make reasonable attempts to schedule conferences at a mutually agreeable time. If the employee fails to appear at a scheduled conference, the District may hold the conference and issue a decision in the employee's absence.

RESPONSE
At Levels One and Two, "response" shall mean a written communication to the employee from the appropriate administrator. Responses may be hand delivered or sent by U.S. Mail to the employee's mailing address of record. Mailed responses shall be timely if they are postmarked by U.S. mail on or before the deadline.

If the administrator addressing the complaint determines that additional time is needed to complete a thorough investigation of the complaint and/or to issue a response, the administrator shall inform the grievant in writing of the necessity to extend the response time and a specific date by when the response will be issued.

A grievance official who fails to meet a time requirement, without providing written notice of an extended deadline, shall be considered to have denied the complaint as of the date of the missed deadline.

DAYS
"Days" shall mean District business days, unless otherwise noted. In calculating time lines under this policy, the day a document is filed is "day zero." The following business day is "day one."

REPRESENTATIVE
"Representative" shall mean any person who or an organization that does not claim the right to strike and is designated by the employee to represent him or her in the complaint process.

The employee may designate a representative through written notice to the District at any level of this process. If the employee designates a representative with fewer than three days' notice to the District before a scheduled conference or hearing, the District may reschedule the conference or hearing to a later date, if desired, in order to include the District's counsel. The District may be represented by counsel at any level of the process.

CONSOLIDATING COMPLAINTS
Complaints arising out of an event or a series of related events shall be addressed in one complaint. Employees shall not bring separate or serial complaints arising from any event or series of events that have been or could have been addressed in a previous complaint

When two or more complaints are sufficiently similar in nature and remedy sought to permit their resolution through one proceeding, the District may consolidate the complaints.

UNTIMELY FILINGS
All time limits shall be strictly followed unless modified by mutual written consent.

If a complaint form or appeal notice is not timely filed, the complaint may be dismissed, on written notice to the employee, at any point during the complaint process. The employee may appeal the dismissal by seeking review in writing within ten days from the date of the written dismissal notice, starting at the level at which the complaint was dismissed. Such appeal shall be limited to the issue of timeliness.

COSTS INCURRED
Each party shall pay its own cost incurred in the course of the complaint.

COMPLAINT FORM
Complaints under this policy shall be submitted in writing on a form provided by the District.

Copies of any documents that support the complaint should be attached to the complaint form. If the employee does not have copies of these documents, they may be presented at the Level One conference. After the Level One conference, no new documents may be submitted by the employee unless the employee did not know the documents existed before the Level One conference.

A complaint form that is incomplete in any material aspect may be dismissed, but may be refilled with all the required information if the refilling is within the designated time for filing a complaint.

AUDIO RECORDING
As provided by law, an employee shall be permitted to make an audio recording of a conference or hearing under this policy at which the substance of the employee's complaint is discussed. The employee shall notify all attendees present that an audio recording is taking place.

LEVEL ONE
Complaint forms must be filed:

1. Within 15 days of the date the employee first knew, or with reasonable diligence should have known, of the decision or action giving rise to the complaint or grievance; and
2. With the lowest level administrator who has the authority to remedy the alleged problem. In most circumstances, employees on a school campus shall file Level One complaints with the campus principal; other District employees shall file Level One complaints with their immediate supervisor.

If the only administrator who has authority to remedy the alleged problem is the Superintendent or designee, the complaint may begin at Level Two following the procedure, including deadlines, for filing the complaint form at Level One.

If the complaint is not filed with the appropriate administrator, the receiving administrator must note the date and time the complaint form was received and immediately forward the complaint form to the appropriate administrator.

The appropriate administrator shall investigate as necessary and hold a conference with the employee within ten days after receipt of the written complaint. The administrator may set reasonable time limits for the conference.

