

# Southern Plains Education Cooperative

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## Employee Handbook

8/1/23

<http://southernplainedcoop.org>



# SPEC OFFICE STAFF

Sarah Mittelstadt, Director.....507-238-1472

Dawn Becker, Business Manager.....507-235-4310

- Payroll Concerns
- New Employee documentation
- Budgets and Billing
- Data Requests
- Verification of Employment
- Personnel Files
- Contract/Work Agreement Questions

Ashley Blazejak, Office Coordinator.....507-235-4301

- Director's Calendar
- Worker's Compensation
- Seniority Lists
- Absence Management (Aesop) questions – Leave questions
- Staff Development Requests
- Changes in contact information
- Evaluation Reports
- Psychologist Secretary
- Southern Plains Operations (Conference room, van, etc.)
- SPEC website
- SpEd Forms Set up and Questions
- Board Meeting Information
- Caseload Reports: 10/1 and 2/1
- LCTS
- Family Medical Leave Act
- EC Screening Coordinating

Shelley Junkermeier, Student Services Coordinator.....507-235-4303

- Third Party Billing
- MARSS and Student Information Reporting Data for Southern Plains sites

Judy Berkland, Accounting Specialist.....507-235-4304

- Supply Requisitions, Purchase Orders
- Invoices, Accounts Payable
- Timesheets/Time & Attendance

Julie Becker and Sue Clabaugh. Payroll (contracted with Fairmont) .....507-235-4005

[payroll@fairmont.k12.mn.us](mailto:payroll@fairmont.k12.mn.us)

- Flexible Spending Accounts
- Disability Insurance
- Health Insurance
- Life Insurance

## SOUTHERN PLAINS CONTACTS

<b>Office</b>			
Sarah Mittelstadt		507-238-1472	<a href="mailto:sarah.mittelstadt@southernplainedcoop.org">sarah.mittelstadt@southernplainedcoop.org</a>
Dawn Becker		507-235-4310	<a href="mailto:Dawn.becker@southernplainedcoop.org">Dawn.becker@southernplainedcoop.org</a>
Ashley Blazejak		507-235-4301	ashley.blazejak@southernplainedcoop.org
Judy Berkland		507-235-4304	judy.berkland@southernplainedcoop.org
Shelley Junkermeier		507-235-4303	<a href="mailto:shelley.junkermeier@southernplainedcoop.org">shelley.junkermeier@southernplainedcoop.org</a>
<b>Coordinators</b>			
Cheryl Hamp	Fairmont High School, GHEC	507-236-1709 (cell) 507-235-4235 (desk)	<a href="mailto:champ@fairmont.k12.mn.us">champ@fairmont.k12.mn.us</a>
Deb Bertram	USC	507-399-6361 (cell)	<a href="mailto:deb.bertram@southernplainedcoop.org">deb.bertram@southernplainedcoop.org</a>
Stephanie Bovy	BEA		Stephanie.bovy@southernplainedcoop.org
Kellie Fischer	Early Childhood Special Education, Fairmont Elementary	651.238.7670 (cell) 507-238-4133 (desk)	<a href="mailto:kellie.fischer@southernplainedcoop.org">kellie.fischer@southernplainedcoop.org</a>
Lori Jacobsen	Martin County West	507-764-4671	<a href="mailto:lorijacobsen@mcwmavericks.org">lorijacobsen@mcwmavericks.org</a>
Stephanie Schmitz (Assistant Director)	Arise Academy	507-327-7997 (cell)	<a href="mailto:Stephanie.Schmitz@southernplainedcoop.org">Stephanie.Schmitz@southernplainedcoop.org</a>

# GENERAL TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYMENT**

The Southern Plains Education Cooperative is an Equal Opportunity Employer and the cooperative does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, disability, sexual orientation, including gender identity or expression, age, family care leave status, or veteran status. The cooperative also makes reasonable accommodations for disabled employees.

Refer to Board Policy 401 *Equal Employment Opportunity* for more information.

## **DISCRIMINATION, BULLYING, HARASSMENT AND VIOLENCE**

The policy of the cooperative is to maintain a learning and working environment that is free from harassment and violence on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, familial status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, including gender identify or expression, or disability. The cooperative prohibits any form of harassment or violence on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, familial status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, including gender identity or expression, or disability.

A violation of this policy occurs when any pupil, teacher, administrator, or other personnel of the cooperative harasses a pupil, teacher, administrator, or other personnel or group of pupils, teachers, administrators, or other personnel through conduct or communication based on a person's race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, familial status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, or disability, as defined by this policy. (For purposes of this policy, personnel include board members, employees, agents, volunteers, contractors, or persons subject to the supervision and control of the cooperative.)

A violation of this policy occurs when any pupil, teacher, administrator, or other personnel of the cooperative inflicts, threatens to inflict, or attempts to inflict violence upon any pupil, teacher, administrator, or other personnel or group of pupils, teachers, administrators, or other personnel based on a person's race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, familial status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, including gender identity or expression, or disability.

The cooperative will act to investigate all complaints, either formal or informal, verbal or written, of harassment or violence based on a person's race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, familial status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, including gender identity or expression, or disability, and to discipline or take appropriate action against any pupil, teacher, administrator, or other personnel who is found to have violated this policy.

If you feel you have been a victim or witness a student you feel is victimized in the school environment, you should file a complaint as soon as possible with Stephanie Schmitz, the Human Rights Officer. For concerns related to Stephanie Schmitz, Sarah Mittelstadt should be contacted. You will not be subject to any form or reprisal or retaliation for making a good faith complaint under this policy. (Refer to Policy #413, "*Harassment and Violence*", Policy #515, "*Bullying Prohibition*", and Policy #522, "*Student Sex Discrimination*".) You are obligated to intervene and report bullying to the appropriate building individual if you see bullying of others. If you do not do so, you may be subject to disciplinary action.

