

STAFF-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS and PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY

DEFINITIONS

(a) Staff: Staff is defined as the following:

1. Includes all full-time, part-time and substitute individuals employed by the District, including as examples: any student teachers, practicum students, fieldwork students, teachers, pupil service staff, administrators, supervisors, support staff, activity directors, coaches, athletic trainers, and District volunteers;
2. employees of contractors or agencies and independent contractors;
3. volunteers of non-District organizations.

(b) Student: Student is defined as any individual enrolled in the District, including part-time students and students who are age 18 or older, and also includes any individual of school-age who is participating in any District-sponsored class, program, or activity that is offered for children and other school-age youth.

The District's expectation is that all staff members interactions with students will be grounded in the staff member's District-authorized role and remain consistent with the scope of the staff member's assigned duties and responsibilities. The District recognizes that the vast majority of staff members ~~to~~ maintain the highest professional, moral and ethical standards in their conduct with students. However, one purpose for identifying rules, guidelines and standards in written policy is to assist such staff in identifying potentially inappropriate conduct by others that should be reported for further review or supervisory follow-up.

All District staff members are expected to accept responsibility for their conduct, and to understand that their conduct may be regarded as representative of the District, and that even off duty conduct may adversely affect the abilities of a staff member to effectively perform his/her job duties. Staff is expected to abide by a professional standard of conduct and model good citizenship for students, parents, and the community.

The interactions and relationships between staff members and students should be based upon mutual respect and trust; an understanding of the appropriate boundaries between adults and students in an educational setting; and consistent with the educational mission of the District. Even if a student participates willingly in an activity, prohibited interactions between staff and students (regardless of the student's age) are a violation of this policy.

Specifically, the District expects that its staff maintain appropriate professional relationships with students in particular, and any youth in general, and be sensitive to the appearance of impropriety in their conduct with students. Staff members are encouraged to discuss issues with their principal or supervisor whenever they are unsure whether particular conduct may constitute a violation of this policy.

Employees must understand that even an appearance of inappropriate relationships will adversely impact their effectiveness in the school environment. Therefore, employees must be diligent in maintaining the highest ethical standards when interacting with youth both inside and outside the school environment and are strictly prohibited from forming such personal relationships with students outside the classroom.

PROHIBITED CONDUCT

Staff members are prohibited from engaging in any of the following types of prohibited conduct, regardless of whether the conduct occurs on or off school property or whether the conduct occurs during or outside of school hours. The following list of prohibited conduct does not, and is not intended to, constitute the entire list of conduct for which discipline may be imposed:

- (a) Engaging in any romantic or sexual relationships with students, including dating, flirting, sexual contact, inappropriate physical displays of affection, or sexually suggestive comments between staff and students, regardless of whether staff or student initiates the behavior, whether the relationship is consensual, or whether the student has parental permission;
- (b) Fostering, encouraging, or participating in inappropriate emotionally or socially intimate relationships with students in which the relationship is outside the bounds of the reasonable, professional staff-student relationship and in which the relationship could reasonably cause a student to view the staff person as more than a teacher, administrator, or advisor;
- (c) No staff member may engage in grooming behaviors with any student. In this context, grooming is defined as any conduct or communication that fosters, exploits, or is intended to gauge a student's vulnerability or willingness to engage in inappropriate behavior. Grooming may involve a course of repeated or escalating conduct that normalizes inappropriate conduct from a student's perspective or otherwise desensitizes a student to inappropriate behaviors. Grooming often involves but is not limited to sexual contexts. Examples of conduct that can constitute grooming include:
 - a. Singling out a student for inordinate and inappropriate special attention, which may include exchanging special gifts, arranging to meet or communicate at inappropriate times or locations or without a sufficient school-related purpose, or making sexually-suggestive or otherwise inappropriate comments about the student's body or appearance.
 - b. Engaging in expressly or implicitly sexualized communication, including exchanging information about a student's or an adult's sexual experiences or communicating other sexual content or sexual subject matter
 - c. Stating or agreeing that any inappropriate conduct or communications between the staff member and a student will be secrets or confidences that should not be shared or disclosed to others.
 - d. Using threats, bribery, fear, intimidation, harassment, embarrassment, or guilt to encourage secrecy in the relationship or to facilitate the start or continuation of inappropriate conduct or an inappropriate relationship.
- (d) Initiating or continuing communications with students for reasons unrelated to any appropriate purpose, including oral or written communication; telephone calls; electronic communication such as texting, instant messaging, email, chat rooms, Facebook, or other social networking sites; webcams; or photographs. Electronic and online communications with students, should only occur through district approved platforms and no communication should occur through personal accounts;
- (e) Socializing with students outside of class time for reasons unrelated to any appropriate purpose;
- (f) Providing alcohol (regardless of age) or drugs – either prescription or illegal (except for those provided in accordance with District policy on medication administration) – to students.

