

### **Code Of Conduct-Staff/Student Relationship Policy**

The Portsmouth School Department (PSD) is committed to protecting the safety and well-being of students and employees, creating, and maintaining a safe, supportive, and positive learning environment and workplace. The PSD affirms the responsibility of employees and PSD partners to abide by the standards of professional conduct, to act as role models, and to promote the dignity, health and safety of students while always maintaining professional relationships with students.

This policy covers conduct that takes place both on and off PSD property, and both during and outside of the school day. The policy also pertains to all forms of communication that may occur between employees and students, at any time. This policy applies to all individuals registered and enrolled as a student in the PSD, regardless of age, as well as PSD employees and coaches who work with or have contact with students.

The relationship between the PSD staff and students must be one of cooperation, understanding and mutual respect. It must always be of a professional nature. Staff members have a responsibility to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning and to motivate each student to perform to his/her capacity. They should recognize students' unique abilities, talents, and challenges; and treat all students with dignity and respect in all interactions.

Staff members should strive to secure individual and group discipline and should be always treated with respect by students. By the same token, staff members should extend to students the same respect and courtesy that they, as staff members, have a right to demand.

Although it is desired that staff members have a sincere interest in students as individuals, partiality and the appearance of impropriety must be avoided. Excessive informal and/or social involvement with individual students is prohibited. Such conduct is not compatible with professional ethics and, as such, will not be tolerated.

The Superintendent shall develop a protocol to facilitate this policy incorporating the parameters described above.

Policy Adopted: May 23, 2023

Portsmouth School Department  
Portsmouth, Rhode Island

**CODE OF CONDUCT-STAFF/STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS PROTOCOL**

Staff members are expected to use good judgment in their relationships with students both inside and outside of the school context including, but not limited to, the following guidelines. Any questions regarding any of the following can be addressed to the building principal or Superintendent.

1. Staff members should only communicate with students in person, using PSD issued email addresses, PSD sanctioned social media accounts formed for educational, school-related purposes, or via third-party PSD-sanctioned applications unless there are exigent circumstances or prior, express written consent from a parent or guardian.
2. Staff members are prohibited from providing drugs or alcohol to students or consuming drugs or alcohol in the presence of students on school property, during a school or PSD -sponsored event, or otherwise in their capacity as a PSD employee.
3. Staff members shall not discuss sexual matters outside of an appropriate educational context, including the use of sexual jokes, slang, or innuendo.
4. Staff members shall refrain from commenting on a student's physical appearance or body that can have the effect of objectifying the student and/or compromising the student's social and emotional well-being.
5. Staff members shall not touch students punitively or in such a way that could be construed as romantic or for the purpose of sexual gratification—including but not limited to—intimate touching, brushing up against another's body, pinching, fondling, or massaging. Staff members are prohibited from displays of inappropriate or unwanted physical affection.
6. Except in the role of their job description, staff members shall, whenever possible, not meet alone with a student in an area that is secluded or that is not openly accessible/visible to others, such as a room without windows or without visibility through a door.
  - a. Athletic coaches should not be alone with a student in an area that is secluded or that is not openly accessible/visible to others, such as a room without windows or without visibility through a door. If a coach wants to meet or speak with a student one-on-one, that meeting should be observable. This includes away games or practice fields, off school premises.
7. Dating between staff members and students is prohibited. This includes—but is not limited to—a social interaction, preplanned or not, in which the purpose is to initiate or continue a relationship outside the scope of the normal school-related encounter that is romantic and/or sexual in nature. Parental consent does not create an exception.

8. Staff members shall not engage in romantic relationships with students. This includes—but is not limited to—relationships in which a staff member dates, exchanges personal affection, engages in intimate or sexually suggestive communication, and/or engages in any form of sexual or physical intimacy with a student. Staff members shall not make romantic or sexually suggestive comments to or about students.
9. Staff members shall maintain a reasonable standard of care for the supervision, control and protection of students commensurate with their assigned duties and responsibilities.
10. Staff members shall not send students on personal errands.
11. Staff members shall, pursuant to law and board policy, immediately report any suspected signs of child abuse or neglect.
12. While staff are expected to support students' SEL needs, staff members should encourage the student to access appropriate individual agencies for assistance and should not attempt to assess, diagnose, or treat a student's personal problem relating to sexual behavior, substance abuse, mental or physical health and/or family relationships.
13. Except in the role of their job responsibility, staff members shall not disclose any information concerning a student to any person not authorized to receive such information. This includes, but is not limited to, information concerning assessments, ability scores, grades, behavior, mental or physical health and/or family background that has been acquired because of their employment with the PSD.
14. Parent permission shall be obtained before students are transported by staff.

### **Reporting Prohibited Conduct with Students**

Students or their families who wish to report a violation of this Policy may do so by notifying the Superintendent, a PSD faculty or staff member, including a teacher or principal. Students may communicate a complaint to any PSD employee with whom they feel comfortable. Students and families are encouraged to document all reports in writing. Faculty and staff in receipt of a report of Prohibited Conduct must document all communications and maintain all evidence relevant to the initial report and subsequent actions and communications.

While addressing complaints under this policy, the PSD will attempt to maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable and appropriate under the circumstances. The PSD will not tolerate any attempt at retaliation against any person who in good faith makes or assists in making a complaint under this policy or provides truthful information or cooperates in an investigation of a complaint. Retaliation is a serious violation of this policy. Concerns about attempted retaliation should be raised and will be handled in the same manner as any other concern under this policy.

Knowingly lodging a false complaint may result in disciplinary and/or legal action against the

complainant.

Any PSD employee who has direct, or indirect knowledge of Prohibited Conduct outlined in this Policy must immediately report the conduct to the administration. The administration will document all reports and determine whether to pursue further action in accordance with Title IX. If the incident does not warrant a Title IX investigation, administration will provide said documentation to the Superintendent who shall designate an investigator and determine if there has been a violation of this Policy.

In addition, all PSD employees are required to follow the mandatory reporting requirements required under state law for reporting suspected child abuse/neglect. PSD administrators may report instances of Prohibited Conduct to the police department and seek advice from legal counsel regarding further law enforcement involvement as appropriate.

Reports to the Superintendent and School Committee: The Superintendent shall provide the School Committee data on an annual basis that includes the incidents of violations of this policy that have taken place. Such data will include a statement describing what remedial action has been taken to address such violations.

### **Supportive Measures**

Members of school support staff shall be available to support and guide students affected by Prohibited Conduct. Supportive measures may include, but are not limited to:

- a. Counseling;
- b. Extensions of deadlines or other course-related adjustments;
- c. Modifications of work or class schedules;
- d. Supervision at arrival, dismissal, lunch and/or recess;
- e. Mutual restrictions on contact between the parties; and/or
- f. Increased security and monitoring of certain areas of the school grounds.

Consequences for violations of this policy may range from a written reprimand to termination of the employee.

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