Other complaints should be dealt with at the lowest level (going directly to the individual of concern). If concerns persist, these concerns should be brought to the building supervisor, ongoing concerns should be brought to the director. Any staff that is made aware of concerns from students, parents, community members, or others should always be brought to the building supervisor in the relevant district. If assistance is needed, the director is available to support this report.

Anyone can report harassment of any person at any time via mail, phone, or email to Stephanie Schmitz, Human Rights Officer email [Stephanie.schmitz@southernplainedcoop.org](mailto:Stephanie.schmitz@southernplainedcoop.org) or 507-235-4099

## **IMMIGRATION LAW COMPLIANCE**

All offers of employment are contingent on verification of your right to work in the United States. You will be asked to provide original documents, as required by federal law, to sign a Federal Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification Form.

Identification is required that meets federal requirements to establish work eligibility. If you at any time cannot verify your right to work in the United States, Southern Plains may be obligated to terminate your employment.

## **EMPLOYEE BACKGROUND CHECK**

Southern Plains completes background checks on applicants who receive an offer of employment as described in the Minnesota Child Protection Background Check Act, Minnesota Statute Section 123B.03 or other background checks as allowed by law. The applicant signs a criminal history consent form, which provides permission for Southern Plains to conduct a criminal history background check. If the applicant fails to provide Southern Plains with a signed informed Consent Form and payment for the background check at the time the applicant receives a job offer, the applicant will be considered to have voluntarily withdrawn the application for employment. The offer of employment shall be conditioned upon a determination by Southern Plains that an applicant's criminal history does not preclude the applicant from employment. Southern Plains specifically reserves any and all rights it may have to conduct criminal background checks regarding current employees or applications without the consent of such individuals.

## **CALENDAR**

Many of the Southern Plains staff members are itinerant and work between multiple school district schedules. Staff members are responsible to ensure they work the appropriate number of contracted days to meet the needs of each of the member districts. Staff should be prepared to present a calendar with the days worked. Staff should keep these days on file for two years.

Southern Plains serves 5 school districts; no one school district dictates the schedule for all the districts. Students need to receive all services possible as designated by their Individualized Education Plan. It is not appropriate to say, "I am not working on Thursday because XYZ School District does not have school."

## **DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALS**

Materials should not be distributed by staff for items that are not directly related to cooperative or school district related items without prior authorization from the director.

## **DISTRICT POLICIES**

Please follow the policies and "culture" within each district to the best of your ability. For example, some districts require an identification badge; all Southern Plains staff members are expected to follow this on a regular basis. Make every effort to follow the dress code expectations in each building; work with the building principal if you are unable to do so due to your position.

## **DRIVER'S LICENSE AND DRIVING RECORD**

Employees whose work requires operation of a motor vehicle may be required to present and maintain a valid driver's license. Any changes in your driving record which would hinder driving privileges must be reported to your supervisor immediately. If you lose your right to drive for business, and your job is travel-intensive, you may lose your job.

If you use your vehicle for work related purposes, you are expected to: 1) drive defensively, 2) wear your seat belt, 3) make accommodations for bad weather including carrying appropriate requirement in your vehicle for your safety, 4) avoid use of phone unless you are using hands-free, and 5) carry proof of insurance on your vehicle as required by law (you may be asked to show proof of vehicle insurance).

## **NURSING MOTHERS, LACTATING EMPLOYEES, AND PREGNANCY ACCOMMODATIONS EMPLOYEE NOTICE**

Minnesota Statute 181.939 gives pregnant and lactating employees certain legal rights.

Pregnant employees have the right to request and receive reasonable accommodations, which may include, but are not limited to, more frequent or longer breaks, seating, limits on heaving lifting, temporary transfer to another position, temporary leave of absence or modification in work schedule or tasks. An employer cannot require an employee to take a leave or accept an accommodation.

Lactating employees have the right to reasonable paid break times to express milk at work unless they are expressing milk during a break that is not usually paid, such as a meal break. Employers should provide a clean, private, and secure room that is not a bathroom near the work area that includes access to an electrical outlet for employees to express milk.

There will be no retaliation or negative action for pregnant or lactating employees exercising rights under this law. Employees that need assistance with finding locations to express milk or to make arrangements for accommodations should contact their supervisor.

## **TRANSPORTING STUDENTS**

In order for us to be in compliance with transportation laws (MN Statute 171.02, subd 2.b), no one is allowed to transport students, **unless they have received the Type III transportation training, signed the form indicating they have received the training, and signed a waiver to do a background check of your driving record, completed the Special Needs and Knowledge quiz, and completed the Behind the Wheel ride-a-long. This must be done annually. There will be no exceptions to this.**

All staff must use a vehicle from one of our member school districts or the cooperative van. No personal vehicles may be used unless you have the following items and authorization from myself on an annual basis:

- umbrella insurance policy,
- certification from the Department of Transportation inspection within the past year,
- legally required safety supplies (fire extinguisher, ten-unit first aid kit, body fluids cleanup kit) stored in a removable, moisture-and dust-proof container, and
- three reflective, red triangle, road-warning devices.

## **Disclosure Requirements (MS 171.02 sub 2b (h), (i), (j), (k))**

In the event you incur any of the following you are required to disclose in writing within 10 days of conviction to your employer:

- DWI
- Disqualifying offenses
- Moving violations

A person who sustains a conviction of a moving offense in violation of chapter 169 within three years of the first of three other moving offenses is precluded from operating a Type III school bus for one year from the date of the last conviction.

## **Controlled Substance and Alcohol Testing MS 171.02 sub 2b (f)**

## **LICENSE RENEWAL**

All employees requiring a professional license as part of their position are required to provide an updated copy of their professional license to the Southern Plains office. Southern Plains maintains a continuing education committee; staff can submit continuing education credit requests through this committee. Please contact Eric Weedman, [eric.weedman@southernplainscoop.org](mailto:eric.weedman@southernplainscoop.org), Chair of the CE Committee with any CE questions.

