

# POLICYALERT



April, 2008

Forethought Consulting, Inc.

TM

## BESE BULLETINS

### REVISIONS RESULT IN CHANGES TO POLICIES

One of the enhancements in the upgrade of our **CAPS**, *Computer Assisted Policy Service*, is that we are able to bookmark and link chapters, sections, or individual provisions included in Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) *Bulletins* that are cited in the references of School Board policies. Last year this linking process made us begin to look more closely at some of the increasing number of revisions being made by BESE to its *Bulletins*. As you are aware, Bulletin 741, *Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators*, underwent a complete make-over a few years ago, and revisions since have even given rise to several new *Bulletins*.

In this issue of **POLICYALERT**, we discuss some of the revisions that have resulted in School Board policy changes. We have spent the last 3-6 months reviewing selected *Bulletins* to assess any revisions made. In this first installment, except for one policy, *Testing Program*, we have concentrated on the revisions to Bulletin 741 and the policies affected by it. We will discuss in a subsequent newsletter policy changes based on other *Bulletins*.

#### ● SUMMER SCHOOL

The amount of revision to the policy *Summer School* largely depends on when the policy was originally adopted by your School Board. Nevertheless, the main focus of the revisions deal with the minimum amount of instruction per credit a student can earn and the minimum attendance required by BESE for students to be eligible to receive credit or pass a subject. These revisions are based on changes to Sections 2503 and 2504 of Bulletin 741.

#### ● HOME STUDY

The policy *Home Study* was revised to make several technical amendments based on changes to Chapter 33 of Bulletin 741. The first revision changes the deposit for the use of textbooks to **100%** of the book's replacement cost, up from 50% previously.

## Policies In This Issue:

- Summer School
- Home Study
- Homebound Instruction
- Adult Education
- Graduation Requirements
- Testing Program
- Attendance
- School Admission
- Student Absences and Excuses

Another amendment now states that home study students in grades 5 and 9 transferring to the public school system shall take the 4th and 8th grade LEAP 21 tests *in order to determine the appropriate grade level* for placement purposes. Before, these tests were used to determine enrollment.

Lastly, the section of the policy on *Achievement Testing* was revised to clarify the taking of LEAP 21 tests, which allows the parents to assess the performance of their home schooled child.

### ● HOMEBOUND INSTRUCTION

Recent revisions to Section 1103 E of Bulletin 741 better define the concept of *homebound instruction*.

Students are eligible for homebound instruction when the student is unable to attend school due to qualifying physical illness (as determined by the School Board), accident, or health care treatment. The student's incapacitation requires the verification by a physician on the application for homebound instruction.

One rule added by BESE stipulates that homebound instruction shall start on the eleventh (11th) school day following absence by the student for ten (10) consecutive school days. Following the ten days absence, the student shall also be referred to the *School Building Level Committee* to determine if Section 504 services are needed.

In an effort to provide continuity of instruction, BESE also now requires a minimum of four (4) hours of instruction per week, unless the student's physician requires less, and that instruction covers at least the core academic subjects of English, Math, Science, and Social Studies.

For some School Boards, the regulations we have included at the end of the policy are new suggestions that the Board would impose for participants. These regulations will hopefully increase safety precautions and protect the teacher and School Board from adverse situations, as well as attempt to assure the student receives the educational instruction he or she deserves.

Policy *Homebound Instruction* has been upgraded to include these latest BESE provisions.

### ● ADULT EDUCATION

Revisions to the policy *Adult Education* were made to offer consistency with current BESE provisions. The changes made to the draft policy were brought about by the reorganization of Bulletin 741, and found in Chapter 27 and the creation of Bulletin 123, *Adult Education Content Standards*. For the most part, the policy has been streamlined in the process.

### ● GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

With today's increasing emphasis on academic preparation and achievement levels, students may graduate with diplomas containing various distinctions or technical endorsements. To receive these higher distinctions, among the various qualifications required to graduate is passage of all four (4) components of the *Graduate Exit Examination*. But to receive a *standard high school diploma*, a student has only to pass three (3) of the components – language arts and mathematics, and either science or social studies. (See Section 2319, Bulletin 741)

Therefore, to accommodate the various levels required, we have altered the policy *Graduation Requirements* to include the simple provisions that a student must pass *certain components* of the exam, whether the requirement is 3 or 4.

### ● TESTING PROGRAM

Since we started reviewing the changes BESE has made to its Bulletins last fall, BESE's *Test Security Policy* has now been significantly revised 3 times, with the latest posting March, 2008. There is no real purpose in discussing the revisions that have been made to the *Testing Program* policy because they are too numerous and technical in nature, but we have made a concerted effort to assure its ingredients are in compliance with the requirements of BESE's *Test Security Policy*, found in Section 305 of Bulletin 118, *Statewide Assessment Standards and Practices*.

