

# Forsyth County Schools Employee Handbook 2024-2025



## **FCS' VISION, MISSION, BELIEFS & GOALS**

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

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

## **BOARD MEMBER INFORMATION & MEETING SCHEDULE**

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

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

- District #1: Wes McCall
- District #2: Lindsey Adams
- District #3: Tom Cleveland
- District #4: Darla Light - Chairperson
- District #5: Mike Valdes – Vice Chairperson

## **INTRODUCTION**

FCS serves 55,000+ students and is the largest employer in the county with over 8,000 full and part-time employees and substitutes. In the past decade, student enrollment has grown by 40%. For 2024-2025, we are home to 42 schools: 23 elementary, 11 middle, 7 high, 1 College and Career Academy.

# Forsyth County Schools

2022-27 Strategic Plan

Safe

Connected

Thriving

## Vision

A safe, connected, and thriving community for all

## Mission

To provide an unparalleled education for all to succeed

## Beliefs

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



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## **FCS EMPLOYMENT POLICIES, PRACTICES, & PROCEDURES**

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

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

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

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

### **EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY-BOARD POLICY GAAA**

#### **Board Policy Reference: [GAAA](#)**

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

Any employee, applicant for employment, or other person who believes they have been discriminated against or harassed in violation of this policy must make a complaint in accordance with the procedures outlined in Policy GAAA. Complaints made to the School District regarding alleged discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, or national origin in violation of Title VI; religion or sex in violation of Title VII; sex in violation of Title IX; disability in violation of Section 504 or the ADA, or on the basis of age in violation of the ADEA, will be processed in accordance with the procedures outlined in Policy GAAA.

## **CODE OF ETHICS FOR EDUCATORS**

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

## **STAFF INVOLVEMENT IN DECISION-MAKING**

### **Board Policy Reference: GAC**

The Board of Education will solicit community and staff input whenever Board policies are composed or revised. The proposed policy or change in policy will be made available for public comment for at least the period of time until the next regularly scheduled Board meeting. An exception may be made if policies or changes in policy are required by the state or federal government.

The District will also encourage community input on curriculum revisions, programs, and services by having community members serve on task forces and committees and by having input forms on the FCS website. Local School Councils (LSCs), which are comprised of parents, teachers, business partners, and the school principal, will be the official organizations to which the Board will turn for input on items as outlined in O.C.G.A. 20-2-86. While these councils are not created for “decision making,” they certainly have a voice in the decision-making process. The Board encourages the councils to establish Ad Hoc Committees on issues of local site interest. LSCs will annually bring recommendations to the Board.

## **STAFF CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

### **Board Policy Reference: GAG**

It is the policy of this Board that no employee may be the direct supervisor of a member of their household, immediate family, or relative as close as first cousin. Specifically, an employee may not supervise or evaluate a spouse, child, grandchild, sibling, aunt or uncle, nephew or niece, or first cousin. It is also the policy of this board that no employee may be the direct supervisor of a brother-in-law or sister-in-law, father-in-law or mother-in-law, daughter-in-law or son-in-law. For purposes of this policy, the principal and assistant principal of a school are deemed to be direct supervisors of all employees assigned to the school.

The practice of assigning married couples or other persons within the immediate family to the same school is strongly discouraged and should be avoided whenever possible. Persons who are common-law married or who are living together in a meretricious relationship are also subject to this policy.



If, subsequent to adoption of this policy, employees become related in a form otherwise prohibited by this policy, then the district generally will require the individual who is deemed to be in a subordinate position to transfer to another work site.

## **PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL WORKING CONDITIONS**

### **Board Policy Reference: GBR**

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

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

## **CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECK POLICY**

### **Board Policy Reference: GAK (1)**

A criminal record check will be conducted at or prior to employment on every person who is employed by the Board of Education for the first time to fill either a full-time or part-time certified or classified position with this School District.

For initial hiring purposes, the employee either shall be fingerprinted and/or shall provide a signed consent on a form designated by the School District, including the employee's full name, address, social security number, and date of birth, based upon the requirement of state law or applicable rule or regulation. A clearance certificate verifying a satisfactory criminal background check may be required based on the requirements of state law and rules of the Professional Standards Commission.