The administrator shall provide the employee a written response within ten days following the conference. The written response shall set forth the basis of the decision. In reaching a decision, the administrator may consider information provided at the Level One conference and any other relevant documents or information the administrator believes will help resolve the complaint.

LEVEL TWO
If the employee did not receive the relief requested at Level One or if the time for a response has expired, the employee may request a conference with the Superintendent or designee to appeal the Level One decision.

The appeal notice must be filed in writing, on a form provided by the District, within ten days of the date of the written Level One response or, if no response was received, within ten days of the Level One response deadline.

After receiving notice of the appeal, the Level One administrator shall prepare and forward a record of the Level One complaint to the Level Two administrator. The employee may request a copy of the Level One record.

The Level One record shall include:

1. The original complaint form and any attachments.
2. All other documents submitted by the employee at Level One.
3. The written response issued at Level One and any attachments.
4. All other documents relied upon by the Level One administrator in reaching the Level One decision.

The Superintendent or designee shall hold a conference within ten days after the appeal notice is filed. The conference shall be limited to the issues presented by the employee at Level One and identified in the Level Two appeal notice. At the conference, the employee may provide information concerning any documents or information relied upon by the administration for the Level One decision. The Superintendent or designee may set time limits for the conference.

The Superintendent or designee shall provide the employee a written response within ten days following the conference. The written response shall set forth the basis of the decision. In reaching a decision, the Superintendent or designee may consider the Level One record, information provided at the Level Two conference, and any other relevant documents or information the Superintendent or designee believes will help resolve the complaint.

Recordings of the Level One and Level Two conferences, if any, shall be maintained with the Level One and Level Two records.

LEVEL THREE

If the employee did not receive the relief requested at Level Two or if the time for a response has expired, the employee may appeal the decision to the Board.

The appeal notice must be filed in writing, on a form provided by the District, within ten days of the date of the written Level Two response or, if no response was received, within ten days of the Level Two response deadline. The Superintendent or designee shall inform the employee of the date, time, and place of the Board meeting at which the complaint will be on the agenda for presentation to the Board.

The Superintendent or designee shall provide the Board the record of the Level Two complaint. The employee may request a copy of the Level Two record.

The Level Two record shall include:

1. The Level One record.
2. The written response issued at Level Two and any attachments.
3. All other documents relied upon by the administration in reaching the Level Two decision.

If at the Level Three hearing the administration intends to rely on evidence not included in the Level Two record, the administration shall provide the employee notice of the nature of the evidence at least three days before the hearing.

The District shall determine whether the complaint will be presented in open or closed meeting in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act and other applicable law.

The presiding officer may set reasonable time limits and guidelines for the presentation including an opportunity for the employee and administration to each make a presentation and provide rebuttal and an opportunity for questioning by the Board. The Board shall hear the complaint and may request that the administration provide an explanation for the decisions at the preceding levels.

In addition to any other record of the Board meeting required by law, the Board shall prepare a separate record of the Level Three presentation. The Level Three presentation, including the presentation by the employee or the employee's representative, any presentation from the administration, and questions from the Board with responses, shall be recorded by audio recording, video/audio recording, or court reporter.

The Board shall then consider the complaint. It may give notice of its decision orally or in writing at any time

up to and including the next regularly scheduled Board meeting. If the Board does not make a decision regarding the complaint by the end of the next regularly scheduled meeting, the lack of a response by the Board upholds the administrative decision at Level Two. A decision by the Board, if any, is final and may not be appealed.

South Texas Educational Technologies, Inc.
108802 (Local Policy)

PERSONNEL-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS: EXHIBITS

The forms on the following pages are provided to assist the District in processing employee complaints/grievances.

