

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 members and volunteers shall not engage in boundary invasions of students, which may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- A. 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;

- B. 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.
- C. Any kind of flirtatious or sexual communications with a student;
- D. 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;
- E. Providing alcohol, drugs, or tobacco to students or failing to report their use of these substances;
- F. Non-guidance/counseling staff shall refer students to appropriate guidance/counseling staff to follow up on personal or family problems and/or relationships;
- G. Sending students on personal errands unrelated to any educational purpose;
- H. Banter, allusions, jokes, or innuendos of a sexual nature with students;
- I. Favorably commenting on a student’s appearance if it is unduly revealing or if the comments have no educational value;
- J. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns or other private matters to one or more students;
- K. 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;
- L. Maintaining personal contact (including “friending” or “following”) a student on any social networking application or device;
- M. 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 education or legitimate school business to conduct, they shall use school e-mail addresses and school district approved communication applications. If staff members receive a student's communication on anything other than school approved email or communication application, the staff members shall reply via school-approved email or communication application or by including the student's parents/guardian and an administrator.

- N. Exchanging or providing personal gifts, cards, or personal letters with an individual student;
- O. 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;
- P. Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation or failing to timely report that occurrence;
- Q. Providing a student with information or views about other students or staff members without a legitimate professional purpose;
- R. Asking a student to keep a secret or not to disclose any inappropriate communications or conduct;
- S. Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy, (e.g. walking in on the student in the bathroom or a hotel room on a field trip);
- T. Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others; and/or
- U. 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.

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 Assistant Superintendent. The Assistant Superintendent will see that the matter is investigated and documented, and if a boundary invasions have occurred without a legitimate educational or safety purpose, that appropriate action is taken and documented. The Assistant Superintendent will maintain a file documenting reports, letters of direction, and discipline relating to professional boundary investigations.

Reminder About Reporting Sexual Abuse

In some situations, the person engaging in boundary invasions with a student may also have engaged in child abuse or sexual abuse, which is defined in Board Policy 3421 - Child Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Prevention. Remember that according to law (RCW 26.44.020) and Board Policy 3421, all school personnel who have reasonable cause to believe that a student has experienced sexual abuse by an adult or student are required to make a report to Child Protective Services and/or law enforcement. (See Board Policy 3421.) Reporting suspected abuse to the building principal or supervisor does not relieve professional school personnel from their reporting responsibilities and timelines.

Disciplinary Action

Staff member or volunteer violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Violations of this policy may occur by ignoring professional boundaries as well as failing to report another staff member or volunteer who is ignoring professional boundaries. In any disciplinary situation, the Superintendent should consider whether the conduct violates the Code of Professional Conduct in Chpt. WAC 181-87 and whether a report to the Office of Professional Practices is warranted.

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.

Dissemination of Policy and Reporting Protocols

This policy and procedure will be included on the district website and in all employee, student, and volunteer handbooks. Annually, all administrators and staff will receive copies of the district's reporting protocol. The district shall also provide a copy of this policy and procedure to students and their parents during each school year.

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Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries Additional Guidelines

A. Prevent One-on-One Access to Students

1. Classroom doors should have windows, windows should not be covered except in lockdown situations
2. When an educator meets in the classroom alone with a student, the door should be open
3. Discourage educators from one-on-one contact with students in private settings
4. Require educators and students to meet in places observable by others, such as offices with windows or outdoors, if privacy is needed
5. When a counselor or administrator meets alone with a student, the door should have windows that are not covered
6. Assign at least two educators to monitor bathrooms and locker rooms of their gender, when possible
7. When dealing with a toileting incident, two adults should assist the student if possible
8. Assign at least two educators to be present to assist students with activities such as putting on bathing suits and taking showers
9. Encourage educators to include another adult in electronic communications with students
10. Prohibit educators from:
 - Taking a student without another adult to private areas, such as storage closets, athletic training rooms, hotel rooms, or personal vehicles
 - Sleeping in the same room overnight with students, unless the student's parent or guardian is present
 - Taking a student into the educator's home, unless the student's parent or guardian is present
11. Require educators to:
 - Inform a program supervisor before moving students out of the program area or to a different location on or off campus
 - Use separate bathrooms, locker rooms, and showers from student or, if separate facilities are not available, schedule separate usage times
 - Release students only to an authorized parent, legal guardian, or other adult specifically authorized by the custodial parent or guardian and only after confirming their identification

B. Enforce Professional Boundaries with Supervision

1. Require that supervisors:
 - Receive training on professional boundaries
 - Make periodic unannounced visits in class and during activities to observe whether educators are following professional boundaries
 - Document specific observations about how educators interact with students

- Correct and provide prompt feedback to educators regarding their adherence to professional boundaries
 - Stop any interaction with a student that appears suspicious
 - Discontinue any adult's participation in activities or programs involving students if someone suspects or alleges an inappropriate boundary invasion
2. Train all staff members, volunteers, and students, on how to report suspected professional boundary violations
 3. Require that educators report suspected violations of professional boundaries
 4. Encourage parents or legal guardians to report any suspected professional boundary violations
- C. Reporting

When an administrator receives a report that an employee, volunteer, or contractor has perpetrated sexual misconduct against a student or a suspicion of such, the administrator will follow the district's reporting protocol. Based on the circumstances, the administrator might need to inform:

- The Title IX coordinator
- The district's legal counsel
- The district's head of compliance
- Campus police or the district's student protection officer

The administrator should consider whether state or local laws require informing the local police and /or state or local child protection authorities.

The administrator should take immediate steps to prevent further harm to the alleged victim or other students, such as removing the alleged abuser from the program or activity or limiting that individual's contact with students pending resolution of the matter.

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