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



Any cost of such record checks for all personnel shall be paid by the applicant, employee, or the Board. Criminal record check information shall be used by the School District and its officials and employees only for the purpose of determining whether to grant regular employment, and in any administrative or judicial proceeding calling such employment into question.

Such information shall be stored, restricted, and disposed of in such manner as may be required by federal and state authorities. A breach of confidentiality or the inappropriate use of criminal background check information may constitute a workplace violation and may be grounds for disciplinary action including, but not limited to, termination and/or reporting to the Professional Standards Commission. The Superintendent shall establish such procedures, fees and regulations needed to administer this policy.

### **CRIMINAL CHARGES/SELF-REPORTING**

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

### **PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT**

#### **[Board Policy Reference: GBC](#)**

The Board of Education believes that an active program of recruitment of professional personnel is essential in order to attract competent, qualified, and productive personnel. The District posts professional job openings on the State of Georgia website. The District then notifies appropriate colleges and universities annually of this posting practice. The FCBOE policies regarding employment discrimination apply to the recruitment and selection of personnel.

### **PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL LAY-OFF**

#### **[Board Policy Reference: GBKA](#)**

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

## **EMPLOYEE RESIGNATION**

### **Board Policy Reference: GBO**

The Superintendent of Schools shall be authorized to accept employee resignations on behalf of the FCBOE. Once a resignation is received by the Superintendent or designee, the resignation may not be rescinded.

## **PERSONNEL COMPENSATION GUIDES & CONTRACTS**

### **Board Policy Reference: GBA**

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

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

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

## **EMPLOYMENT VERIFICATION**

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

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

Verifiers can submit requests by:

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

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

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

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

### **E-VERIFY**

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

### **INFECTIOUS DISEASES**

#### **Board Policy Reference: [GANA](#)**

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

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

### **RE-EMPLOYMENT/RIGHT TO NOT RE-EMPLOY**

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

### **ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATION-CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT**

#### **Board Policy Reference: JGI**

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

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

School employees and volunteers are not responsible for contacting the child's family or any other person(s) to determine the cause of the suspected abuse or neglect. It is not the responsibility of the school employee or volunteer to prove that the child has been abused or neglected, or to determine whether the child is in need of protection. Failure to report may result in disciplinary action against the employee.

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

### **MANDATORY REPORTING POLICY**

The Official Code of Georgia Annotated O.C.G.A. 20-2-1184 requires all employees to report certain suspected student crimes on a school campus or at a school activity to the principal or site supervisor. The full enumerated list of crimes that must be reported can be found on the FCS website but include crimes such as aggravated battery or possession of a weapon within a school safety zone or at a school function. If the principal or site supervisor has reasonable cause to think the report is valid, they must make an immediate report to the following: (1) the Superintendent, (2) the appropriate police authority, and (3) the district attorney. Employees who have

reasonable cause to believe that a child under the age of 18 and/or a student has been physically abused, neglected, exploited, or sexually abused must report the facts known to that employee to the principal, site supervisor, or designee. It then becomes the duty of the principal, site supervisor, or designee to make an oral report immediately to the Department of Family and Children Services, but in no case later than twenty-four (24) hours from the time there is reasonable cause to believe a child has been abused.

All FCS employees are required to report offenses committed by school system employees. The full enumerated list of offenses that must be reported can be found on the FCS website.

### **HARASSMENT POLICY**

#### **Board Policy Reference: GAEB**

It is the policy of the Forsyth County Board of Education to prohibit any act of harassment of employees by other employees based upon race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, or disability at all times and during all occasions while at school, in the workplace, or at any school event or activity. Any such act shall result in prompt and appropriate discipline, including the possible termination of employment.

Sexual harassment may include conduct or speech which entails unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, taunts, threats, comments of a vulgar or demeaning nature, demands, or physical contact which creates a hostile environment. There may be other speech or conduct which employees experience as inappropriate or illegal harassment which should also be reported. Harassment can take many forms and it is not possible to itemize every aspect of the harassment forbidden by this policy.

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

It is the duty of all employees to promptly report harassment forbidden by this policy. The principals of all schools shall ensure that employees are informed through handbooks, training materials, and verbally that such harassment is strictly forbidden, how it is to be reported and the consequences for violating this policy.

