

**SECTION: PERSONNEL**

Procedure Title: **Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries**

Many educators or volunteers who cross the line of professional boundaries may not consciously begin with predatory motivation in mind. Instead, they allow themselves to develop a special relationship with a student that results in situations where their professionalism is compromised. Sometimes, this leads to sexual misconduct. All of this can be prevented by maintaining professional boundaries with students.

Educators, volunteers, students, parents, and other concerned adults are the key to stopping unprofessional conduct against students. Hence, the following information will help you to help protect students, your school, and the profession.

**Reporting Violations**

All school staff members or volunteers must promptly notify the supervisor of a staff member or volunteer suspected of engaging in a boundary invasion toward a student.

Staff members should:

- Not wait before reporting suspicious behavior or try to determine whether there is an innocent explanation;
- Not confront or discuss the matter with the staff member at issue or with anyone else, but maintain confidentiality to protect privacy and avoid rumors; and
- Document for their own records, that they notified an administrator, including to whom and what they reported

Students and their parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to notify the principal (or other administrator) if they believe a staff member or volunteer may be engaging in inappropriate boundary invasion conduct with a student.

**Boundary Invasion**

A boundary invasion is an act or pattern of behavior by a staff member or volunteer that does not have a bone fide health, safety, or educational purpose for the student. Such situations are the opposite of maintaining professional boundaries with students. Staff member and volunteers shall not engage in boundary invasions of students, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- 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;
- 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

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student, or taking an inordinate number of photographs of a student.

- Any kind of flirtatious or sexual communications with a student;
- 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;
- Providing alcohol, drugs or tobacco to students or failing to report their use of these substances;
- For non-guidance/counseling staff, continually encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. It is understood that staff members play an important role in supporting students when they face issues and challenges outside the classroom. Staff shall recognize and refer students to counselors/administrators for on-going non-educational issues;
- Sending students on personal errands unrelated to any educational purpose;
- Banter, allusions, jokes or innuendos of a sexual nature with students;
- Favorably commenting on a student’s appearance if it is unduly revealing or if the comments have no educational value;
- Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns, or other private matters to one or more students;
- Addressing students, or permitting students to address staff members with personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner;
- Maintaining personal contact (including “friending” or “following”) a student on any social networking application or device;
- Sending phone, email, text, instant messenger, or other forms of written or electronic communication to students when the communication is unrelated to school work 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.
- Exchanging or providing personal gifts, cards, or personal letters with an individual student;

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- 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;
- Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation or failing to timely report that occurrence;
- Providing a student with information or views about other students or staff members without a legitimate professional purpose;
- Asking a student to keep a secret or not to disclose any inappropriate communications or conduct;
- Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy, (e.g. walking in on the student in the bathroom or a hotel room on a field trip);
- Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others; and/or
- Any home visits unless other adults are present.
- Soliciting phone, email, text messages or other forms of written or electronic communication from students when the communication is unrelated to school work or other legitimate school business; or
- Any other conduct that fails to maintain professional staff/student boundaries.

### **Appearances of Impropriety**

The following activities may be boundary invasions and can create an actual impropriety or the appearance of impropriety. Whenever possible, staff should avoid these situations. If unavoidable these activities should be pre-approved by the appropriate administrator. If not pre-approved, the staff member must report the occurrence to the appropriate administrator as soon as possible.

- Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others;
- Inviting or allowing individual students to visit the staff member's home;
- Visiting a student's home; and/or
- Sending or soliciting email, text messages or other electronic communications from the student for social purposes. All communication will use professional judgement and relate to an educational purpose, i.e. coursework, athletics, activities.

### **Reporting violations**

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

Staff members are required to promptly notify the principal or the supervisor of the employee or volunteer suspected of engaging in inappropriate conduct that violates this

policy or procedure.

The administrator to whom a boundary invasion concern is reported must document, in writing, the concern and provide a copy of the documentation to the Executive Director, Human Resources. The Executive Director, Human Resources will maintain a file documenting reports of this nature which are made.

**Reporting Sexual Abuse**

All professional school personnel who have reasonable cause to believe that a student has experienced sexual abuse by a staff member, volunteer, or agency personnel working in the school are required to make a report to Child Protective Services or law enforcement pursuant to board policy and procedure 3421, Child Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation Prevention, and Chapter 26.44, RCW. Reporting suspected abuse to the building principal or supervisor does not relieve professional school personnel from their reporting responsibilities and timelines.

**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.

**Training**

All new employees and volunteers will receive training on appropriate staff/student boundaries within three months of employment or service. Continuing staff will receive training every three years.

**Dissemination of Policy and Reporting Protocols**

This policy and procedure shall be included on the district Web site and in all employee, student, and volunteer handbooks. Annually, all administrators and staff will receive copies of the district's reporting protocol.

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