



## Know Your Rights: An Introduction to Student Handbooks

If you have questions about school rules — for example, what to do if a student is told they are subject to discipline — you should first review the student handbook for any applicable school policies and procedures.

Every school district has a student handbook that covers topics such as those related to academic expectations, students' privacy rights, and disciplinary procedures. There are usually separate handbooks for elementary, middle, and high school levels.

Most often, the school handbook can be found on the district's main website, or the specific school website under their "Families" or "Students" tab.

**The following are some topics commonly covered in student handbooks that you may wish to be aware of:**

### **Personal belongings and locker use**

Districts may explain whether school officials can search student lockers and belongings. [Here](#), the ACLU provides more information about student [searches](#).

### **Dress code policies**

- Schools have specific dress code policies. We note that some policies may discriminate against students [on the basis of](#) race or gender — like **those relating to hair [and make-up](#)**.

### **Technology Use**

- Districts may have technology use policies including whether the district or city has access to student emails sent via the district's email domain, browser history etc.
- Schools typically have policies around the use of recording devices while on school property.
- There are also usually rules about cell phone use in school. View the ACLU's guidance about the reasonable suspicion required for school officials to search cell phones [here](#).

### **Surveillance technology and use of security cameras**

- including on school grounds, on school-issued technology, or other technology

### **Bullying policies**

- Districts may specify how to report alleged bullying and outline the process if someone is accused of bullying.

## **Free speech, expression, demonstration and assembly**

- More information [here](#).

## **Disciplinary procedures**

- MA state law requires that schools explain their disciplinary policies in student handbooks.

### **Your school's handbook will more specifically define its policies under these topic areas.**

- If you are subject to discipline, you may first wish to review the student handbook for any applicable school policies and procedures. You may consider asking the school what policy or provision of the handbook they allege you violated.
- You may also consider consulting with an attorney who has expertise in school disciplinary matters before you communicate with the school.

To seek additional legal resources from ACLU of Massachusetts, see information available at <https://www.aclum.org/en/seeking-legal-help-aclu>