## **DISCRIMINATION/HARASSMENT REPORTING**

The Forsyth County School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, disability, or gender in employment decisions or educational programs and activities, including its athletic programs. Any student, employee, applicant for employment, parent, or other individual who believes they have been subjected to harassment or discrimination by other students or employees of the School District based upon any of the factors listed above should promptly report the same to the principal of the school or the appropriate Coordinator as listed below, who will implement the board's discriminatory complaints or harassment procedures. Students may also report harassment or discrimination to their school counselor.

Equity Coordinators for the school system are:

### **Title VI**

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

### **Title IX**

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

### **ADA and 504**

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

### **Sports Equity**

- Dr. Cindy Salloum (Students)

Equity Coordinators may be contacted at:

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

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

## **COMPLAINTS & GRIEVANCES**

### **Board Policy Reference: GAE**

The purpose of this policy is to implement the provisions of the Act of the General Assembly of 1992, OCGA 20-2-989.5 et seq. In accordance with the foregoing, it is the policy of the Forsyth County Board of Education that certificated personnel shall have the right to present and resolve complaints relating to certain matters affecting the employment relationship at the lowest organizational level possible. The Board of Education encourages all employees to resolve their complaints informally in a spirit of collegiality whenever possible. The procedures outlined in this policy are available when such efforts do not succeed, or where, for any other reason, the certificated employee desires to pursue this policy and its procedures.

The procedures associated with Policy GAE shall not apply to:

- Performance ratings contained in personnel evaluation and professional development plans pursuant to O.C.G.A. 20-2-210. Procedural deficiencies on the part of the school system are not excluded in the scope of complaint.
- Termination, non-renewal, demotion, suspension, or reprimand of any employee, as set forth in O.C.G.A. 20-2-940.
- The revocation, suspension, or denial of certificates of any employee as set forth in O.C.G.A. 20-2-790.
- A certificated employee who chooses to appeal under O.C.G.A. 20-2-1160 shall be barred from pursuing the same complaint under this policy.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE COMPLAINTS**

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

## **DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE**

### **Board Policy Reference: GAMA**

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



Any employee who is convicted for the first time, under the laws of this state, the United States, or any other state, of any criminal offense involving the manufacture, distribution, sale or possession of a controlled substance, marijuana, or a dangerous drug shall be subject to disciplinary action. At a minimum, such an employee shall be suspended for a period of not less than two months and shall be required to complete a drug abuse treatment and education program licensed under Chapter 5 of Title 26 of the Official Code of Georgia and approved by the Board. At a maximum, such an employee may be terminated from their employment with the school system.

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

### **ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES FOR A DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE**

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

### **DRUG SCREENING OF BUS DRIVERS**

#### **Board Policy Reference: GCRA (1)**

The Forsyth County Board of Education places a high priority on ensuring the safe transportation of students on school buses. In order to help prevent accidents and injuries resulting from misuse of alcohol and controlled substances, the Board of Education has implemented the United States Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration, Controlled Substances and Alcohol Use and Testing regulations (“regulations”) as well as applicable state law and regulations promulgated thereunder.

All individuals who drive or may drive a bus for the Board of Education at any time, including, but not limited to full-time drivers, part-time drivers, substitute drivers, coaches, mechanics, and others, must participate in the controlled substance and alcohol testing program as more fully described in federal and state regulations. The employment of any individual who is subject to controlled substance and alcohol testing under the regulations referenced in this policy shall be terminated under any of the following conditions:

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

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

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

### **EMPLOYEE TOBACCO USE**

#### **Board Policy Reference: GAN**

In compliance with the Pro-Children Act of 1994, smoking and use of other tobacco products, including the use of E-Cigarettes and other electronic tools and devices, shall be prohibited in any school or building used for the instruction of students. Employees of the board of education and visitors shall be prohibited from being in possession of, smoking, or using tobacco products on school district property at any time, or while supervising students after school hours, or while operating a vehicle owned by the school district.

### **INTERNET ACCEPTABLE USE**

#### **Board Policy Reference: IFBG**

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

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

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

## **INTERNET SAFETY**

### **Board Policy Reference: IFBGE**

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

### **Supervision & Monitoring**

It shall be the responsibility of all members of the Forsyth County Schools staff to supervise and monitor usage of the online computer network and access to the Internet in accordance with this policy and the Children's Internet Protection Act.

