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QUESTIONS

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Managing Non-District Provided Furniture in School Spaces

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The presence of non-district provided furniture in classrooms, offices, breakrooms, and other common areas can introduce various safety, compliance, and maintenance concerns. Unauthorized items, such as couches, bookshelves, cabinets, and area rugs, may create blind spots, pose tripping hazards, increase fire risks, and even provide opportunities for inappropriate behavior.

While some of these items may be acceptable, it's a best practice for districts to establish a policy with a formal approval process and clear criteria for determining what employees are allowed to bring on campus. This approach helps ensure consistency, safety, and accountability while reducing potential risks.

Several factors should be considered when determining whether non-district provided furniture should be allowed. To help ensure these items meet safety and operational standards, it is recommended that the following criteria be considered:

- **Condition, Cleanliness & Structural Stability** – Items should be in good condition, free from damage, easy to clean, and structurally stable for daily use. Upholstered furniture should be commercial-grade, treated with flame retardant, and certified by the manufacturer for safety and durability. Items such as bookshelves and cabinets should be properly secured to prevent tipping hazards. Rugs should be in good condition, with secure edges and non-slip backing to minimize tripping hazards.

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- Size, Placement & Accessibility Compliance – Items should not obstruct pathways or exits, or violate Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. They should also not interfere with emergency exits, fire alarms, heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC) systems, or classroom functionality. Additionally, the placement should maintain clear sightlines for student supervision, reducing risks related to misconduct or inappropriate behavior.
- Intended Use – Items should align with the educational environment and serve a necessary instructional or operational purpose. Furniture and equipment should directly support teaching, learning, or school operations rather than be for personal comfort or decoration.

In addition to establishing criteria for all non-district provided furniture, a policy should also include procedures to assist with its management. Consider the following:

- Pre-Approval Requirement – A procedure for employees to submit a request before bringing in any outside furniture, including a form with item details and/or photos for review.
- Classroom & Office Audits – Regular inspections to verify compliance with the policy, ensuring any non-approved items are removed.
- Removal & Disposal: Ensure employees are aware that they are responsible for removing both compliant and non-compliant non-district items at their own expense to avoid incurring district disposal costs. This includes taking responsibility for removal when leaving their position or no longer needing the items.

While implementing a strict 'no outside furniture' policy would eliminate the challenges associated with non-district provided furniture, it may not be realistic. For employees who may require additional furniture due to accessibility, comfort, or instructional needs, the district may consider establishing a process as part of the policy to review these requests and determine whether accommodations can be provided through approved channels. If a district is already experiencing challenges with non-district provided furniture, it may be beneficial to implement a retroactive approval process. This would include auditing classrooms, identifying non-compliant items, and establishing a process for removal or approval based on district-set criteria. By establishing a policy with set criteria and a process for approval, the district can ensure compliance while maintaining flexibility to accommodate appropriate items when necessary.

For additional guidance on managing personal appliances, please refer to our Risk Simplified on Mitigating Employee Use of Personal Appliances. For any inquiries regarding non-district provided furniture or personal appliances, please contact GSRMA Member Services at memberservices@gsrma.org