

STAFF CONDUCT WITH STUDENTS

The Maine School of Science and Mathematics Board expects all staff members, including teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators, and others to maintain the highest professional, moral, and ethical standards in their conduct with students. For the purposes of this policy, staff members also include school volunteers.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that interactions and relationships between staff members and students are 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 schools.

The Board understands that staff members may interact with and have friendships with families of students outside of school. This policy is not intended to prohibit such interactions, provided that professional boundaries are maintained at all times.

Staff members are expected to be sensitive to the appearance of impropriety in their conduct with students and are encouraged to discuss issues with the building principal or their supervisor whenever they are unsure whether particular conduct may constitute a violation of this policy.

Unacceptable Conduct

Examples of unacceptable conduct by staff members that are expressly prohibited include but are not limited to the following:

- A. Any type of sexual or inappropriate physical contact with students or any other conduct that might be considered harassment under the Board's policy on Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students;
- B. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the normal teacher-student relationship;
- C. For non-guidance/counseling staff, encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. If a student initiates such discussions, staff members are expected to be supportive but to refer the student to appropriate guidance/counseling staff. In either case, staff involvement should be limited to a direct connection to the student's school performance;

- D. Engaging in sexual banter, allusions, jokes, or innuendos with students;
- E. Asking a student to keep a secret;
- F. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns, or other private matters to one or more students;
- G. Addressing students with terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner; and
- H. Permitting students to address you by your first name, nickname or otherwise in an overly familiar manner.
- I. “Friending” students or engaging in any other interactions on social media or through digital applications (outside of any school-approved activity);
- J. Communicating with students on non-school matters through phone calls, email, text messages, Messenger or any other digital methods, or by notes, letters or any other means (unless the student’s parent approves of the activity, e. g, in the context of employment or participation in community activities);

Before engaging in the following activities, staff members should consult with the Executive Director or their supervisor, as appropriate:

- K. Being alone with individual students out of the view of others;
- L. Driving students home;
- M. Inviting or allowing students to visit the staff member’s home;
- N. Visiting a student’s home, unless on official school business that is known and agreed to by the parent;
- O. Exchanging personal gifts (beyond the customary student-teacher gifts); and/or
- P. Socializing or spending time with students (including but not limited to activities such as going out for meals or movies, shopping, traveling, and recreational activities) outside of school-sponsored events except as participants in organized community activities.

Reporting Violations

Students and/or their parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to notify the Executive Director if they believe a teacher or other staff member may be engaging in conduct that violates this policy.

Staff members must promptly notify the Executive Director if they become aware of a situation that may constitute a violation of this policy.

Disciplinary Action

Staff violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

Violations involving sexual or other abuse will also result in referral to the Department of Human Services and/or law enforcement in accordance with the Board's policy on Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect.

School Obligation to Report to Maine Department of Education (MDOE)

Any staff member holding a credential should be aware that violation of this policy may result in revocation or suspension of a certificate if it endangers the health, safety or welfare of a student.

The Executive Director/designee will notify the MDOE immediately if a credential holder is disciplined, suspended or terminated as a result of a "covered investigation" (as defined in 20-A MRSA § 13025) in which the school determined that a student's health, safety or welfare was endangered.

As soon as practicable, the school will provide to the MDOE any final report produced in support of the school's decision to discipline, suspend or terminate the credential holder. The credential holder may submit a written rebuttal to the report to the MDOE.

The Executive Director/designee will notify the MDOE immediately if a credential holder who is the subject of a covered investigation leaves the school's employment for any reason prior to the conclusion of the covered investigation.

[NOTE: As defined in 20-A MRSA § 13025, "covered investigation" means "an investigation by a school entity into the conduct of a holder of a credential

that a school entity has a reasonable expectation would affect the credential holder's employment or contracted service because the alleged conduct involves alcohol, illegal drugs, physical abuse, emotional abuse, inappropriate contact between a credential holder and a student, stalking, or similar behavior that endangers the health, safety or welfare of a student.”]

Dissemination of Policy

This policy shall be included in all employee, student and volunteer handbooks.

Cross Reference: ACAA - Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students
 JLF - Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Adopted: August 14, 2020