

PERSONNEL

Professional Boundaries Between Staff and Students

The purpose of this procedure is to provide district staff with information regarding appropriate professional boundaries that must be maintained with students. In a professional staff/student relationship, school employees must conduct themselves in a way that maintains interpersonal boundaries that are consistent with the legal and ethical duty of care that school personnel have for students.

A boundary invasion is an act or omission by an adult school employee, volunteer, or contractor, or that has the potential to abuse the staff/student relationship.

An inappropriate boundary invasion is an act, omission, or pattern of such behavior by a school employee, volunteer, or contractor that does not have an educational purpose, that exceeds the professional purpose and/or necessity of the adult individual's association with students, and that results in abuse or creates the appearance of abuse of the staff/student professional relationship.

A. Unacceptable Conduct

Examples of inappropriate boundary invasions by staff members include but are not limited to the following:

1. Any type of inappropriate physical or sexual conduct with a student or any other conduct that violates the board's policies regarding student welfare, the educational environment, or conduct toward current or former students. Inappropriate physical conduct includes hugging, kissing, or being "overly touchy" with students without any legitimate educational or professional purpose;
2. Showing intimate or unduly revealing photos to a student or asking a student to provide intimate or unduly revealing photos; taking inappropriate photographs of a student or taking an inordinate number of photographs of a student.
3. Any kind of flirtatious or sexual communications with a student;
4. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the professional staff/student relationship. This includes, but is not limited to, favoring one or more students with special privileges, allowing them to remain in the classroom during non-class times, unilaterally removing a student from another class or activity, or engaging in "peer like" behavior with one or more students;
5. Providing alcohol, drugs, or tobacco to students or failing to report their use of these substances;
6. For non-guidance/counseling staff, allowing or encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. If a student initiates such discussions, staff members shall refer the student to appropriate guidance/counseling staff. In either case, staff involvement should be limited to a direct connection to the student's school performance;

7. Sending students on personal errands unrelated to any educational purpose;
8. Banter, allusions, jokes, or innuendos of a sexual nature with students;
9. Favorably commenting on a student's appearance if it is unduly revealing or if the comments have no educational value;
10. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns or other private matters to one or more students;
11. Addressing students or permitting students to address staff members or volunteers with personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner;
12. Maintaining personal contact (including "friending" or "following") a student on any social networking application or device;
13. Sending phone, e-mail, text, instant messenger, or other forms of written or electronic communication to students when the communication is unrelated to schoolwork or other legitimate school business. If staff members have educational or legitimate school business to conduct, they shall include a parent/guardian and a school administrator on the communication. If staff members receive a student's communication, the staff member shall reply by including the student's parent/guardian and an administrator. Staff members should use school e-mail addresses and phone numbers and the parents' phone numbers for communications with students, except in an emergency situation;
14. Exchanging or providing personal gifts, cards, or personal letters with an individual student;
15. Socializing or spending time with students (including but not limited to activities such as going out for beverages, meals or movies, shopping, traveling and recreational activities) outside of school-sponsored events, except as participants in organized community activities;
16. Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation or failing to timely report that occurrence;
17. Providing a student with information or views about other students or staff members without a legitimate professional purpose;
18. Asking a student to keep a secret or not to disclose any inappropriate communications or conduct;
19. Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy, (e.g. walking in on the student in the bathroom or a hotel room on a field trip);
20. Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others; and/or
21. Any home visits unless other adults are present, the student(s) are invited for an activity related to school, and the student's parent/guardian and an administrator are informed and have consented.

B. Reporting Violations

Students and their parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to notify the principal (or other administrator) if they believe a teacher or other staff member may be engaging in conduct that violates this policy.

Staff members are required to promptly notify the principal, program administrator, or Human Resources administrator if they become aware of a situation that may constitute a violation of this policy. Staff members should not wait before reporting suspicious or concerning behavior to determine the explanation.

C. Investigation and Documentation

When an administrator receives information that a boundary invasion has occurred or might have occurred, the administrator must document, in writing, the concern and provide a copy of the documentation to the designated Employee Services administrator. The Employee Services administrator will see that the matter is investigated and documented, and if boundary invasions have occurred without a legitimate educational or safety purpose, that appropriate action is taken and documented. The Employee Services administrator will maintain a file documenting reports, letters of direction, and discipline relating to professional boundary investigations.

D. Disciplinary Action

Staff violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. The violation may also be reported to the state Office of Professional Practices. Violations involving sexual or other abuse subject to mandatory reporting requirements will result in referral to Child Protective Services and/or law enforcement in accordance with the board's policy on reporting child abuse and neglect.

E. Training

All new staff members and volunteers will receive training on appropriate staff/student boundaries within three months of employment or beginning of service. Such initial training may be on-line training. Site administration and classified employee supervisors shall see to it that more detailed, live training covering this entire procedure shall occur every two years for all schools and work sites. Site administration and classified employee supervisors will also address professional boundaries at staff meetings early in the year.

F. Dissemination of Policy and Reporting Protocols

Training regarding this policy and procedure will be provided to staff. This policy and procedure shall be included in orientation materials for new employees, and shall be posted on the district web site. Information regarding this policy should be incorporated into staff and volunteer training materials on abuse and harassment.