

**Search and Seizure**

The Board seeks to ensure a learning environment that protects the health, safety and welfare of students and staff. To assist the Board in attaining these goals, District officials may, subject to the requirements below, search a student's person and property, including property assigned by the District for the student's use. Such searches may be conducted at any time on District property or when the student is under the jurisdiction of the District at school-sponsored activities.

All searches for evidence of a violation by the District shall be subject to the following requirements:

1. The District official shall have individualized, "*reasonable suspicion*" to believe evidence of a violation of law, Board policy, administrative regulation or school rule is present in a particular place;
2. The search shall be "*reasonable in scope*." That is the measures used are reasonably related to the objectives of the search and not excessively intrusive in light of the age, sex, maturity of the student, and nature of the infraction.
3. District officials may also search when they have reasonable information that emergency/dangerous circumstances exist.

**Desks and School Lockers**

Desks and school lockers are the property of the schools. The right to inspect desks and lockers assigned to students may be exercised by school officials to safeguard students, their property and school property with reasonable care for the Fourth Amendment rights of students.

The exercise of the right to inspect also requires protection of each student's personal privacy and protection from coercion. An authorized school administrator may search a student's locker or desk under three (3) conditions:

1. There is reason to believe that the student's desk or locker contains the probable presence of contraband material.
2. The probable presence of contraband material poses a serious threat to the maintenance of discipline, order, safety and health in the school.
3. The student(s) have been informed in advance that school Board policy allows desks and lockers to be inspected if the administration has reason to believe that materials injurious to the best interests of students and the school are contained therein.

Use of drug-detection dogs and metal detectors, or similar detective devices may be used only on the express authorization of the Superintendent.

District officials may seize any item that is evidence of a violation of law, Board policy, administrative regulation or school rule, or which the possession or use of is prohibited by such law, policy, regulation or rule.

**Student Search**

A student may be searched if there are reasonable grounds for suspecting that the search will turn up evidence that the student has violated or is violating either the law or the rules of the school. The scope of the search must be reasonably related to the objectives of the search and the nature of the infraction.

Students may be searched by law enforcement officials on school property or when the student is under the jurisdiction of the district upon the request of the law enforcement official. Such requests ordinarily, shall be based on warrant. The school Principal or designee will attempt to notify the student's parents in advance and will be present for all such searches by law enforcement officials.

Strip searches shall not be conducted by school authorities. All searches by the Principal or his/her designee shall be carried out in the presence of another adult witness.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-221 Boards of Education to prescribe rules

*New Jersey v. T.L.O.*, 469 US 325; 105 S.CT. 733

*Safford Unified School District #1 v. Redding* (U.S. Sup. CT 08-479)

Adopted: March 9, 2021

NORTH CANAAN BOARD OF EDUCATION  
North Canaan, Connecticut

## Students

### Search and Seizure

#### Definitions

a. **“Reasonable suspicion”** means sufficient knowledge possessed by the District official at the time the official makes or authorizes the search that would lead a reasonable person to believe that a search of a particular student or place will likely turn up evidence of a violation of law, Board policy, administrative regulation or school rule. The official’s knowledge may be based upon relevant past experience of the official, observation by the official and/or credible information from another person.

(1) **“Past experience”** may provide the district official with information relevant to the violation as well as information that enables the official to evaluate the credibility of information from another student.

(2) **“Credible information from another person”** may include information that the district official reasonably believes to be true provided by another District employee, a student, a law enforcement or other government official or some other person.

b. **“Reasonable in scope”** means the manner and extent of the search are reasonably related to the objectives of the search, limited to the particular student or students most likely to be involved in the infraction and not excessively intrusive in light of the student’s age, sex, maturity or the nature of the infraction.

#### Justification for Student Searches

Students have the right to be free of unreasonable searches and seizures under the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. Balanced against this right is the school officials' responsibility to create and maintain an environment consistent with the school's educational mission. School officials have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of all students under their authority.

#### Prohibited Items

Students are prohibited from bringing to school items or substances that would disrupt the educational function of the school or that are prohibited by Board policy, administrative regulations or by law. Examples of items or substances in this category are weapons, clubs, explosives, firecrackers, alcoholic beverages, and nonprescription drugs or drug paraphernalia.

#### Lockers and Other School Property

Lockers and other storage spaces are provided to students for their convenience. These storage areas remain school property, and as such, are subject to routine periodic inspections by school authorities as well as searches. Such inspections allow responsible school authorities to confirm that lockers are being used appropriately in a manner consistent with the health and safety of all students. Students should not store items in lockers that violate school Board policy or administrative regulations or law.

## **Emergencies**

Circumstances that put the safety of students or school staff at risk or could result in substantial property damage also will constitute sufficient reasons for school or police officials to conduct a thorough search of all school property. A bomb scare is an example of such an emergency. In responding to such an emergency or dangerous circumstance, the actions of the school officials shall be reasonably effective and not more intrusive than necessary.