As required by the Children's Internet Protection Act, Forsyth County Schools will educate minors about appropriate online behavior, including interacting with other individuals on social networking websites and in chat rooms, and cyber-bullying awareness and response.

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

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

## **RESPONSIBLE USE GUIDELINES**

The mission of FCS is to prepare and inspire all students to contribute and excel. The district provides ongoing student instruction that develops graduated digital citizenship for using technology as a tool to achieve this mission. Information and Communication Technology is an integral part of the District's curriculum across subjects and grades in developmentally appropriate ways, and it is aligned to the competencies listed in the District's Learner Profile which include: seek knowledge and understanding; think critically and solve problems; listen, communicate and interact effectively; exhibit strong personal qualities; and engage and compete in a global environment. It is important that FCS employees understand that using digital devices (whether personal or school owned) and the FCS network is a privilege and should use them according to the Responsible Use Guidelines.

Employees must:

- Use digital devices, networks, and software in school for educational

purposes and activities.

- Keep personal information (including home/mobile phone number, mailing address, and user password) and that of others private.
- Show respect for self and others when using technology including social media.
- Give acknowledgement to others for their ideas and work.
- Immediately report any inappropriate use of technology by staff or students.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA EXPECTATIONS**

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

- Post nothing you would not be completely comfortable sharing with your students, their parents, or your professional colleagues.
- Never use language which may be deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, libelous, and/or as derogatory remarks or characterizations.
- Do not discuss students, parents, or coworkers or publicly criticize school system policies or personnel.
- Do not post images on District-approved sites that include students without checking for media release notices on all students.
- With every post, consider whether it puts your effectiveness as an educator at risk.

### **VIDEO GUIDELINES**

While it is acknowledged that video can be a powerful medium for conveying information and communicating to students, we ask that teachers adhere to the best practices regarding video/film usage and the legal policies that surround the Fair Use of Copyrighted Materials for educational purposes.

All videos should be shown in the context of a greater lesson, such as introducing or expanding upon an element of the curriculum, encouraging class discussion, etc. Showing a video simply to show a video is not allowed. Lesson plans should support valid instructional standards.

While clips from films that are accompanied by standards based instruction are encouraged in order to protect instructional time and to meet with Fair Use Guidelines for the use of copyrighted materials, teachers or other staff members

wanting to show an entire movie to their class should NOT do so without prior approval from administration through the use of a Video Approval Form.

Online streaming services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, or other for-profit streaming services are NOT to be used for the viewing of videos at school. The terms of service for these services explicitly denies usage in any sort of public performance (including educational environments). Unless the Terms of Service ("TOS") of a particular service state permission for educators to use in the classroom, videos delivered through such services should not be used in the classroom.

### **MOVIE GUIDELINES**

Additional Procedures for Use of Non-Rated Videos/DVDs can be found on the [FCS website](#).

If it is established that a student or parent/guardian objects as a matter of principle to the viewing of a particular video/DVD, a meaningful alternative or related activity will be assigned without penalty or embarrassment to the student. Alternative assignments must consist of useful work related to valid instructional goals. They may not be punitive in nature.

Any videos/ or movies shown under any of the following circumstances will require the school to have a public performance license.

- The movie/video is NOT being used as an essential part of the curriculum.
- The movie/video is being shown to more than one class of students at the same time.
- The movie/video is being shown outside the classroom setting.
- The movie/video is being shown outside of school hours.
- Admission is being charged to view the movie.

<https://www.swank.com/k-12-schools/copyright/>

Please check with your school media specialist to see if your school has a public performance license or if you have any other questions about showing videos/movies at school.

### **STAFF REMUNERATION GUIDELINES**

All employees, including coaches, athletic directors, sponsors and directors of any school program may not solicit students or parents of students to purchase equipment, supplies, or services from the employee or to participate in activities that financially benefit the employee unless approved by Forsyth County School System Board of Education or an authorized designee. The employee should not

accept gifts from vendors or potential vendors for personal use or gain where there may be the appearance of a conflict of interest. Coaching, instructing, promoting athletic camps, summer leagues, tutoring and other activity that involves students from Forsyth County Schools and from whom the employee receives remuneration is not allowed unless approved by the Forsyth County School System Board of Education or an authorized designee. These types of activities must be in compliance with all rules and regulations of the Georgia High School Association.

