

[This is to be added to PART III. THE IOWA SCHOOL SYSTEM GENERALLY: Our Nestlings, Mostly Safe, yet at Risk, D. Behavior & Discipline at Ames Schools, c.2006 to 2008, p. 100, et seq.]

Committee defines acceptable student conduct

By: Bob Zientara

08/13/2008

Updated 08/13/2008 11:47:00 AM CDT

Iowa school districts have a lot of latitude when it comes to defining acceptable student conduct and truancy.

A committee of Ames Community School Board members and administrators discovered that while working for months on a revised, 17-page student conduct code that will be up for adoption by the board on Aug. 25.

District residents can review and comment on the policy up to the day of the meeting.

"We were left to decide what truancy means," board member Michael Murray said at the board's Monday, Aug. 11 meeting.

So the committee used 170 days of mandatory school attendance as a benchmark, and worked from there, he added.

The policy defines acceptable conduct, outlines steps that determine truancy, lays out due process and defines penalties. Among them: low-income families with pre-K to sixth grade students could lose up to a quarter of their "family investment program" benefits if they don't correct truancy problems.

Murray also said that the new policy eliminates a provision that allows the district to drop a student from a high school class if he or she misses five or more class periods.

"We weren't sure who that was supposed to help," he said.

Instead, missed classes will be dealt with under policy provisions on tardiness and attendance, Murray added.

"This policy went to our principals a couple of times and the committee got legal advice on other issues," said board member Anita Rollins. "We hope that parents and students review the policy and respond."

Superintendent Linda Beyea said that after the policy is adopted, a set of rules will be submitted to the board to show how administrators will carry out the policy.

"There are some (provisions) that address situations with younger or older students," she said. "The overall philosophy was written to reach out broadly, but there are specifics for individual situations."