Exhibit A: Employee Complaint Form - Level One - 2 pages

Exhibit B: Response to Level One Complaint - 1 page

Exhibit C: Level Two Appeal Notice - 1page

Exhibit D: Response to Level Two Appeal -1page

Exhibit E: Level Three Appeal Notice - 1page

Exhibit F: Board's Response to Level Three Appeal - 1 page

EXHIBIT A

EMPLOYEE COMPLAINT FORM - LEVEL ONE (Page 1 of 2)

To file a formal complaint, please fill out this form completely and submit it by hand delivery, fax, or U.S. Mail to the appropriate administrator within the time established in DGBA (LOCAL). All complaints will be heard in accordance with DGBA (LEGAL) and (LOCAL) or any exceptions outlined therein.

1. Name _____

2. Address _____

   _____

   Telephone number ( ) _____

3. Position _____

   Campus/Department_____

4. If you will be represented in voicing your complaint, please identify the person representing you.

   Name _____

   Address _____

   _____

   Telephone number ( ) _____

5. Please describe the decision or circumstances causing your complaint (give specific factual details):

6. What was the date of the decision or circumstances causing your complaint?

7. Please explain how you have been harmed by this decision or circumstance:

EMPLOYEE COMPLAINT FORM - LEVEL ONE (Page 2 of 2)

8. Please describe any efforts you have made to resolve your complaint informally and the responses to your efforts:

   With whom did you communicate?

   On what date?

9. Please describe the outcome or remedy you seek for this complaint:

Employee signature

Signature of employee's representative

Date of filing

Complainant, please note:

A complaint form that is incomplete in any material way may be dismissed, but may be re-filed with all the required information if the re-filing is within the designated time for filing a complaint.

Attach to this form any documents you believe will support the complaint; if unavailable when you submit this form, they may be represented no later than the Level One conference. *Please keep a copy of the completed form and any supporting documentation for your records.*

EXHIBIT B

RESPONSE TO LEVEL ONE COMPLAINT

Date _____

_____
Name of Complainant

Address of Complainant

_____

_____

Dear _____

Having considered the complaint we discussed in our Level One conference on

(date), I have decided on the following response:

[Note: When preparing the letter, include only one of the following sentences.]

For the following reasons, I am unable to provide the remedy you seek:

I will take the following actions to grant the remedy you seek for your complaint:

Although I am unable to provide the full remedy you seek for your complaint, I will take the following actions to provide a partial remedy:

(signature of supervisor, principal, or other appropriate administrator)

Complainant, please note:
To appeal this response, you must file a written notice of appeal with the appropriate administrator within the time limit set in DGBA (LOCAL). The necessary forms are available at _____ during regular business hours.

EXHIBIT C

LEVEL TWO APPEAL NOTICE

To appeal a Level One decision or the lack of timely response after Level one conference, please fill out this form completely and submit it by hand delivery, fax, or U.S. Mail to the Superintendent or designee within the time established on DGBA (LOCAL). Appeals will be heard in accordance with DGBA (LEGAL) and (LOCAL) or any exceptions outlined therein.

1. Name _____

2. Address _____

   _____

   Telephone number ( ) _____

3. Position _____

   Campus/Department _____

4. If you will be represented in voicing your complaint, please identify the person representing you.

   Name _____

   Address _____

   _____

   Telephone number ( ) _____

5. To whom did you present your complaint at Level One?

   Date of Conference _____

   Date you received a response to the Level One Conference _____

6. Please explain specifically how you disagree with the outcome at Level One:

7. Attach a copy of your original complaint and any documentation submitted at Level One.

8. Attach a copy of the Level One response being appealed, if applicable

Employee signature

Signature of employee's representative

Date of filing _____

EXHIBIT D

RESPONSE TO LEVEL TWO APPEAL

Date _____

Name of Complainant)

_____

Address of Complainant

_____

_____

Dear _____

Having considered the appeal you presented at Level Two on

(date), I have decided on the following response:

[Note: When preparing the letter, include only one of the following sentences.]

I am unable to grant your appeal and have instructed (name) to find a resolution in keeping with the remedy you seek.

Although I am unable to fully grant your appeal, I have instructed (name) to take the following actions as a partial remedy to your complaint.