## **NON-EXEMPT AND EXEMPT EMPLOYEES**

Employees are classified as either “exempt” or “non-exempt”. Non-exempt jobs are generally measured by the hour, require time sheets, and are performed under direct supervision. These employees are subject to overtime pay provisions as provided by the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and any applicable state laws. Overtime or compensatory time off begins after 40 hours worked in a given calendar week. (The calendar week is defined as 12:01 a.m. Saturday through midnight Friday.)

Exempt employees are those whose duties and responsibilities are exempt from overtime pay provisions as provided by the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and any applicable state laws. Exempt employees do not keep hourly time records, and are expected to get the job done no matter how long it takes. They are not paid extra if their work takes more than 40 hours in a week.

For non-exempt employees, hours worked beyond the work day must be pre-approved.

Except in emergencies, all hours beyond the work agreement must be approved in advance by the building principal or director.

Hours must be submitted on a time sheet within one month of the date of the hours worked unless other arrangements have been made with the director.

Classified staff have a paid lunch included in their master agreement. They should not submit for pay for days in which they do not get lunch (i.e. field trips), because they already are paid for that time.

## **PERSONNEL FILE**

Southern Plains maintains an employee personnel file. Keeping your personnel file up-to-date is important. You may see information in your own personnel file by making a request in advance to review it during regular hours in the presence of an appointed office staff. You may also request to receive copies of all documents in your file. All medical records, if any, will be kept in a separate file.

## **PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Southern Plains staff needs to keep updated contact information for all employees in case of an emergency. In order to ensure this information is kept up to date; all staff should notify the office of any changes in name, address, and phone number. For at least one year following employment, staff should provide updated information. It is your responsibility, when experiencing a family status change, to notify Southern Plains office personnel in writing within 30 days for benefit modifications.

## **PURCHASING MATERIALS**

Southern Plains staff should seek permission prior to purchasing items for which she/he anticipates obtaining reimbursement. No items will be purchased using cooperative dollars that will be utilized through individual’s personal technology accounts such as Kindle or Audible. Applications will not be purchased for individual’s personal technology devices.

Paraprofessionals should contact their assigned case manager if they are in need of any supplies. The districts are obligated to provide the lowest cost items, not always the preferred type of school supplies.

Individuals that have input into purchasing materials (this includes, but is not limited to, all certified and classified staff involved in purchasing) may not accept gifts of more than \$5 from vendors. Donations may be made to the school; however, employees may not accept sample curriculum, iPads, meals, etc. for personal use.

Minnesota Statute 13.32 requires that school districts report to parents technology tools used for curriculum, testing, and assessment; a service agreement regarding the data must also be agreed upon with the vendor regarding use and

security of the data. As a result, no staff are allowed to use any websites or apps (even if free of charge) that stores ANY student information without prior approval from Southern Plains administration. There is a link to a google form to request these tools on the Southern Plains website.

## **RESTRICTIVE PROCEDURES**

Restrictive procedures are the use of physical holding or seclusion in an emergency:

- Restraint: physical intervention intended to hold a child immobile or limit a child's movement and where body contact is the only source of physical restraint.
- Seclusion is defined as confining a child alone in a room from which egress is barred (the student is not allowed to leave). Removing a child from an activity to a location where the child cannot participate in or observe the activity is NOT seclusion. Seclusion rooms must be registered with the commissioner and have a written notice from local authorities that it complies with the state code.
- Emergency is defined as a situation where immediate intervention is needed to protect a child or other individual from physical injury or to prevent serious property damage.

It is not allowed to physically carry or restrain students unless it is written in the Individual Education Plan.

The only types of restraints allowed within the Southern Plains Education Cooperative (SPEC) districts are those taught in the Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) training. If you use restraints and have not been trained on these techniques in the last year, you will need to take the course or refresher course. At this time, we have **no** registered seclusion rooms in any of our member districts; if you feel a room is being used for seclusion, please contact the Southern Plains Director.

If you work with students who are at risk for creating emergency situations, you will need to participate in the Restrictive Procedures Training offered by SPEC. Once you have this training and use a restraint, there are several forms that must be completed. The training discusses the appropriate forms.

## **WAGE DISCLOSURE**

Southern Plains does not restrict employees' right to discuss their wage with others and will not retaliate for disclosing their pay. Minnesota Statute 181.172.

## **LEAVES**

All individuals are responsible to ensure they are familiar with their work agreement or contract. Provide complete information in Absence Management. Additional information may be requested to interpret the contract or agreement.

### **SICK LEAVE**

Minnesota Statute 181.9413 allows all employees to earn one hour of sick and safe time for every 30 hours worked. (All of the collective bargaining agreements and individual work agreements provide more time than required by law.) Use of sick leave is extended to other family members and additional reasons as per statute. Employees should enter leave in Absence Management as soon as they know they are unable to work with details. If that is after 6:00 a.m., they should report that absence directly to the Southern Plains office (and text Stephanie if at Arise).

### **PARENTAL LEAVE**

According to Minnesota Statute 181.9412, employees are entitled to take up to 16 hours of unpaid leave a year to attend school conferences and "school related activities" that cannot be scheduled during non-work hours.

## **ATTENDANCE/TIME OFF FROM WORK**



You should be ready to work at the beginning of your assigned daily work hours.

Consistency in attendance is important for work productivity and services to students. It is understood individuals have illnesses and family emergencies; it is important to take time to regain health and support family. However, any time you are absent or late impacts our ability to deliver services, negatively impacts the reputation of Southern Plains, and places extra burdens on your coworkers. Excessive absenteeism or tardiness may result in corrective measures, up to and including termination. If you have been absent for three consecutive days without notification, you will be considered to have voluntarily resigned.