## **Student Searches**

School authorities are authorized to conduct searches of students or their property when reasonable suspicion indicates that a particular student is in possession of an item or a substance that represents a material threat to school routine or is prohibited by Board policy, administrative regulations or by law. Student property shall include, but not be limited to, purses, and bookbags. School authorities in cooperation with the local police department reserve the right to conduct sniff searches with dogs of school property.

## **Police Notification**

With regard to possession of items that constitute a violation of law, school authorities may wish to cooperate with the appropriate law enforcement agencies in the interest of preserving the integrity of the school's educational mission.

## **Lockers and Other School Property (Desks)**

1. The school principal or his/her designee shall maintain an accurate list of all locker assignments and either a master key or combinations to all lockers.
2. At the time a student is assigned a locker or other storage space, s/he shall be informed that school authorities are empowered to conduct random periodic inspections of school lockers. Notices of this inspection policy also shall be posted in appropriate locations throughout the school.
3. Students also will be informed of the following locker regulations:
  - A. Students are responsible for the contents of the locker assigned to them.
  - B. Students are to keep their lockers locked.
  - C. Students are not to give other students access to their locker.
4. The exercise of that right to inspect also requires protection of each student's personal privacy and protection from coercion. An authorized school administrator may search a student's desk or locker under the following conditions:
  - A. There is reason to believe that the students' desk or locker contains contraband material and the presence of said material poses a serious threat to the maintenance of discipline, order, safety or health in the school.
  - B. The search of a group of students' desks or a group of students' lockers where no

particular student within the group is suspected may be conducted only if there is a reasonable suspicion of conduct immediately harmful to students, staff or school property.

### **Prescription Drugs**

Students who have a legitimate need to bring prescription drugs to school should register this information in the nurse's office.

### **Lost or Abandoned Items**

Lost or abandoned items will be inspected by school authorities.

### **Student Searches**

1. All searches of students shall be conducted or authorized by the Principal or designee, in the presence of a witness.
2. When the need to search a student arises, the student may be asked to give his or her consent to the search, but in no event shall the student be threatened with harsher punishment or treatment for refusing to consent, nor shall he or she be coerced or induced to give consent in any other manner. The consent, if given, shall be put in writing. If the student is unwilling to give free and voluntary consent, the school administrator may order the student to submit to a search. If the student refuses to obey the order, the school administrator may bring insubordination charges against the student as stipulated in applicable school regulations.
3. Searches should be no more intrusive than necessary to discover that for which the search was instigated.
4. A search of a student's handbag, gym bag or similar personal property carried by a student may be conducted if there is "reasonable grounds" for suspecting that the search will turn up evidence that the student has violated or is violating either the law or the rules of the school.
5. Locker searches shall be conducted in the presence of another staff member and in the presence of the student responsible for the contents of the locker, if possible.
6. Searches may include, if school authorities think necessary, a frisk or pat down of student clothing. Frisk or pat down searches shall be conducted by a member of the same sex as the student and in the presence of another staff member. Where the object of the search may be felt by a pat down of clothing or personal property, the District official may first pat the clothing or property in an attempt to locate the article before searching inside the clothing or property.
7. At no time should school officials conduct a search that requires a student to remove more clothing than his/her shoes or jacket. If school authorities are convinced that a more intrusive search is required to expose contraband they should advise the proper law enforcement agency.

8. A search of a student's person, or a search of a group of students where no particular student within the group is suspected, may be conducted only if there is a reasonable suspicion of conduct immediately harmful to students, staff or school property. "Strip searches" of students are prohibited by employees of this school District.
9. Student searches that disclose evidence of school misconduct, but not criminal misconduct, should be treated according to applicable policies and/or regulations.
10. In the event that a student search discloses evidence of criminal wrongdoing, the school Principal or his/her designee shall determine whether or not police officials should be notified of the fruits of the search. If police officials are notified the student's parents should be advised of this fact as soon as possible.

### **Emergency/Dangerous Circumstances**

1. Where a District official has knowledge that would lead a reasonable person to believe that either an emergency or dangerous circumstance exists and that it is necessary to act to protect the safety of any person or property, the official may make a search to the extent necessary to relieve the emergency or dangerous circumstance.
2. In responding to such an emergency or dangerous circumstance, the actions of the official shall be reasonably effective and no more intrusive than necessary.

### **Documentation**

Administrators shall document all searches. Documentation shall consist of the following:

- Name, age and sex of student;
- Time and location of search;
- Justification for search and nature of reasonable suspicion;
- Type/Scope of search (what was searched);
- Results of search, prohibited material(s) found, disposition of the material(s) seized and discipline imposed;
- Name of the witness to the search;
- Name of the District official.

Notice of the Board's policy and pertinent provisions of this regulation will be provided to staff, students and their parents annually, through such means as staff and student/parent handbooks and the school/District website.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

10-221 Boards of education to prescribe rules.

*New Jersey v T.L.O.*, 53 U.S.L.W. 4083 (1985)

PA 94-115 An Act Concerning School Searches.

Safford Unified School District #1 v. Redding (U.S. Sup. CT 08-479)

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