(signature of Superintendent or designee)

Complainant, please note:
To appeal this response, you must file a written notice of appeal with the appropriate administrator within the time limits set in DGBA (LOCAL). The necessary forms are available at _____ during regular business hours.

EXHIBIT E

LEVEL THREE APPEAL NOTICE

To appeal a Level Two decision or the lack of timely response after Level Two Conference, please fill out this form completely and submit it by hand delivery, fax, or U.S. Mail to the Superintendent or designee within the time established on DGBA (LOCAL). Appeals will be heard in accordance with DGBA (LEGAL) and (LOCAL) or any exceptions outlined therein.

1. Name _____

2. Address _____

   _____

   Telephone number ( ) _____

3. Position _____ Campus/Department _____

4. If you will be represented in voicing your complaint, please identify the person representing you.

   Name _____

   Address _____

   _____

   Telephone number ( )_____

5. To whom did you present your appeal at Level Two?

   Date of Conference _____

   Date you received a response to the Level Two Conference _____

6. Please explain specifically how you disagree with the outcome at Level Two:

7. Do you want the Board to hear this appeal in open session? _____
   Please be aware that the Texas Open Meetings Act may prevent the Board from granting a request for open session.

8. Attach a copy of your original complaint and any documentation submitted at Level One and a copy of your Level Two appeal notice.

9. Attach a copy of the Level Two response being appealed, if applicable

Employee signature _____

Signature of employee's representative _____

Date of filing _____

EXHIBIT F

BOARD'S RESPONSE TO LEVEL THREE APPEAL

Date _____

Name of Complainant)

_____

Address of Complainant

_____

_____

Dear _____

Having heard the representation of your appeal at Level Three, the Board took the following action at its meeting on (date):

{Note: When preparing the letter or announcing the decision at the Board meeting, include only one of the following sentences.]

We have denied the appeal and have upheld the decision made by the Superintendent (or designee) at Level Two.

We have granted the appeal and have instructed the Superintendent to find a resolution in keeping with the remedy you seek.

We have we partially denied and partially granted the appeal and have instructed the Superintendent as follows:

Sincerely,

President of the Board of Trustees

TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT

Employees may be terminated, demoted, or suspended for just cause which may be generally described as any conduct, action, or inaction, arising from, connected with, or impacting on the employee's work, whether on or off duty, that is inconsistent with the employee's obligations to the employer; or conduct reflecting a disregard of the employer's interests, policies or procedures. Just cause includes, but is not limited to, inefficiency, unacceptable performance, incompetence, misconduct, negligence, insubordination, or conviction of a felony or misdemeanor under the provisions of the Criminal Offender Employment Act.

Although impossible to cite an all-inclusive list of actions, which constitute just cause, examples include but are not limited to:

1. Falsification of documents.
2. Threatening, fighting, assaulting, or abusive behavior towards a principal, student, employee, guest or customer of STET/HMPS, including "horseplay or provoking a fight between others.
3. Sexual harassment of an employee, student, or guest of STET/HMPS on or off campus which may explicitly or implicitly affect an employee's performance or unreasonably interferes with a person's employment or academic endeavors.
4. Engaging in discrimination, harassment, or retaliation in any form.
5. Engaging in or soliciting a romantic, sexual, or otherwise inappropriate relationship with a student, regardless of whether the relationship is consensual.
6. Jeopardizing the safety or health of an employee (including oneself) student, guest or customer of STET/HMPS.
7. Behaviors that interfere with a student's safety or cause an unsafe environment.
8. Corporal punishment (meaning the infliction of physical pain by hitting, paddling, spanking, slapping, or any other physical force used as a means of discipline) or verbal abuse of students, or the use of profanity or other language that is intended to belittle or degrade a student.
9. Failure to report child abuse or neglect as required by Chapter 261 of the Texas Family Code.
10. Dishonesty or intentional fabrication of events.
11. Dishonest, immoral, or illegal conduct while on duty and/or on school property that would tend to bring discredit to the District.
12. Engaging in malicious gossip, spreading rumors, or otherwise engaging in behavior designed to create discord and lack of harmony or otherwise interfere with the job performance of fellow employees or service providers.
13. Engaging in rudeness, disrespectful, or unprofessional behavior toward parents and school contractors or vendors.
14. Negligent, incompetent, inefficient or unacceptable performance of duties.
15. Willful disregard of reasonable directives or policies or a defiant attitude of noncompliance toward regulations, directives or policies applicable to an employee.
16. Conduct that interferes with the efficient operation of STET/HMPS.
17. Disrupting the work environment.

