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Topic: School Safety

Question: How does Burke County High School discipline students including students with disabilities who violate the *Weapons in Schools Policy*?

Burke County High School has a broad range of prevention strategies that are structured, consistent and fair. The prevention efforts depend upon the “routine” discipline structure within this school.

All students receive a student handbook which addresses student expectations, rewards, code of conduct, penalties and due process procedures. The student handbook provides guidelines which are clear and concise. The handbook is covered the first week of school during five extended homeroom periods. In addition to the homeroom sessions, grade level orientation sessions are conducted to review and answer questions.

Burke County High School provides a range of instructional alternatives for students who are disruptive in the regular school program. Those instructional alternatives include but are not limited to in-school suspension for designated period(s) or days, out of school suspension for a designated time period, referral to the alternative school or referral to a tribunal.

Burke County High School has a proactive safety plan to help counteract the growing incidences of violence evident in schools across the nation and to provide a safe learning environment for students, faculty and staff.

In reference to weapons, the board policy and code of discipline state: *A student shall not possess, handle or transmit a knife, razor, ice pick, machete, pistol, rifle, shotgun, pellet gun, explosive or any other object that could be considered a weapon or an instrument that could pose a danger to the health and safety of students, teachers or any other person on school property, at any school function or enroute to and from school.* The consequences for a weapon violation include confiscation of the weapon, out of school suspension for 10 days, notification of the appropriate authorities and referral to a tribunal. A student found guilty of a violation of this policy would be expelled from school for a minimum of one calendar year. The policy includes the provision allowing the superintendent or the board to modify the expulsion requirement on a case-by-case basis.

For a student with a disability the code of discipline procedures would be followed. During the tribunal phase the diagnostic evaluation and current individualized educational plan would be studied, reviewed and taken into consideration. The policy allowing modification of expulsion based upon circumstances and facts would be considered.

Burke County High School is a disciplined, safe and violence-free institution. The mission of this faculty and staff is to challenge students academically, to provide opportunities for effective oral and written communication, to promote a safe atmosphere where students become responsible and productive members of this community, and to instill in students a feeling of self-worth through their academic and extra curricular accomplishments.

With this school mission in mind, all students at Burke County High School have many avenues and opportunities to receive assistance and support to help them improve their behavior. Those opportunities include the following:

- ◆ Availability of guidance and counseling services
- ◆ Before and after school tutoring services
- ◆ Conflict resolution opportunities
- ◆ After school clubs and organizations
- ◆ Athletic activities
- ◆ Student teacher and parent conferences
- ◆ Student behavior contracts
- ◆ Special privilege cards for academics and behavior
- ◆ Student assistance programs
- ◆ A curriculum for character and value education is in developmental stages

In closing, if each school in Georgia is to be disciplined, safe and violence-free so that academic achievement of students can be the foundation upon which the school is built, then a student with a disability who violates the *Weapons in School Policy* should be punished. The need for school safety far outweighs the individual needs of a special education student. Does a weapon in the hands of a special education student hurt less?