- (g) No staff member may engage in any activity, conduct, or communication that constitutes, encourages, or invites either unlawful conduct or conduct that would reasonably endanger the safety or well-being of any person.

The following expectations are necessarily context-sensitive and require staff members to reasonably exercise judgement and discretion in particular circumstances in order to maintain appropriate boundaries with students:

1. Staff shall not engage with students in inappropriately peer-like social relationships via activities or communications that reasonably may compromise the staff member's ability to perform his/her District role, including his/her ability to serve as an effective and objective adult authority figure.
2. Staff shall not foster, encourage, or maintain relationships with students in which there is an inappropriate level of communicative, interpersonal, or emotional intimacy that reasonably may compromise the staff member's ability to perform his/her District role, including his/her ability to serve as an effective and objective adult authority figure, even though there may be no sexual or romantic aspect to the relationship.
3. Staff shall appropriately limit their physical contact with students. For example, staff are expected to avoid physical contact with students that, taken in context, a reasonable person would be likely to perceive as suggestive of romantic/sexual interest or involvement, or as inappropriately familiar or intimate and without a legitimate purpose.

If a staff member identifies a situation what could potentially be perceived as a failure to maintain appropriate boundaries with one or more students, but believes that the activity, communication, or conduct would, in fact, be appropriate under the specific circumstances, the appropriate course of action is the the staff member to obtain advance permission from a supervising administrator and, when practical, advance parental consent.

If a District staff member is approached by a student with or otherwise learns of a possible student problem or concern that is outside of the District staff member's scope of responsibility, the staff member is expected to refer the matter to or connect the student with the appropriate District resource(s). If the staff member is uncertain which District resource(s) would be appropriate in the situation, the staff member should contact the building administrator or Director of Pupil Services.

Limitations on the Scope and Application of this Policy

This policy and any rule or guidelines developed under this policy shall not be construed or applied in a manner that would impede a staff member's ability to:

1. Reasonably perform his/her District-authorized role and responsibilities, provided that his/her communications and conduct remain grounded in legitimate educational purposes and sound professional practice. Depending substantially on the staff member's specific District-authorized role(s). Legitimate educational purposes may include matters that relate to academics, extracurricular activities, counseling, advising, health and medical matters, social services, or operational services (e.g. transportation or food service).
2. Reasonably respond to exigent circumstances that suggest that there is an imminent threat to the health, safety, or property of any person. If a staff member relies on the exception to engage in communication or interaction with a student that may otherwise be inappropriate (e.g., due to the time, location, method, or subject matter), the staff member is expected to promptly report the relevant circumstances to the building administrator or Director of Pupil Services.

Application of the Policy to Non-District Relationships

In establishing the policy and the expectations identified herein, the District recognizes that, in some situations, staff members will have non-District relationships with and non-District social connections to certain students such that certain activities, communications, and other conduct that may be inappropriate in the absence of such non-District relationships are, in fact, appropriate. This includes students to whom a staff member is related, as well as other situations in which the staff member has a reasonable basis for the relationship and its attendant activities, communications, and other conduct that is independent of the staff member's District role (e.g., the student is a friend of the staff member's own child, the student is the child of a family friend, the staff member and student are both members of the same non-District organization or community group, etc). Except as provided in the next paragraph, this policy and any rules or guidelines adopted under this policy are not intended and shall not be applied to limit or constrain conduct, activities, or communications that are based on such legitimate non-District relationships.

A District staff member who engages in activities, communication, or other conduct under the "non-District relationship" exception identified in the previous paragraph does so with the limitation that where there is a sufficient nexus between such conduct and the staff member's District role and responsibilities, the District may impose lawful consequences for and issue lawful directives relating to conduct that is inappropriate or that impairs the staff member's ability to be effective in his/her District role. The same limitation applies to conduct that occurs off duty or outside the scope of the staff member's District role.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

- (a) **Duty to Report.** Any person with knowledge or suspicion of an improper relationship between staff and a student must immediately report the conduct to school administration. Nothing in this paragraph is intended to relieve mandated reporters of their obligations under state and local statutes.
- (b) **Protection from Retaliation.** Staff who makes a good-faith report of a suspected fraternization violation, or who cooperates in inquiries or investigations related to the investigation of such a report, shall be protected from retaliation in accordance with District policy.

Consequences for Policy Violations

- (a) **Discipline.** The District will take appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including termination, against any staff found to have violated this policy or any rules or directives that the District issues in furtherance of this policy. The District may also report the circumstances relating to certain policy violations to law enforcement and other applicable authorities.
- (b) **Report Procedures.** Reports of suspected ~~fraternization~~ violations shall follow the procedures set forth in appropriate Board policy and/or State statute.

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