Patterns of absenteeism or tardiness may result in discipline even if the employee has not yet exhausted available paid time off. Absences due to illnesses or injuries that qualify under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) will not be counted against an employee's attendance record. Medical documentation within the guidelines of the FMLA may be required in these instances.

## **FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT**

Employees may have rights under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) for leave without risk of disciplinary action. FMLA may be taken for the following reasons:

- For the birth and care of a newborn child of the employee,
- For placement with the employee of a son or daughter for adoption or foster care,
- To care for a spouse, son, daughter, or parent with a serious health condition,
- To take medical leave when the employee is unable to work because of a serious health condition, or
- For qualifying exigencies arising out of the fact the employee's spouse, son, daughter, or parent is on active duty or call to active duty status as a member of the National Guard or Reserves in support of a contingency operation.
- Additional leaves may be taken within the confines of the FMLA.

Employees are responsible to notify the cooperative 30 days prior to taking the FMLA leave whenever the leave is foreseeable. When 30 days is not possible, the employee must provide as much notice as possible and follow all call-in procedures. Employees also need to complete the forms online to request and certify FMLA leave.

## **SCHOOL CANCELLATION**

Staff should follow the calendar of the district in which they work, and itinerant staff should have a calendar of their hours and locations available should it be requested.

If school is cancelled, for weather or school activities, staff within that district and programs will be cancelled. Itinerant staff will only be cancelled for districts that are cancelled; they will be expected to service schools that are open.

Make up time will be the responsibility of the individual staff when assigned by the district, but the director reserves the right to make up time if needed.

**CLASSIFIED**

Call-In Procedure for Absences

This procedure is to be followed by all employees of Southern Plains Education Cooperative. As soon as you become aware that you will not be able to work please log-in or call:

**LOG-IN: login.frontlineeducation.com**  
**CALL: 1.800.942.3767**

All staff **must be knowledgeable** of your Master Agreement and follow the proper procedure for calling in to request a leave of absence (stating a reason) and to obtain a sub.

HR REASON	DESCRIPTION
Association Leave	Association/Bargaining Unit (Local); <b>Please list specific reason for absence</b>
Education Minnesota	Association/Bargaining Unit (State); <b>Please list specific reason for absence</b>
Jury Duty	Court Jury Duty; <b>only to be used when called to be on a jury. A copy of check will be required following service.</b>
Sick Leave Other (For individuals other than self)	Illness or Injury – For individuals other than self <b>Please list the individual and their relationship to you. Sorry – pets don't qualify</b>
Bereavement	For time after the loss of a family member <b>List the individual and their relationship</b>
Parental Lv Deduct	Pay deduct hourly – for Child School Activity; <b>List the school activity</b>
Personal Leave	<b>Specify reason</b>
Personal Lv Deduct	Pay deduct – Overuse of Personal Leave; <b>Specify reason</b>
Pregnancy/Adopt Lve	<b>Medical forms required</b>
Professional	<b>List reason for leave (i.e. Crisis Prevention Intervention; IEP Meeting). These are leaves that do not go through staff development.</b>
Special Permission	<b>List reason for leave, these are specifically approved by Assistant Director or Director</b>
Sick Leave Deduct	Pay deduct – If you have no sick leave remaining.
Sick Leave Self	Personal Illness;
Staff Development	<b>Submit paper form to SPEC Ofc. If this was approved by a member district, please indicate so and list the chair of the committee.</b>
Work Comp	<b>1<sup>ST</sup> Report of Injury Form required</b>

➤ **Please make every effort to contact Absence Management by 6:00 AM.**

SAVING YOUR ABSENCE REQUEST:

SAVE

Absence Management will make efforts to find a substitute

SAVE & ASSIGN

ASSIGN YOUR OWN SUBSTITUTE. WARNING! CLICKING THE “SAVE AND ASSIGN” BUTTON INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE PREARRANGED WITH THE SUBSTITUTE THAT YOU ARE GOING TO ASSIGN ON THE NEXT PAGE.

# CERTIFIED

## CALL-IN PROCEDURES FOR ABSENCES

This procedure is to be followed by all employees of Southern Plains Education Cooperative. As soon as you become aware that you will not be able to work please log-in or call:

**LOG-IN: [login.frontlineeducation.com](http://login.frontlineeducation.com)**  
**CALL: 1.800.942.3767**

All staff **must be knowledgeable** of your Master Agreement and follow the proper procedure for calling in to request a leave of absence (stating a reason) and to obtain a sub.

HR Reason	Description
Association Leave	Association/Bargaining Unit – Local Level; <b>Please list specific reason for absence</b>
Sick Leave Other (For individuals other than self)	Illness or Injury – For individuals other than self <b>Please list the individual and their relationship to you. Sorry – pets don't qualify</b>
Bereavement	For time after the loss of a family member <b>List the individual and their relationship</b>
Education Minnesota	Association/Bargaining Unit – State Level; <b>Please list specific reason for absence</b>
Extracurricular	<b>Indicate activity; the relevant district must approve this expenditure</b>
Jury Duty	Court Jury Duty; only to be used when called to be on a jury. <b>A copy of the check will be required following service.</b>
Local Funeral No Sub	Local funerals (per Master Agreement) 2 hours or less, no sub hired/covered from within; <b>Note the name of the individual who's funeral you will attend.</b>
Paperwork Days	Paperwork day <b>List the tasks you intend to complete including the initials of students.</b>
Parental Lv Deduct	Pay deduct – for Child School Activity; <b>List the school activity</b>
Personal Leave 1	No information needed
Personal Lv Deduct	Pay deduct - Overuse of Personal Leave; <b>A reason must be stated</b>
Pregnancy/Adopt Lve	<b>Medical forms required</b>
Professional	<b>Specify reason (i.e. CTIC meeting)</b>
Sick Leave Deduct	Pay deduct - Overuse of Sick Leave & Family Bereavement
Sick Leave Self	Personal Illness
Staff Development	<b>Submit paper form to SPEC Ofc. If this was approved by a member district, please indicate so and list the chair of the committee.</b>
Work Comp	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Report of Injury form required</b>