18. Engaging in an act of sabotage; willful or with negligence causing the destruction or damage of STET/HMPS property, or the property of fellow employees, volunteers, contractors, or visitors, in any manner.
19. Inability or unwillingness to perform the duties required of a position.
20. Insubordination or other disrespectful conduct (including refusal to follow the lawful directives of a supervisor or the Superintendent).
21. Possession or use of alcohol or illicit drugs, reporting to work under their influence, or being under their influence while on the job.
22. Possession of drug paraphernalia or stolen property.
23. Conviction or admission of a felony or certain misdemeanors.
24. Possession of firearms, weapons or explosives on STET/HMPS property, while on duty or while representing STET/HMPS.
25. Careless, negligent, improper, unauthorized, or malicious use of or theft of, property, equipment, or funds.
26. Unauthorized possession or removal of any STET/HMPS property, including documents, from the premises without prior permission from a supervisor.
27. Abuse of privileges.
28. Breaching STET/HMPS confidentiality policy.
29. Failure to report for work or to timely report justifiable reason for absence to the department head or campus administrator.
30. Repeated tardiness or poor attendance.
31. Misconduct which adversely affects the interest or reputation of STET/HMPS or its employees.
32. Any repetition of offenses which resulted in a reprimand, warning, demotion, notification of unacceptable performance or suspension.
33. Job abandonment.

Dismissal of Non-Contract "At-Will" Employees

As defined by the Texas Workforce Commission, employment at will means that absent a statute or an express agreement (such as an employment contract), either party in an employment relationship may modify any of the terms or conditions of employment, or terminate the relationship altogether, for any reason, or no particular reason at all, with or without advance notice.

Non-contract employees are employed "at-will" and may be dismissed without notice, a description of the reasons for dismissal or a hearing. It is unlawful for the district to dismiss any employee for reasons of race, religion, sex, national origin, disability, and military status, any other basis protected by law or in retaliation for the exercise of certain protected legal rights. At-will employees who are dismissed have the right to grieve the termination. The dismissed employee must follow the district process outlined in this handbook when pursuing a complaint.

The principal is required to notify the superintendent of an educator's resignation within seven business days of the following:

• Certain misconduct, abuse, unlawful act
• Involvement or solicitation of a romantic relationship with a student or minor

• Solicitation or engaging in sexual conduct with a student or minor
• Inappropriate communications with a student or minor
• Failure to maintain appropriate boundaries with a student or minor
• Possession, transfer, sale, or distribution of a controlled substance
• Illegal transfer, appropriation, or expenditure of district or school property or funds
• An attempt by fraudulent or unauthorized means to obtain or alter any certificate or permit for the purpose of promotion or additional compensation
• Committing a criminal offense or any part of a criminal offense on district property or at a school-sponsored event.

Additionally, the principal or director is required to notify the superintendent of a noncertified employee's resignation or termination within seven business days for any of the following:
• Alleged incident of misconduct of abuse or otherwise committed an unlawful act with a student or minor, or
• Was involved in or solicited a romantic relationship with a student or minor
• Engaged in inappropriate communications with a student or minor
• Failed to maintain appropriate boundaries with a student or minor

The superintendent is required to report such conduct to SBEC regarding educators and noncertified employees.