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

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

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

The Board of Education funded supplement and any appreciation gift or gratuity will cover all work done in a fiscal year per responsibility, with the exception of parks and recreational programs. The Superintendent has the authority to authorize a larger gift or gratuity to be accepted by an employee in the event of an exceptional circumstance or emergency, e.g. health issue, loss of home, family emergency.

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

### **EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT GUIDELINES**

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

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

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

### **SOLICITATION OF FUNDS AND MONEY HANDLING BY STAFF**

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

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

### **STAFF DRESS CODE**

Employees are expected to maintain an appropriate level of personal hygiene and dress appropriately for the school or workplace situation and level of formality.

Employees should adhere to the expectations set forth by their supervisor. All employees must always wear a photo identification badge. All employees issued a security access badge must wear it or have it in their possession.



## **STUDENT RECORDS**

### **Board Policy Reference: JR**

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

## **LEAVES & ABSENCES**

### **Board Policy Reference: GARH**

In accordance with Georgia law, eligible employees earn paid annual sick leave accrued at the rate of one-and-one-quarter (1 ¼) days for each completed month of work. All employees' unused sick leave shall be accumulated from one fiscal year to the next, up to a maximum of 120 days. All employees may transfer up to 45 unused sick leave days from another system. If an employee needs to use unearned sick leave, advanced leave may be granted. The advance shall not exceed the number of days the employee would have accrued through the end of the fiscal year. If an employee fails for any reason to complete a fiscal year of work, sick leave used but not yet earned will be deducted from the employee's final paycheck.

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

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

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

### **Leave Without Pay (LWOP)**

Leave Without Pay will only be authorized when an employee is approved to be absent, but does not have available accrued, paid leave to cover the absence.

When an employee does not have approval to be absent and does not have accrued, paid leave available to cover the absence, the employee will be in LWOP status and may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, unless protected under FMLA.

#### Personal Leave

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

#### Observance of Religious Holidays

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

#### Jury and Witness Leave

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

#### Military Leave

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

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

employee's supervisor and the appropriate personnel administrator with a copy of the official military orders.

#### Bereavement Leave

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

#### Paid Parental Leave

The Board of Education shall make Paid Parental Leave equally available to all eligible employees of the Board of Education.

Employees are eligible for this leave if either:

- 1.) they are defined as full-time and benefits eligible, and have had at least six (6) months of continuous employment; or
- 2.) if an hourly employee, have worked at least 700 hours over the six month period immediately preceding the requested leave date. "Full-time, benefits-eligible" is defined as working at least 50 percent for certified staff, and at least 60 percent for non-certified staff members.

Effective July 1, 2024, 240 hours of "paid parental leave" is available over a 12-month period due to the birth of a child, adoption of a child, or receiving a foster child. Leave is available only once per eligible employee per year. The leave may be taken as needed in increments less than eight (8) hours. Unused PPL is forfeited after the 12-month period. PPL runs concurrently with FMLA. Contact the Human Resources Department to apply.

#### Prospective Teacher Leave

Any regular full-time employee of the Forsyth County Board of Education who has completed two or more consecutive years of service during the current period of employment, and whose service is fully satisfactory, may be authorized by the Superintendent or designated official to take a leave of absence without pay for the purpose of completing certain degree requirements for initial professional teaching certification subject to specific terms and conditions outlined in Board Policy GARH. While the District will endeavor to return the employee to his or her former position and site, the District must reserve the right to assign or reassign the employee upon return, or, if deemed necessary by the District, to postpone or deny the employee's return to work. Continuation of coverage under each of the District's various employee benefit plans while on this type of leave is determined by the provisions, terms, and conditions governing the operation of each plan.