➤ **Please make every effort to contact Absence Management by 6:00 AM.**

**LOSS OF PREP.** There is no place on the system for teachers to indicate if their class will be covered by a colleague. If this is the case, you should select “No sub required,” and note the name of the teacher subbing for you in the “Notes to Administrator” box. **If a name is not provided, your colleague will not receive payment for his/her loss of prep time.**

### SAVING YOUR ABSENCE REQUEST:

SAVE

Absence Management will find a substitute

SAVE & ASSIGN

Assign your own substitute. **WARNING!** Clicking the “save and assign” button indicates that you have PREARRANGED with the substitute that you are going to assign on the next page

# PAYROLL AND REIMBURSEMENTS

## **PAYMENT INFORMATION**

Every effort is made to avoid errors in your pay. If you believe an error was made, contact Julie Becker immediately. The staff will take the necessary steps to research the problem and to assure that any necessary correction is made promptly.

Pay dates are the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month or the Friday prior if the date falls on a weekend.

To access the Employee Self Service system to view your pay stub, go to the Southern Plains website. Your employee ID is your ID#. The first time you log into the system your password will be the last four digits of your social security number; you will be prompted to change this after you log into the system the first time.

## **EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT**

You must have written authorization prior to incurring an expense on behalf of Southern Plains Education Cooperative. To be reimbursed for all authorized expenses, you must submit an expense report accompanied by original receipts (detailed receipts must be provided) and approved by your supervisor. Expenses must be submitted within one month of the expenditure on the "Expense Form" located on the Southern Plains website.

Checks are written on the second and fourth Thursday of each month.

If the employee is directed to attend a training that involves overnight stay, meal reimbursements will be provided at the following rate:

Nonmetro \$30 per day

Metro \$40 per day

Out of state travel will be at the federal IRS rate which can be identified at [www.gsa.gov/perdiem](http://www.gsa.gov/perdiem)

## **TIME SHEETS**

All time sheets should include:

- 1) total hours
- 2) an hourly rate of pay
- 3) a total salary
- 4) a signature

Completed time sheets are due to Judy Berkland on the first working day of the month in which the check will be issued.

## **TIME AND ATTENDANCE (FRONTLINE)**

Southern Plains requires hourly staff to report time in the Frontline: Time and Attendance system. This is needed because of the Affordable Care Act, Special Education Fiscal Compliance, and the Fair Labor Standards Act require that there be documentation of actual hours worked.

- Time must be entered daily. Always enter the actual time worked; however, you do not need to clock out for lunch times of 30 minutes or less.
- If there is any 15-minute time or more that is not included in your original work agreement that you do not work, you must include this time in Absence Management.
- Whenever possible, clock in using the "barcode"; however, anytime you arrive early or stay later than your contracted time must be prior approved (verbally or via email) with the Assistant Director.

- Submit your time at the end of the last working day each week. By “submitting” your time, you are indicating that this time is a complete and accurate reflection of your time.

Time that is entered in the Time & Attendance system (such as riding the bus) that is more than your original work agreement will be paid as “gap” time. This time is paid in the following month. Only hours that are more than 40 hours worked per week are hours that count as “overtime”.

## STIPENDS

All stipends need prior approval. Stipends that are NOT contract related should be submitted on a PAYROLL PAYMENT VOUCHER, which is available in SPEC office. The voucher should list:

- 1) the hours worked
- 2) the amount of salary to be paid

The voucher must be submitted to Judy Berkland on the first working day of the month in which the check will be issued and needs to be signed by both the employee and the supervisor.

## PAY CHECKS

Monthly paychecks are issued through automatic deposit. The auto-deposits are made on the 25<sup>th</sup> of each month.

Employees submitting time sheets or payment vouchers, or those requesting extra duty pay will be paid the month following the date of work.

## AUTO DEPOSIT

If your auto deposit is split between two accounts (one designated as a dollar amount and the other as a percentage), the dollar amount you designated may be greater than the total of your ADDITIONAL summer check. In this case, the check will be automatically deposited into the account designated as a percentage. If you wish to change this, you must notify Julie/Sue C. by the first working day of the month in which the check will be issued. No adjustments will be made after the auto deposit transaction has been completed.

## WAGE GARNISHMENTS

When court-ordered deductions are to be taken from your paycheck, Southern Plains Education Cooperative acts in accordance with the Federal Consumer Credit Protection Act, which places restrictions on the total amount that may be garnished from your paycheck.

## BENEFITS

### CREDIT APPROVAL FOR LANE CHANGES (CERTIFIED STAFF)

The master agreement provides for salary lane changes for employees who improve their professional skills by continuing their graduate education. In order to count toward a lane change, a course must be germane to their assignment as determined by the director. Course credit approval forms must be completed and submitted to your director **before** you take the course. When credits have been earned, submit to the lane change form with appropriate documentation. Both of these forms are located on the Southern Plains website.

### DISABILITY INSURANCE

The cooperative pays the premium for a long-term disability insurance policy for eligible employees. There is a 120-day continuous workday waiting period of eligibility (30 days for employees with 5 or less years of experience). The policy pays 66 2/3% of an employee’s normal pay, subject to taxation, up to age 65 if necessary for continuing disability.

## **FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS**

The Southern Plains Education Cooperative maintains a flexible spending plan to which eligible employees may contribute pre-tax dollars from their pay to cover either of the following areas:

1. Unreimbursed Medical Expenses
2. Child Care Expenses

By participating in the Flexible Savings Account, employees can receive reimbursement of these before tax dollars and save themselves money.