Discharge of Convicted Employees

The district shall discharge any employee who has been convicted of a felony under Title 5 Penal Code or convicted of or placed on deferred adjudication community supervision for the following:

• An offense requiring the registration as a sex offender
• Improper relationship between an educator and a student
• Sale, distribution, or display of harmful materials to a minor
• Public indecency
• A felony offense involving school property

If the Title 5, Penal Code offense is more than 30 years before the date the person's employment began or the person satisfied all terms of the court order entered on conviction the requirement to discharge for does not apply.

Resignations

A classified employee who desires to terminate services with STET/HMPS should submit a signed resignation statement to the appointing authority 2 weeks prior to the date of termination. Professional employees should give 30 days notice prior to the date of termination. Upon receiving a resignation, STET/HMPS reserves the right to make a resignation effective immediately prior to the 2 weeks or 30 days.

If the employee is not available to sign or refuses to sign a statement, the principal should note such on the employee record and forward for processing. Employees must contact the Benefits Department for insurance coverage questions and inquiries. If an employee's separation from STET is less than 5 working days, seniority and other such employment privileges may be reinstated with approval from the Superintendent. Employees may not appeal a resignation of voluntary termination even if the action was in lieu of termination.

Job Abandonment and Voluntary Resignation

Failure to provide notification of an absence to a supervisor for two consecutive workdays (unless prevented by circumstances beyond the employee's control) may be considered job abandonment and/or voluntary resignation on the last day worked, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, and STET/HMPS will process the work

separation as a voluntary resignation on the employee's part.

In the event of a voluntary resignation, all school-owned property (e.g., keys, uniforms, etc.) must be returned immediately to STET/HMPS.

No payment shall be made for accrued and unused state or local leave or any other type of leave upon voluntary resignation or job abandonment, regardless of whether or not the employee provided advance notice of resignation.

Prohibition on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Except as required by state or federal law, district employees are prohibited from engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion activities, including assigning diversity, equity, and inclusion duties to any person. Any employee who intentionally or knowingly engages in or assigns diversity, equity, and inclusion duties to another person will be subject to appropriate discipline, including termination of employment.

Prohibited Classroom Instruction

District employees are prohibited from engaging in an act prohibited by Education Code 28.0022 (Certain Instructional Requirements and Prohibitions). Any district employee intentionally or knowingly engaging in or assigning to another individual activities related to controversial topics described in Education Code 28.0022 is subject to disciplinary action, including termination of employment.

Exit Procedures and Interviews

Exit interviews will be scheduled for employees who have resigned from the district. If an employee is unable to attend the interview or resigns with no advance notice, an Exit Questionnaire will be sent electronically to the individual which provides the district with feedback on his or her employment experience.

Separating employees are asked to provide the district with a forwarding address, email address and phone number. All district keys, books, property including intellectual property, and equipment must be returned upon separation from employment. The district may withhold the cost of any unreturned items from the final paycheck.

Reports Concerning Court-Ordered Withholding

The district is required to report the termination of employees that are under court order or writ of withholding for child support or spousal maintenance to the court and the individual receiving the support (Texas Family Code 8.210, 158.211). Notice of the following must be sent to the court and support recipient:

1. Termination of employment not later than the seventh day after the date of termination
2. Employee's last known address
3. Name and address of the employee's new employer, if known

STUDENT ISSUES

Equal Educational Opportunities

STET/HMPS does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, sex, or disability in providing education services, activities, and programs, including vocational programs, in accordance with Title VI

of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972; and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

Questions or concerns about discrimination of students on any of the basis listed above should be directed to the administrator of the campus or the superintendent.

Student Records

Student records are confidential and are protected from unauthorized inspection or use. Employees should take precautions to maintain the confidentiality of all student records.