### Administrative Leave and Associated Expectations

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

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

### Annual Leave

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

### EMPLOYEE CALENDARS

Work schedules are coordinated by Employee Calendars to ensure essential district needs are addressed effectively and efficiently. This calendar designates weekdays that every employee covered by it is expected to perform designated duties and responsibilities at the assigned work site unless excused in accordance with applicable laws, policies, procedures or directives. Attendance at work is especially important on certain dates during the year designated by the district as "CRITICAL DAYS." The use of PERSONAL LEAVE is NOT permitted on these critical days: the day before or the day after a holiday; during pre-planning and post planning; or on in-service days. NOTE: CALENDARS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE DUE TO BUDGET OR WEATHER.

### THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT (FMLA)

#### Board Policy Reference: GBRIG

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

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

### Eligibility

- Employees of the Forsyth County Board of Education who have been employed by the Board for at least 12 months and who have worked at least 1250 hours for the board of education during the 12 month period immediately prior to requesting leave are eligible to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (“FMLA”).
- An eligible employee may request leave for one or more of the following reasons:
  - Birth of a son or daughter and to care for the newborn child;
  - Adoption or foster placement with the employee of a son or daughter and to care for the newly placed child;
  - To care for the employee's spouse, son, daughter or parent, if that person has a serious health condition;
  - Serious health condition of the employee that prevents the employee from performing his/her job functions;
  - Any qualifying exigency arising from the fact that the employee’s family member (the covered military member) is on active duty or has been notified of an impending deployment in support of a contingency operation. Qualifying exigencies are defined as short-notice deployment (seven or less calendar days); military events and related activities; childcare and school activities; financial and legal arrangements; counseling; rest and recuperation (up to five days per instance); post-deployment activities; additional activities where the employer and employee agree that the leave is an exigency and agree to both timing and duration of the leave; and
  - Military caregiver leave to care for a covered servicemember with a serious injury or illness if the employee is the spouse, son, daughter, parent, or next of kin of the servicemember.
  - An employee’s in-laws, grandparents, siblings, and other extended family members are not covered under FMLA.
  - If both parents work for the District, they are entitled to a combined total of 12 weeks of FMLA.

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

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

Employees should contact Human Resources to apply for FMLA. If the need for FMLA leave is foreseeable, an employee requesting leave must provide at least 30 days advance notice. If such advance notice is not possible, the employee must give notice to their immediate supervisor as soon as practicable, ordinarily within one or two working days of learning of the need for leave. When planning medical treatment, the employee should make a reasonable effort to schedule the treatment, subject to the approval of the health care provider, so that any corresponding leave will not unduly disrupt the operations of the school district.

Upon return from leave, the employee is entitled to be reinstated to a position equivalent to the one the employee held when they left on FMLA leave, with equivalent pay, benefits and other terms and conditions of employment. Upon proper notice, however, the Board of Education may deny reinstatement under this policy to an employee whose salary is in the highest 10% of the employees employed by the school district if such denial is necessary to prevent substantial and grievous economic injury to the District's operation, as determined by the Board of Education.

#### **AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT (ADA)**

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

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

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

## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

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

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

Employees/supervisors should report injuries no more than three days from the incident; however, immediate reporting is preferable. Forms and paperwork can be found on the District's website under the Finance & Business tab. If medical care is needed, please contact the Workers' Compensation Program Manager – Sheila Fairfield at 770-887-2461 Ext. 202140, for authorization of treatment from one of the panel physicians.

Workers' Compensation leave runs concurrently with FMLA.

## **RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS**

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

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

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



## **EMPLOYEE BENEFITS**

### **AFFORDABLE CARE ACT (ACA)**

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

### **EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP)**

Forsyth County Schools offers an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) to all benefits eligible employees through MetLife. Please use this link for more information.

<https://shawhankinsbenefits.net/fcs/employee-benefits/eap-benefits/>

### **EMPLOYEE SELF-SERVICE FOR BENEFITS**

Visit the FCS Benefit Resource Center at <https://shawhankinsbenefits.net/fcs/> which includes information and access to:

- State Health Benefit Plan
- Dental
- Vision
- Life
- Disability
- Long Term Care
- Voluntary Benefits
- Universal Life
- Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA)
- Retirement Plans
- Employee Assistance Program

### **RETIREMENT PLANS**

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

- Teachers Retirement System (TRS)

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

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

- Public School Employees Retirement System (PSERS)

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

- Employees' Retirement System (ERS)

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