## **HEALTH INSURANCE**

Currently Southern Plains provides an HSA compatible health insurance policy in combination with the Fairmont Area School District. We currently offer employee only or family coverage plans with district contributions depending upon collective bargaining and work agreements.

## **LIFE INSURANCE**

In most collective bargaining agreements/work agreements, the cooperative pays the premium for basic life insurance for eligible employees. This insurance currently has an accidental death and dismemberment provision.

## **RETIREMENT**

### *PERA & TRA*

All employees of Southern Plains Education Cooperative who meet minimum requirements of hours worked in a year are covered under either the Public Employee's Retirement Association or the Teacher's Retirement Association. The school district and the employer both contribute to those mandated state retirement plans in an amount set by law. Further information is available on the PERA website at [www.mnpera.org](http://www.mnpera.org) or the TRA website at [www.tra.state.mn.us](http://www.tra.state.mn.us)

### *DEFERRED ANNUITIES – 403(B)*

The school district sponsors district-approved companies who provide 403(b) deferred annuities/mutual funds. Depending upon work agreements, employees may contribute to these annuities with pre-tax dollars up to the maximum allowed by law. In some contracts/agreements, the employer will match a portion of the employee contribution up to the maximum specified in the contract/agreement. Please check your contract/agreement to see if there is any employer match and contact Julie Becker if you are interested in signing up to participate in the 403(b) program.

### *SOCIAL SECURITY (FICA)*

As an employee of the Southern Plains Education Cooperative, you are automatically covered under the Federal Social Security Act. You and Southern Plains contribute a portion of your gross salary to Social Security as required by law.

## **STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

Southern Plains assists employees in continuing education by subsidizing attendance and conferences and providing on-the-job training in some areas. Requests to attend conferences, conduct book studies, or other professional development should be submitted in writing on the Staff Development Request form available on the Southern Plains website.

## **WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

All employees are entitled to Workers' Compensation benefits. This coverage is automatic and immediate and protects you from on-the-job injury. An on-the-job injury is defined as an accidental injury suffered in the course of your work, or an illness which is directly related to performing your assigned job duties. All injuries or illnesses arising out of the

scope of your employment must be reported immediately. Employees returning to work and may be required to bring a doctor's clearance for returning to work.

Any employee who is injured on the job should report the injury to Ashley Blazejak at the SPEC Office within 24 hours; please complete the First Report of Injury Form (FROI). Reports should be made whether or not an individual anticipates they need to go to the doctor. The employee should also report to Ashley if they will go to the doctor after a period of time following the initial report. The form can be faxed to Ashley at 507-238-2361. If the injury is serious, seek medical treatment immediately.

TRA credit **does not** accumulate while on work comp. Employees have two options regarding work compensation:

- Option 1. Ashley will make a copy of the check
  - ♦ There will be a deduction from paycheck for total amount
  - ♦ .33 will be taken from sick leave
- Option 2. Employee will keep the check
  - ♦ SPEC will not pay any payroll
  - ♦ There will be no deduction in sick leave days

### **Return-to-Work Program**

Southern Plains Education Cooperative supports the practice of bringing injured employees back to work, as soon as they are medically able, to a position in our cooperative compatible with any physical restrictions they may have. We believe this practice serves the best interests of our employees and cooperative

Current positions can be modified to fit the medical limitations of injured employees by modifying assignments or working reduced hours. If this is not possible, temporary transitional jobs or temporary assignments may be made available.

This return-to-work program is an important part of our cooperative's commitment to manage work-related injuries in a way that's best for our employees and for this cooperative.

## **WORKPLACE PROCEDURES**

### **COMMUNICATIONS**

Employees are encouraged to maintain two-way communication. With employees working in more than 11 buildings across at least two counties, communication can be very difficult. Southern Plains board and administration does all it can to communicate information in a timely manner; however, employees are encouraged to ask questions and bring forward concerns. Employees are also encouraged to bring forward ideas as to how Southern Plains can enhance the services toward the member school districts.

### **LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY**

Employees may not use Southern Plains or their position within Southern Plains to represent or engage in legislative activities unless specifically approved by the Director.

### **OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT**

Employees are strongly discouraged from working with students they currently service in the student's home. If individuals do work in this situation, staff should refrain from sharing school information in the home environment or home information in the school environment. Individuals are encouraged to notify the director if they are working in the home environment with students currently serviced in the school setting.

## **COMPUTERS, ELECTRONIC MAIL, AND VOICE MAIL MESSAGE**

Southern Plains makes every effort to make technology available as a business tool to enhance performance and services you provide; however, along with this benefit come important responsibilities which you assume in using the technology resources. Southern Plains Internet Usage Policy is meant to advise those who use our equipment on the subject of access to and disclosure of computer-stored information, voice mail messages, and electronic mail messages created, sent or received by Southern Plains employees with Southern Plains equipment (Refer to Policy #524, "Internet Acceptable Use and Safety Policy"). Southern Plains employees must adhere to the Southern Plains technology policy and the policy associated with the equipment and network in which the employee is located. The data stored and recorded by electronic means can be accessed by technology staff and administration at any time; users should expect only limited privacy in the contents of files.

Employee use of social media/Student Relationships. It is important to continually be an ambassador to students and communities in a professional manner while promoting the morals and ethics of our districts and the cooperative. With current technology and social networking, it can promote difficulty with setting boundaries. Examples of social networking include blogs, wikis, podcasts, and social networks.

Social networks can be a valuable communication tool for both professional and personal relationships; however, it is important to continually be an ambassador to our students and communities in a professional manner while promoting the morals and ethics we promote. The following are guidelines for setting these boundaries:

- It is recommended that you keep separate social networks for personal use and professional use.
- If you have a social network that is used for personal use, it is strongly advised not "friend" minors that are students you service.
- For "professional" networks, be sure that all communication is appropriate and a positive representation of the districts we service.
- Do not submit or post confidential or protected information (directly or indirectly) about the member districts, its students, alumni, or employees.
- Ensure all social media posts follow policies of Southern Plains (nothing that is defamatory, proprietary, bullying, discriminatory, or harassing)
- Consider whether a particular posting puts your professional reputation and effectiveness servicing Southern Plains districts.
- When using social media be aware of security risk and phishing scams.

