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Module 3 Question= Hazing

Central Montcalm Board of Education Members:

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to speak to and present this document to you. My purpose is to make you aware of the dangers of hazing and the preventative measures I am suggesting to protect students against the negative effects of hazing. This document consists of six important sections: a definition of hazing, what is acceptable, what is unacceptable, what punishments I feel should be given to those who haze, where the school's policies/procedures concerning hazing can be found, and other information pertaining to hazing that I feel the school board should be aware of. With the hazing incidents that have recently taken place at neighboring school districts, I feel that Central Montcalm should be proactive in their approach to eliminating all forms of hazing.

Hazing is defined by the state of Michigan in public acts 111 and 112 as "An intentional, knowing or reckless act by a person who acted alone or with others that was directed against an individual and that person knew or should have known would endanger the physical health or safety of the individual, and that was done for the purpose of affiliation with, participation in, or maintaining membership in

any organization.” Hazing can be broadly interpreted by different people but essentially if someone is put in harm’s way as form of “initiation”, this can be considered hazing.

Florida State University (FSU) identifies the four D’s of hazing as activities which: cause discomfort, demeans, disgraces, or degrades. Under FSU’s definition, hazing does not have to include physical acts. The effects of hazing may be psychological or can be acts which embarrass individuals in front of their peers. Hazing is typically thought of a problem seen in team sports; however, sports is not the only place where hazing can exist.

Clubs, academic teams, band, choir, etc. are all avenues in which hazing can exist. Essentially, any group that labels itself as a team, club, etc. could be susceptible to hazing. With my background in athletics I will primarily be using athletic examples in this paper; however, these examples could be used across many different groups and organizations outside of sports. Hazing does not have to be something serious such as assault or activities which could endanger someone’s life. Peer pressure from other members of a team to have everyone shave his/her head as a way to unify the team could be considered hazing.

For years the Cedar Springs Red Hawks boys’ basketball team members have all dyed their hair blonde for the start of district competition. Although many people view this as boys being boys, this could be considered hazing. No, dying a person’s hair does not put them in danger, but the possible ramifications of not following the group could be detrimental to individual team members who choose not to follow suit with the team activity. Hazing can be broadly interpreted;

therefore, the school board would be both prudent and proactive if it moved forward to educate both coaches and advisors to understand what hazing is and to work hard to prevent it.

After reading possible situations where hazing may exist you may be wondering if any team/group interaction is not seen as hazing. There are several acceptable alternatives to team building that do not include hazing; they include: team get-togethers (dinners/team nights), assigning captains, learning the history of the organization, film study, etc. Team nights or team dinners are great places for team members to bond. Team nights are occasions for both players and coaches to interact with one another outside of the athletic arena. This downtime provides opportunities to build rapport with one another and strengthen the unity of the team. These team nights will have an adult coach present to monitor that hazing is not occurring within the team. I have had multiple team nights in my years of coaching, and I have always believed the benefits of this activity have helped to bond team members into a stronger team.

Assigning captains is an acceptable practice as the coach works to build team unity. Selecting appropriate captains for your team is helpful in assisting coaches to monitor the team. Appropriate captains are student-athletes who are good role models for their peers. Student athletes who are positive role models generally have a strong work ethic, possess leadership skills, get good grades in school, and also excel in the athletic arena. By having trustworthy captains, the team can police itself concerning hazing issues. Making team captains aware of the signs of hazing and the dangers, consequences and punishments for hazing will insure that the

captains help steer the team to make positive decisions and stay away from hazing activities.

Also, through learning the history of the team and having film studies this makes team members realize that they are a part of something that is bigger than themselves. All young people desire to be part of a group and thrive on acceptance from peers. By teaching members about the history of the team, coaches are reinforcing the positive aspects of being part of an organization. Film studies are another great opportunity for student-athletes to spend time with one another for the betterment of the team.

Many team activities, however, are unacceptable for the school to allow. These types of activities include: initiations, forcing freshmen (younger players) to do menial tasks, peer pressure that forces members of the group to abide, etc. Initiations for younger players being received into a group can be very dangerous. Although some initiations may seem harmless these activities still fall under the category of hazing. Even if team members (and their parents/guardians) willingly agree to participate in such rituals, this is still a form of hazing. Some traditions may have been used by teams for generations, however if these traditions consist of hazing, they should be eliminated immediately. If a particular group does have time honored traditions that they want to keep, choosing a different outlet for this type of activity must be the correct course of action. Having a team night or beginning of the season dinner is a better way to accommodate the requests of players and parents to honor new team members.

Having younger players do menial tasks is also a form of hazing. I remember in high school golf all the freshmen had to pick up the range balls every practice because that is what freshmen were suppose to do. At the time I did not consider this a form of hazing, but looking back now I realize that as freshmen we were subjected to performing a menial task, a form of hazing. I also remember playing basketball in high school and the younger players always had to do the more trivial tasks. If someone needed to carry the medical kit, it was always going to be the person with the lowest seniority. Despite the fact that many of these time honored traditions are not considered to be a problem by players, coaches, or parents, they can still be considered a forms of hazing.

Older players generally initiate hazing in which the more dominant group exerts power over the younger and seemingly weaker members. However, older players are not the only members of the team who can engage in hazing activities. Coaches need to be mindful of their own actions. The examples I cited with the range balls being retrieved by the freshmen and the younger players in basketball having to do the menial tasks were traditions brought to the programs and encouraged by the coaches. The coaches believed in a hierarchy in which the coaches were in charge, followed by the seniors, juniors, sophomores, and last the freshmen. Since the coaches reinforced this chain of command, it became acceptable for the older players to use the same status system.

