

School Law Course Reflection Paper

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I have been a teacher for 16 years at Madison Middle School in Madison, SD. I love being a teacher and making a difference in the lives of children. I teach at the middle school level and always have. When people I meet for the first time and they ask me what I do and I respond that I teach middle school, I almost inevitably get the following response: "Oooo, that's a tough age!" I couldn't disagree more with those people. I think at ages 11 – 14 (middle school ages) students are really hungry for education and interpersonal relationships. I love it because most middle school students are still "little kids" at heart and mind, but physically and emotionally they are starting to become "adults." I really feel like this is a crucial time to mold and shape kids into what they will become as adults.

School Law is one of the classes that I have most looked forward to on my journey to obtain my Masters of Education Administration from South Dakota State University. I really feel like this class contains the "meat and potatoes" of what it is to be a school administrator. This course presented me with a look into many of the laws and policies that govern the school systems in America. This course gave me a look into the basics of public school law and helped me understand the impact of legal cases on the operation of public schools in the United States. Most people in education have heard about and understand the significance of court cases like Brown vs. Board of Education, Tinker vs. Des Moines Independent Community School District, and Plessy vs. Ferguson. While the significance of these cases is unquestioned, I was amazed at how many court cases (lawsuits) there have been that have made significant changes to the educational system and made it into that which we know today.

This class introduced me to many of the legal issues facing schools today that I didn't realize they had to deal with like torts, good faith, teacher tenure and vicarious liability. It also provided me an opportunity to "brush up" on some of the issues that I've already had to deal with as a teacher like rights of parents and students, student and teacher freedoms, and discrimination. It was great to have the discussions with my classmates and to read all of the different perspectives that people have on these issues. I sometimes get lost in the fact that I teach in a small, conservative school in the Midwest and that things that we deal with here vary greatly from schools in different parts of the nation. After taking this course, I hope that I can better understand and appreciate the different issues that are affecting our schools and our students on a daily basis. Hopefully, the knowledge I gained can help me right now in my classroom and will also be extremely valuable to me to help guide other teachers in the future as their principal.

This course gave me a glimpse into the legal challenges facing schools today. It helped me to become more knowledgeable of the laws that govern the operations of the schools and the conduct of its employees in today's highly litigious society. It taught me the importance of making smart and legally defensible decisions that affect students and school personnel that I will oversee. I see the significance of developing sound and well thought out policies, rules and regulations that will govern many aspects of every day school life. It will be vital that I possess the legal knowledge necessary to perform all of the administrative tasks necessary for my school to be considered successful.

My goal in taking these graduate courses is to one day become a principal and have the opportunity to lead a staff in educating and preparing a school full of students for their

journey in life. Being a principal is something that has been in the back of my mind ever since I first got into education. Many of my peers and family members have encouraged me to go back to school to get my master's degree but I hesitated to do so because I wanted it to be the right time. I didn't want to get my master's degree "just because." I wanted to get my degree at a time when I thought I would use it. Well, that time is now for me!