

## **Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries**

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to provide all staff, students, volunteers and community members with information about their role in protecting children from inappropriate conduct by adults. This policy applies to all district staff and volunteers. For purposes of this policy and its procedure, the terms "district staff," "staff member(s)," and "staff" also include volunteers.

### **General Standards**

The board expects all district staff to maintain the highest professional standards when they interact with students. District staff are required to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning by consistently maintaining professional boundaries. Professional staff/student boundaries are consistent with the legal and ethical duty of care that district employees have for students. The interactions and relationships between district staff and students should be based upon mutual respect and trust, an understanding of the appropriate boundaries between adults and students in and outside of the educational setting, and consistency with the educational mission of the district. District staff will not intrude on a student's physical and emotional boundaries unless the intrusion is necessary to serve a demonstrated educational purpose. An educational purpose is one that relates to the staff member's duties in the district. Additionally, staff members are expected to be aware of the appearance of impropriety in their own conduct and the conduct of other staff when interacting with students. Staff members will notify and discuss issues with their building administrator or supervisor whenever they suspect or question whether their own or another staff member's conduct is inappropriate or constitutes a violation of this policy. The board recognizes that staff may have familial and pre-existing social relationships with parents or guardians and students. Staff members should use appropriate professional judgment when they have a dual relationship to students to avoid violating this policy, the appearance of impropriety, and the appearance of favoritism. Staff members shall proactively discuss these circumstances with their building administrator or supervisor. The following activities can create an actual impropriety or the appearance of impropriety. Whenever possible, adults should avoid these situations. If unavoidable these activities should be pre-approved by the appropriate administrator. If not pre-approved, the adult must report the occurrence to the appropriate administrator as soon as possible.

- A. Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others;
- B. Inviting or allowing individual students to visit the adult's home;
- C. Visiting a student's home;
- D. Sending or soliciting email, text messages or other electronic communications to the student, except when the communication relates to school business, and the building administrator or supervisor has consented to such communications;
- E. Social networking with students for non-educational purposes.

### **Inappropriate Boundary Invasion Examples**

Examples of possible inappropriate boundary invasions by adults include but are not limited to the following:

- A. Any type of inappropriate physical contact with a student or any other conduct that might be considered harassment under the board's policy on Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students;
- B. Showing pornography to a student;
- C. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the professional staff-student relationship;
- D. Socializing where students are consuming alcohol, drugs or tobacco;
- E. For non-guidance/counseling staff, encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. If a student initiates such discussions, adults are expected to refer the student to appropriate guidance/counseling staff. In either case, adult involvement should be limited to a direct connection to the student's school performance;
- F. Sending students on personal errands unrelated to any educational purpose;
- G. Banter, allusions, jokes or innuendos of a sexual nature with students;
- H. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns or other private matters to one or more students;
- I. Addressing students or permitting students to address staff members with personalized terms of endearment, pet names or otherwise in an overly familiar manner;
- J. Maintaining personal contact with a student outside of school by phone, e-mail, text messaging, instant messenger or Internet chat rooms, social networking websites, or letters beyond homework or other legitimate school business without including the parent/guardian;
- K. Exchanging personal gifts, cards or letters with an individual student;
- L. 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;
- M. Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation;
- N. Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy, (e.g. walking in on the student in the bathroom); and/or
- O. Any other conduct that fails to maintain professional staff/student boundaries.

### **Use of Technology**

The board supports the use of technology to communicate for educational purposes. However, district staff are prohibited from inappropriately communicating with students on-line or from engaging in any conduct on social networking websites that violates the law, district policies or procedures, or other generally recognized professional standards. Staff whose conduct violates this policy may face discipline and/or termination consistent with the district's policies and procedures, acceptable use agreement, and collective bargaining agreements, as applicable.

The superintendent/designee will develop protocols for reporting and investigating allegations and develop procedures and training to accompany this policy.

### **Sexual Grooming**

The Board recognizes that sexual abusers often target students who are suitably passive or needy and then engage in personal boundary invasion behaviors which become increasingly invasive of the student's boundaries.

These actions, termed "sexual grooming" involve the progressive breaking down of normal boundaries, such as physical contact which seems harmless or verbal comments that are designed to flatter and then ingratiate the student.

Since it may not be possible to determine whether boundary invasion behaviors are in fact sexual grooming until after inappropriate sexual contact has occurred, the Board prohibits staff members and volunteers from engaging in behaviors which exceed the boundaries of a professional adult-student relationship.

In addition, since it may not be possible to determine whether boundary invasion behaviors are in fact sexual grooming until after inappropriate sexual contact has occurred, employees are required to report certain boundary invasion behaviors by other employees or volunteers to the appropriate administrator. In doing so, they protect students, the staff member, themselves, and the profession. Such report shall be made to the principal, supervisor or Human Resources at the earliest opportunity (if the supervisor is the person involved in the conduct in question, the report shall be made directly to Human Resources).

Legal References: Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972

Chapter 9A.44, RCW – Sex offenses

Chapter 9A.88, RCW – Indecent exposure – Prostitution

RCW 28A.400.320 Crimes against children – Mandatory termination of classified employees – Appeal – Recovery of salary or compensation by district

RCW 28A.405.470 Crimes against children – Mandatory termination of certificated employees – Appeal – Recovery of salary or compensation by district

RCW 28A.405.475 Termination of certificated employee based on guilty plea or conviction of certain felonies – Notice to superintendent of public instruction - Record of notices

RCW 28A.410.090 Revocation or suspension of certificate or permit to teach – Criminal basis – Complaints – Investigation - Process Page 4 of 4

RCW 28A.410.095 Violation or noncompliance – Investigatory powers of superintendent of public instruction – Requirements for investigation of alleged sexual misconduct towards a child – Court orders – Contempt – Written findings required

RCW 28A.410.100 Revocation of authority to teach – Hearings

Chapter 28A.640, RCW Sexual Equality Chapter 28A.642,

RCW Discrimination Prohibition Chapter 49.60, RCW – Washington State Law Against Discrimination

Chapter 181-87 WAC Professional certification – Acts of unprofessional conduct

Chapter 181-88 WAC Definitions of sexual misconduct, verbal and physical abuse