The following people are the only people who have general access to a student's records:

1. Parents: Married, separated, or divorced unless parental rights have been legally terminated and the school has been given a copy of the court order terminating parental rights.
2. The student: The rights of parents transfer to a student who turns 18 or is enrolled in an institution of post-secondary education. A district is not prohibited from granting the student access to the student's records before this time.
3. School officials with legitimate educational interests.

The student handbook provides parents and students with detailed information on student records. Parents or students who want to review student records should be directed to the campus principal for assistance.

Parent and Student Complaints

In an effort to hear and resolve parent and student complaints in a timely manner and at the lowest administrative level possible, the board has adopted orderly processes for handling complaints on different issues. Any campus office or the central office can provide parents and students with information on filing a complaint.

Parents are encouraged to discuss problems or complaints with the teacher or the appropriate administrator at any time. Parents and students with complaints that cannot be resolved should be directed to the campus principal. The formal complaint process provides parents and students with an opportunity to be heard up to the highest level of management if they are dissatisfied with a principal's response.

Administering Medication to Students

Only designated employees may administer prescription medication, nonprescription medication, and herbal or dietary supplements to students. Exceptions apply to the self-administration of asthma medication, medication for anaphylaxis (e.g., EpiPen^{Ò}), and medication for diabetes management, if the medication is self-administered in accordance with district policy and procedures. A student who must take any other medication during the school day must bring a written request from his or her parent and the medicine in its original, properly labeled container. Contact the principal or school nurse for information on procedures that must be followed when administering medication to students.

Dietary Supplements

District employees are prohibited by state law from knowingly selling, marketing, or distributing a dietary supplement that contains performance-enhancing compounds to a student with whom the employee has contact as part of his or her school district duties. In addition, employees may not knowingly endorse or suggest the ingestion, intranasal

application, or inhalation of a performance-enhancing dietary supplement to any student.

Psychotropic Drugs

A psychotropic drug is a substance used in the diagnosis, treatment, or prevention of a disease or as a component of a medication. It is intended to have an altering effect on perception, emotion, or behavior and is commonly described as a mood- or behavior-altering substance. District employees are prohibited by state law from doing the following:

1. Recommending that a student us a psychotropic drug
2. Suggesting a particular diagnosis
3. Excluding from class or school-related activity a student whose parent refuses to consent to a psychiatric evaluation or to authorize the administration of a psychotropic drug to a student.

Student Conduct and Discipline

Students are expected to follow the classroom rules, campus rules, and rules listed in the Student Handbook and Student Code of Conduct. Teachers and administrators are responsible for taking disciplinary action based on a range of discipline management strategies that have been adopted by the district. Other employees that have concerns about a particular student's conduct should contact the classroom teacher or campus principal. Teachers must file a written report with the principal or another appropriate administrator when they have knowledge that a student has violated the Student Code of Conduct. A copy of this report will be sent by the principal or administrator to the student's parents within 24 hours. For additional information, see the student-parent handbook.

Student Attendance

Teachers and staff should be familiar with the district's policies and procedures for attendance accounting. These procedures require minor students to have parental consent before they are allowed to leave campus. When absent from school, the student, upon returning to school, must bring a note signed by the parent that describes the reason for the absence. These requirements are addressed in campus training and in the student handbook. Contact the campus principal for additional information.

Bullying

Bullying is defined by §TEC 37.0832. All employees are required to report student complaints of bullying, whether it is physical, emotional, verbal and/or cyber to the principal/supervisor immediately. A failure to report may impair the district's ability to investigate and address the prohibited conduct and may result in disciplinary action.

Hazing

Students must have prior approval from the principal or designee for any type of "initiation rites" of a school club or organization. While most initiation rites are permissible, engaging in or permitting "hazing" is a criminal offense. Any teacher, administrator, or employee who observes a student engaged in any form of hazing, who has reason to know or suspect that a student intends to engage in hazing, or has engaged in hazing must report that fact or suspicion to the designated campus administrator.