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The Madison Central School District Distance Education Policy: A Review

Introduction

The Madison Central School District, in Madison, South Dakota, offers its high school students the opportunity to participate in certain courses offered via distance education. Although the number of courses is limited, and the number of students participating is small, the district has written a distance education policy which is available to all stakeholders of the district on the district website. After a review of the policy, various strengths and weakness become apparent. The following is my review of the policy and my recommendations for strengthening the policy.

Policy Strengths and Weaknesses

The first and foremost strength of the current district policy is that it exists! The distance education program for the district is relatively small and it would have been easy to overlook writing a policy for it. In the past years, only one student has completed a distance education course at Madison High School. The Technical Director for the school, Robert Honomichl, explained that because the distance education program is so small and infrequently taken advantage of, the policy is intentionally vague. The vague nature of the policy could be considered both a strength and a weakness depending on perspective. Because it is vague, it can be manipulated and interpreted to apply to a range of situations. Conversely, that vague nature

can also contribute to confusion, false expectations, and possible conflict. The second strength of the policy is that it does mention, (albeit briefly), three important areas: Student Application for Virtual High School Courses, Credit for Virtual Coursework, and Costs for Virtual Coursework. Each of these areas would be of interest to stakeholders involved with the program.

Recommendations

In order to make the existing distance education policy more specific and effective, I would add several topics to the policy that aren't currently covered as well as update the three topics that are currently covered. My first step would be to interview administrators, faculty, and technical support in order to determine what goals, objectives, and needs the Madison District's Distance Education Program has. Although there is not a lot of activity now in the program, I would ask what the stakeholders imagine the program to be in the coming years. Where do they see the program going? What would they like to see the program become? Once these questions are answered, I would communicate with all stakeholders and put together a mission statement and vision statement.

Once the initial goals of the program are in place, the next step would be to put together an outline of the various topics that should be addressed by the policy. My outline would cover topics such as: Academic Policy for administrators, faculty, and staff; Curriculum Policy; Fiscal Policy; Faculty Policies such as compensation, evaluation, support, and expectations; Legal Policies; Student Policies such as academic policy, technical policy, and support; Technical Policy, and Philosophical Policy. This outline would provide structure as each of these topics is addressed. It would also be important to communicate consistently with all stakeholders of the

program as the policy is written. Once these steps were taken, the district would be well on its way to establishing a firm and effective policy for its Distance Education Program.