LEGAL MAILBAG – NOVEMBER 19, 2026



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The "Legal Mailbag Question of the Week" is a regular feature of the CAS Weekly NewsBlast. We invite readers to submit short, law-related questions of practical concern to school administrators. Each week, we will select a question and publish an answer. While these answers cannot be considered formal legal advice, they may be of help to you and your colleagues. We may edit your questions, and we will not identify the authors.
Please submit your questions to: legalmailbag@casciac.org.

Dear Legal Mailbag,

As a principal, I am navigating a disagreement with a parent about when the school's supervision responsibilities end.

The parent wants his child to remain on school grounds after cross-country practice to practice lacrosse independently. He has provided written permission, but no coach or other adult would be supervising this additional activity. I informed him that his child needs to be picked up or take the late bus home when practice ends.

Our handbook requires students remaining after dismissal to report directly to a designated, supervised location or school-sponsored activity. It also prohibits remaining simply to socialize or gather in unsupervised areas. The parent argues that this language addresses dismissal, not the conclusion of athletic practice, and that practicing a sport independently does not fall within the prohibited activities.

Can I require a student to leave campus at the conclusion of a supervised activity even if the handbook does not explicitly address this particular situation? Does written parental permission affect the school's duty to supervise or its potential liability?

Signed,
Standing My Ground

Dear Standing:

The answer to this question relates to the duty of care that school officials assume when students enter school property. When school officials have a duty of care, they can be held responsible if a student is injured for lack of supervision, and in the absence of a duty of care, school officials are not responsible for injuries that may occur. Whether there is a duty of care is the first question in the framework for determining whether school officials will be liable under the legal principles that define negligence:

- Is there a duty of care?
- Did school officials breach that duty, i.e., did school officials act unreasonably?
- Did that unreasonable action cause an injury?
- Was that injury foreseeable?

When all four questions are answered affirmatively, liability can be imposed.

Sometimes school officials have a duty of care, and sometimes they do not. For example, we know that school officials must supervise students playing on the playground during the school day, and liability may result if supervision is inadequate and a student is injured. But school officials are only responsible for supervising students at times when the school district has a duty of care, as is the case when students are at recess during the school day. By contrast, there is no duty of care for students playing on the playground on a Sunday afternoon, and a school district would not be liable if a student is injured in the absence of supervision.

This parent is attempting to expand the duty of care that your school has for students after school. His claim that the handbook provision does not apply to students at the conclusion of an athletic practice is irrelevant. Similarly, his giving "permission" for his son to stay on school property after cross country practice to practice lacrosse independently does not authorize the student to do so. As principal, you are free to establish reasonable rules for students, and that includes your deciding that students are not allowed to remain on school property without supervision at the end of the school day or at the conclusion of an athletic practice.

The key in such situations is clear communication. Parental attempts to expand the duty of care for supervising students is not uncommon. For example, sometimes parents want to drop their children off at school early on their way to work, and school officials must decide whether to provide supervision at that time or to inform parents that such early drop-offs are not permitted. The response of school officials in such situations will establish whether or not the district has a duty of care. Indeed, a parent who continues to drop a young child off at school after officials have informed that parent that supervision is not provided at that hour may properly be reported to DCF as neglectful. Given that physical supervision of older students is typically not necessary, however, a neglect report would not be appropriate in the situation you have.

Here, you are free to maintain your position that students may not remain at your school unsupervised after school or after athletic practices. You are also free to enforce the rule that students are not permitted to remain on school property after school to socialize or otherwise to do their own thing. Once you have communicated clearly to the father that his son's presence on school property after cross country practice is not authorized and will not be supervised, you will have established that the school district has no duty of care. If the student is then injured by engaging in conduct that supervision would have prevented, it will not be your problem. However, this legal analysis will not prevent the father from bringing a claim anyway in such a situation. Accordingly, Legal Mailbag advises not only that you communicate to the father that no supervision will be provided, but also that you enforce the prohibition against the student's remaining on school property after cross country practice.