Employees are prohibited from establishing personal relationships with students that are unprofessional and thereby inappropriate. Do not fraternize with students as though they are peers or friends. Personal emails and text messages that are unrelated to class work or school activities are inappropriate. Sending pictures to students that are "personal" or any form of sexual dialogue is inappropriate and will result in disciplinary action. Technology tools are available to monitor student use of technology. These technology tools should only be used for instruction, technical support, or exam proctoring. If there are other reasons that the employee needs to access a student's device, the staff member should contact the principal prior to accessing the device.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY/DATA PRIVACY**

In the course of their position, all Southern Plains employees can undoubtedly gain knowledge of those students and their families that is considered confidential. Information contained in one or more of the students' files pertaining to diagnosis and treatment by another agency, child protection or social services reports, and reports from hospitals and clinics are all considered confidential. This includes information in a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and other special education forms.



Confidential information cannot be related to another party without the written consent of the parents. Confidential information may be shared in the school among school personnel but only if the individual clearly is in a "need to know" position.

The following are some guidelines to consider regarding the release of confidential information:

- Only share information that is germane to the student's education;
- Only share information with people that can use it to improve the student's education;
- Do not share confidential information in the lounge or out in the community. (If asked about your students in such situations simply state that data privacy laws do not allow you to discuss information about your students in those settings.);
- When in doubt about sharing information, consult the student's special education case manager, a coordinator, or the director of special services.

Employees may not gain confidential records (including, but not limited to, student information systems, due process software, and paper records) to gain information for reasons that are not germane to the individual's professional position.

See Cooperative Policy #206.

## **WEAPONS**

Individuals are not allowed to possess, use, or distribute weapons on school property.

## **JURY DUTY**

If you are called to jury duty, you are asked to log this absence into Absence Management as soon as possible. If there is a change in schedule, please notify Ashley Blazejak of the change. Following jury duty, please bring the check to the Southern Plains Education Cooperative office so a copy can be made. The amount of the check will be deducted from payroll.

## **MANDATED REPORTING OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

All employees are subject to the mandatory reporting policy. If you know or have reason to believe a child or vulnerable adult is being neglected or physically or sexually abused, or has been neglected or physically or sexually abused, or has been a victim of sex trafficking, within the preceding three years, you are required to immediately report the information to the local welfare agency, police department, or county sheriff. If the report is about abuse in school, both the oral and written report can be made to the Minnesota Department of Education. Every complaint of alleged child abuse that occurred at school or a school-related activity must be reported to MDE, even if the complaint is not believable. An oral report must be made within 24 hours by telephone or otherwise and a written report must follow within 72 hours (not counting weekends and holidays). Reporting the possible abuse to a supervisor is not required and does not constitute a report. (Refer to Policy #414, "*Mandated Reporting of Child Neglect of Physical or Sexual Abuse*" in the Board Policies.)

This section serves as your notice of the requirements as mandated reporters and that retaliation against an employee who reports alleged maltreatment is prohibited.

## **CORPORAL PUNISHMENT AND CRISIS INTERVENTION**

The use of corporal punishment, defined as an act of physical force upon a student for the purpose of punishing that student, is not acceptable and will not be tolerated as a disciplinary measure.

The use of prone restraint (the applied physical pressure to keep the student in a face down position on the floor or other surface) and seclusion (involuntary confinement of a student locked or barricaded alone in a room) is only to be

used in the case of an emergency of imminent danger to staff or others. Any use of these procedures should be reported to the administration immediately after use.

Staff that are likely to use physical interventions shall be trained in proper crisis prevention and restraint techniques. Trained procedures will be used by all staff. Additional trainings are available if there are additional areas of needs; if additional training or clarification is needed please contact the Director.

## **SMOKING**

Smoking and use of tobacco products are prohibited in all school buildings, the Southern Plains office, and vehicles. (Refer to Policy #419, *"Smoking/Tobacco Free Environment Policy"* in the Board Policies.)

## **DRUG-FREE WORKPLACE**

Southern Plains is a drug and tobacco-free workplace. (Refer to Policy #418, *"Drug-Free Workplace Policy"* and Policy #419, *"Tobacco-Free Environment"* in the Board Policies.) No tobacco, CBD, marijuana or other products are allowed on school property.

Southern Plains will occasionally use canines to search property. There is no expectation of privacy where such searches are concerned. This can include lockers, personal possessions, and automobiles on school property. Use, possession, or sale of illegal drugs may result in disciplinary action or arrest.

## **PESTICIDES**

All Minnesota school employees have the right to request to be notified prior to pesticide applications on school property. Pesticides include chemicals which are used to control insects, weeds, rodents or other pests as defined by the law (M.S. 123B.575, Subd.9).

Pests have the potential to sting, bite, contaminate, cause property damage, spread disease, cause asthma and/or trigger an allergic reaction. Therefore, school districts prevent and control them.

Because the long-term health effects on children from the application of such pesticides or the class of chemicals to which they belong may not be fully understood.

An estimated schedule of interior pest control inspections and possible treatments is available for review or copying at each school office. A similar estimated schedule is available for applications to school grounds of herbicides and other materials. Parents and staff may receive, at their expense, notification of pesticide application prior to their use in the event application is necessary on unscheduled days. If you wish to receive this notification, please contact the building office(s).

## **SCHOOL CLOSING/LATE STARTS/EARLY DISMISSALS/AUTO DIAL**

All efforts are made to report weather closures for the Arise building via the auto dial system. Please allow time for staff to make the posting.