I remember countless times as a freshmen being told to go do something because "You're a freshmen." This hierarchy of power was being reinforced by both veteran players and the coaching staff, and I had no choice but to comply with the

demands. Although there was never a problem with this system in my high school career, it seems obvious how quickly a more serious form of hazing could occur. The only option for younger athletes was to endure the humiliation and wait patiently for the next year to move up the power hierarchy. In my high school career hazing was a right of passage. I am hopeful current Central Montcalm students will not have this same experience.

My punishment policy for hazing would be to have a zero tolerance policy. Upon hearing of a possible hazing incident I would inform the athletic director, and we would conduct an immediate investigation. Suspensions or dismissals from the team would not happen automatically with a hazing accusation; however, the investigation would be done promptly. Upon finding evidence of hazing, I would suspend the player/players in question immediately from all team-related activities. I do not believe we should punish innocent students until they are proven guilty; however, I do feel a need to discover the truth in a timely manner.

If a player/players were found guilty of hazing they would immediately be suspended from the team. More serious acts of hazing would lead to being removed from the team for either a season or permanently. I do not feel that a policy that suspends players for “x” games for certain hazing and “y” games for other types of hazing is a good policy. Hazing is so open-ended and can occur in so many ways that it would be impossible to have a policy that would cover every type of hazing. Each scenario is different and unique and should be treated as such. My discipline policy for hazing would be that **NO FORM OF HAZING WILL BE TOLERATED**. Student-athletes who are found guilty of hazing will be punished. Punishments for hazing would depend on

the severity of the action. Disciplinary measures can include, but are not limited to the following: suspensions, counseling, loss of captain status, or removal from the team. Hazing incidents which violate the law would be turned over to the Montcalm County Sherriff's Department.

This hazing policy would be visible to all members of the boys' basketball program by its inclusion in the Central Montcalm Boys' Basketball Player Handbook. This handbook would include: all team rules, history, plays, phone numbers, etc. that players may need. Not only would each player have a copy of this, before players are allowed to practice, they will be required to sign a release stating that they have read the contents of the handbook and agree to abide by its rules. Having these signed release forms gives me more protection as a coach, and provides documentation I have shared the hazing policy with players and parents.

In addition to the release form, I will also be having a player/parent meeting at the beginning of each season. During this meeting, I will go through the handbook with student-athletes and their parents, and I will invest some significant time going through the hazing policy. I will remind parents of the dangers of hazing and that with their support these incidents are less likely to occur. I will also remind everyone at the meeting that hazing is something we have seen in our own community. Just this season, a local boys' basketball team was involved in a hazing incident. Not only did that team suffer losses because of the suspensions that followed, it made local news on every television station in west Michigan and gave the school and team very poor publicity. This was a team that was predicted to do very well in the state tournament, yet they were

defeated in the first round of district play. The distraction of the hazing incident clearly played a role in the team's end of the season collapse.

Last, in the preseason meeting I will be sure to explain to parents/players that hazing is not just an incident that the school investigates. Legal investigations and punishments can result from hazing. I will again bring up the example from the neighboring school district and how the players in question are now being investigated for their actions by the Montcalm County Sheriff's Department. I want everyone at the meeting to be aware that punishments for hazing do not necessarily stop with the school district.

In addition to having the parent/player meeting, I will also meet with my staff to make certain that all coaches are monitoring their team(s) for possible hazing and reinforcing the program/district policy. I will meet with the captains of each team and discuss with them the importance of **not** engaging in hazing activities and to encourage their teammates to do the same. In order to give our program the best chance of not experiencing a hazing incident, it will require everyone to have the same commitment and the diligence in monitoring behavior and actions of team members and themselves.

As coaches we have to set a good example. We cannot expect student-athletes not to haze one another if we as coaches are doing the same things to players. Even something such as sitting freshmen at the front of the bus or sitting freshmen two people to a seat to give varsity players their own seat could be considered a form of hazing. As the head coach I will not only be monitoring the players' actions, but also those of my coaching staff to be sure they are setting a good example for their student-athletes.

Setting a good example should also be used from player-to-player. I intend to have the varsity players be visible in the community. As part of them being visible, I would like for them to present to our middle school players about some of the important aspects of being a responsible high school student-athlete. In having them talk with these middle school student-athletes, I will ask my varsity players to explain the dangers of hazing and how we as a high school program do not tolerate hazing and that players refrain from such actions. Middle school players always look up to the older high school players, and having this interaction between these two groups will help younger players to know and to follow the rules and expectations as they advance to higher levels.

Last, I think in order to have an effective policy against hazing it is imperative to secure input from surrounding school districts. I will bring up the issue of hazing at our next Central State Activities Association coaches meeting. Also, I would discuss hazing with other area coaches to exchange ideas on how to fight hazing in Montcalm county.

In closing, I would urge the Central Montcalm Board of Education to consider including a hazing policy for the school district, specifically within the activities code for high school and middle school athletes. Hazing is something that occurs in all parts of the country and with the recent problems at a neighboring school district, I believe that Central Montcalm needs to be proactive in fighting hazing and providing swift consequences to those who do not follow the rules.

Respectfully Yours,

Dan Basom