Lately, we have received amendments to this policy from a few School Boards, and these amendments, by-in-large, attempt to add verbatim a recent change or changes made to BESE's *Test Security Policy* or even information from other sections of Bulletin 118. Although it may seem the easiest way out, we consider this to be a bad practice. When you carefully scrutinize BESE's policy, you realize that some of the information included is specific to the Louisiana Department of Education, and its responsibilities, and has no bearing whatsoever on the local School Boards' practices. Also, we have noted that a couple of School Boards have included the lengthy sections of BESE's *Test Security Policy* dealing with the Louisiana Department of Education's LEAPdata Query System, LEAPweb Reporting System, and the Enhanced Assessment of Grade Level Expectations (EAGLE) System. Most of the information found in the sections addressing these computer reporting systems is repeated verbatim in each of the Bulletin's sections. So the local Board's policy is considerably lengthened because the same information is being included in the local policy 3 different times. Even with our paring down the policy to its basic essentials, the average *Testing Program* policy is 7 pages long, and with the additional information, some systems top out at a hefty 18 pages. Although we never claim our policy manuals are very environmentally friendly, we do try to do our part when we can!

### ● ATTENDANCE

Recent subtle changes to the state's attendance policies have resulted in the same changes being made to the *Attendance* policy. Elementary students are still required to be in attendance for 160 days per school year, but high schools are required to be in attendance for *81 days or the equivalent* per semester or 162 days a school year for schools not operating on a semester basis, in order to be eligible to receive credit for courses taken. The phrase *or the equivalent* is to accommodate those schools which are operating on a nonstandard basis. These provisions are found in Bulletin 741, Section 1103 G.

We want to point out that we are still finding School Board personnel and some schools telling students that they are allowed 20 absences during the year or 10 absences per

semester. This is an erroneous interpretation of BESE's attendance policies. School personnel should be reminded that the actual number of absences allowed is the difference between the 160 (or 162) days of required attendance and the total number of student instructional days in the Board's school calendar. BESE requires at least 177 student instructional days in the traditional 182 school calendar, which would translate into 17 (or 15) days of absence. For nontraditional calendars, the school would have to calculate the equivalent absences. Also, keep in mind that for attendance counting purposes, the days absent include both *excused* and *unexcused* absences, as well as suspensions (see Bulletin 741, Section 1105 A).

### ● SCHOOL ADMISSION

For years, Bulletin 741 seemed to indicate that without an official social security card, a student might not be allowed to enroll in school, which was considered to be a prohibited practice. Section 1107 (A)(1)(C) of Bulletin 741 has now been amended to indicate that if a student does **not** have a social security card, upon enrollment, the student shall be assigned a *state identification number*. This entrance requirement has been added to the policy on *School Admission*.

Totally unrelated to Bulletin revisions, but certainly no less in importance is a section we have added to the policy at the request of Jon Guice, attorney with Hammonds & Sills. The section deals with the admission of students to a school who have committed a felony or action that would have constituted a felony if committed by an adult. This section is actually part of La. Rev. Stat. Ann. §17:416 (D)(2), which gives the Superintendent authority to refuse admission to such a student, except upon review and approval of the School Board.

### ● STUDENT ABSENCES AND EXCUSES

The major change to the policy on *Student Absences and Excuses* deals with the reformatting of information under *Extenuating Circumstances*, found in Section 1103 I and K of Bulletin 741. Previously, there was a list of (8) reasons absences could be exempted under *Extenuating Circumstances*. Some time ago, this list was broken into

two components. Some of the circumstances require verification of the *Supervisor of Child Welfare and Attendance*, while the other reasons enumerated require verification of the principal.

The other major change we have made to this policy was the technical change in the total number of days a student may be absent, just like the change made to the policy *Attendance*. The information regarding what constitutes

whole and half-day attendance, tardiness, reporting absences, and appeal of absences will be new for some systems as well.

Other subtle word changes here and there were made for clarification purposes. We have also made an effort to remove information that was duplicated in different parts of the policy.

## UPCOMING ISSUES

The fun has just begun! We will be sending in the near future a second newsletter rounding up our review of other BESE Bulletins, as well as addressing the special legislative session. In subsequent issues, we'll take a look at the new expanded Family and Medical Leave provisions that include members of the military, and a few policies which have long needed upgrading. And as the 2008 Louisiana Legislature continues its regular session, we will be monitoring its effects on schools and School Board operations -- and will no doubt have other issues to discuss and policies to revise at the close of the session.

If you have a topic you would like for us to research and discuss in a future issue of **POLICYALERT**, send us your suggestions. We'll be glad to take a look!

**FORETHOUGHT CONSULTING, INC.** provides a broad array of management assistance to school boards, specializing in board operations, board policy, regulation, and procedure development, policy manual development, revision, and maintenance, including **CAPS** (Computer Assisted Policy Service). **FORETHOUGHT CONSULTING, INC.** also assists school systems with mediation, board member training, insurance and risk management research and development, and other related services.

**CAPS**, Computer Assisted Policy Service, takes a school system's policy manual and converts it to a web-based computer format for a quick and easy searching of school board policy and related information, including pertinent statutes, Louisiana Department of Education bulletins, and/or Board minutes.

**POLICYALERT** is published periodically and is provided to school boards which subscribe to the monthly *Policy Updating Service*.