Staff should follow the district schedule for the district in which they are assigned. So, if an employee starts in United South Central (USC) and USC has a two-hour late, the staff member should follow the two-hour late. If staff are scheduled for a home-visit, the staff member should notify the home-visit if they cannot make it to the home-visit due to the school weather cancelation and make every effort to make up the home-visit.

Staff should work with the local school district to request access to auto dial systems and keep information updated.

# ENDING EMPLOYMENT

## **INSURANCE NOTICE OF CONTINUATION COVERAGE RIGHTS**

The right to continuation coverage was created by federal law, the Consolidated Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA), as well as certain state laws. Continuation coverage may become available to you and to qualified dependents covered under insurance with Southern Plains Education Cooperative. For more information about your rights and obligations, you should review the insurance plan's Summary Plan Description or get a copy of the Plan Document from Julie.

Qualified beneficiaries who elect continuation coverage must pay for it. Qualifying events may include:

1. Hours of employment are reduced;
2. Your employment ends for any reason other than gross misconduct;
3. The employee dies and the employees' spouse or dependent child/children lose coverage as a result; or
4. An individual loses coverage due to becoming divorced or legally separated.

The Plan Administrator must be notified of the qualifying event within 30 days following the date coverage ends.

The length of coverage varies depending upon the qualifying event and plan policy.

## **CHANGE OF ADDRESS AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

Be sure to notify the Southern Plains office of changes of address, name, and additional contact information for at least three years after employment.

## **UNEMPLOYMENT/RE-EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**

If you are terminated from your job or laid off from your job, you may be eligible for this insurance. Please contact the local job service or [www.positivelyminnesota.com](http://www.positivelyminnesota.com). Additional resources for interviewing and resume writing are available, please contact the director.

## **FINAL PAY**

The payroll cycle varies depending upon a variety of factors. Generally, individuals in the two collective bargaining agreements are paid on a twelve-month cycle; the final paycheck runs through August of the summer following the end of the school year. This may vary depending upon the terms, conditions, and circumstances for each employee.

## **RETURN OF PROPERTY**

Any Southern Plains or member district property issued to use, such as computer equipment, keys, or identification must be returned to the Southern Plains office within 24 hours of your termination/resignation. You are responsible for any lost or damaged items. The value of any property issued and not returned may be deducted from your paycheck, and you may be required to sign a wage deduction authorization form for this purpose.

# ARISE ACADEMY

Space is available at the Arise Academy for itinerant staff to store materials, work for short periods of time, or hold meetings upon request. Please work with the Director or Southern Plains Office Coordinator to identify space.

For staff assigned space at Arise, the following are expectations.

## Heating and Ventilation

- Windows need to remain closed to ensure the system works efficiently. Unless given specific permission on a given day by the Director, do not open windows. (During the period of covid-19 fresh air is believed to help alleviate the virus. During the pandemic, the windows can be opened. Be aware that this will impact the temperature in other rooms.)
- Nothing should be done to tamper with the thermostats in any way to impact the temperature control; doing so may result in disciplinary action.
- Staff are encouraged to dress in layers to accommodate to the temperature of the building.

## Wall Surfaces

- Excessive visual stimulation can result in a negative impact on student performance. Anything posted on the wall should impact student learning.
- In order to protect our wall surfaces, the following is expected:
  - To secure items to the wall, please use wall putty, painters tape, or pins.
  - Tape of any kind other than painters tape may not be used on any painted surfaces.
  - Anything that requires nails, screws, or similar installation may only be completed by custodial staff with permission from the Director.

## Ceilings

- Nothing should be secured to the ceiling tiles or ceiling grid.

## Storage Areas

- It is expected that staff will keep storage areas neat and clean.
- The Principal and Director retain the right to limit use of storage areas to assigned areas only.

## Safety

- Please be sure doors are closed upon exit.
- Never give your ID to a student to access the building, except in the case of an emergency.

## Electrical Items

- Approval from the Coordinator is needed to bring in refrigerators, microwaves, coffee pots, and similar electrical appliances.
- Extension cords should be used sparingly and may not be used for more than a few hours; they should not go across walkways. One power strip that is run along the wall can be used.
- String lights should only be used for a few weeks close to the holiday. They cannot be used as a permanent lighting source as they are a fire hazard.
- Lamps, etc. must be plugged into the wall outlet or a power strip that runs along the wall.
- Heating sources (i.e. space heaters) must be ceramic and have an auto shut-off if tipped.

# EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Employee Handbook contains important information about Southern Plains Education Cooperative; the contents of this employee handbook summarize some of the programs and policies for Southern Plains. Further clarification of benefits and rights are clarified within individual contracts and work agreements. I understand I should consult the Director of Special Services regarding any questions not answered in the handbook

Since the information, policies, and benefits described herein are subject to change at any time, I acknowledge that revisions to the handbook may occur. All such changes will generally be communicated through official notices and a complete copy is available on the Southern Plains website; the board policies and/or collective bargaining agreement take precedence over anything within this manual. Should any part of the Employee Manual be found to be unenforceable or invalid, such finding does not invalidate the entire Employee Manual, but only that part.

I have access to a copy of the Southern Plains Education Cooperative Employee Handbook on the website, [www.southernplainedcoop.org](http://www.southernplainedcoop.org) and have read it on the date listed below. I understand that I am expected to read the entire handbook, accept the terms of the handbook, and agree to comply with the Southern Plains Education Cooperative policies and requirements. Additionally, I will sign this Acknowledgment of Receipt, and return it to the Southern Plains Office. I understand that this form will be retained in my personnel file.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Employee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Employee's Name - Printed

I recognize there are occasionally times member school districts ask for information regarding my name, address, and additional contact information (examples include: emergency call lists, weather related announcements, fall inservice information, etc.). I give Southern Plains Education Cooperative the right to share this information.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Employee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please return to Ashley Blazejak by September 15, 2023