

Employee Ethics and Conduct

Section A - Introduction

Professional and ethical behavior is expected of all District staff members. The standards listed below serve as a notice of expected conduct. The standards are intended to protect the health, safety, and general welfare of students and employees, ensure the community a degree of accountability within the District and define misconduct justifying disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. The listed standards are not a complete list of expectations, and depending on the factual context, an employee may be disciplined for conduct that is not specifically listed. The conduct standards apply to all District employees to the extent they do not conflict with an applicable collective bargaining agreement; in the event of a conflict, the conflicting provision is severable, and the applicable bargaining agreement will control, except where the standard or policy is required by law, in which case the legal requirement shall control. In addition, each educator must comply with 6500 Policy - Employee Ethics and Conduct, and *Code of Ethics for Illinois Educators*, adopted by the IL. State Board of Education (ISBE) (23 Ill.Admin.Code Part 22).

All school employees shall:

1. Exhibit positive examples of preparedness, punctuality, attendance, self-control, language, and appearance.
2. Exemplify honesty and integrity. Violations of this standard include, but are not limited to, falsifying, misrepresenting, omitting, or erroneously reporting the professional qualifications of oneself or another individual or information submitted in connection with job duties or during the course of an official inquiry/investigation.
3. Maintain professional, appropriate relationships and boundaries with all students, both inside and outside the school, and attend all in-service trainings on educator ethics, teacher-student conduct, and school employee-student conduct for all personnel (105 ILCS 5/10-22.39), as well as all required trainings on child abuse, grooming behaviors, and boundary violations (325 ILCS 5/4(j), 105 ILCS 5/10-23.12, and 5/10-23.13 (*Erin's Law*)). Violations of this standard include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Committing any act of child abuse or cruelty to children;
 - b. Willfully or negligently failing to report an instance of suspected child abuse or neglect as required by the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act (325 ILCS 5/);
 - c. Engaging in harassing behavior;
 - d. Willfully or negligently failing to report an instance of suspected sexual harassment as required by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. §1681 et seq.);
 - e. Providing a recommendation of employment for another employee, a contractor, or an agent that the employee knows, or has probable cause to believe, has engaged in sexual misconduct with a student or minor in violation of the law, as prohibited by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 7926);

- f. Engaging in grooming as defined in 720 ILCS 5/11-25, and engaging in grooming behaviors, including sexual misconduct as defined in 6500 Policy - Employee Ethics and Conduct;
 - g. Furnishing tobacco, alcohol, cannabis, or any other illegal/unauthorized substance, including e-cigarettes or vaping devices, to any student or allowing a student under his or her supervision to use tobacco, alcohol, cannabis (including medical cannabis unless the student is authorized to be administered a medical cannabis-infused product by the school employee pursuant to *Ashley's Law*), e-cigarettes or vaping devices, or any other illegal/unauthorized substance;
 - h. Violating expectations and guidelines for employee-student boundaries set forth in these procedures.
 4. Maintain a safe and healthy environment, free from being impaired by and/or under the influence of prohibited substances to ensure high-quality performance for the District and its students. Violations of this standard include, but are not limited to, engaging in any of the prohibited activities listed in the District's drug- and alcohol-free workplace policy. Examples include using or being impaired by or under the influence of illegal drugs; abusing, misusing, and/or being impaired by or under the influence of alcohol, drugs, and/or other lawful products when performing work for the District when impairment is detectable regardless of when and/or where the use occurred; and/or using or being impaired or under the influence of or possessing medical cannabis in a school bus or on school grounds.
 5. Maintain a safe and healthy environment, free from harassment, intimidation, bullying, hazing, and violence, and free from bias and discrimination. Violations of this standard include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Unless specifically permitted by the Firearm Concealed Carry Act, carrying a firearm on or into any District controlled building, real property, or parking area, or any transportation vehicle paid for in whole or in part with public funds;
 - b. Willfully or negligently failing to immediately report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect or of gender harassment;
 - c. Knowingly failing to report hazing to supervising educational authorities or, in the event of death or great bodily harm, to law enforcement; and
 - d. Failing to appropriately respond to a witnessed or reported incident of student-on-student bullying, harassment, hazing, or teen dating violence.
 6. Comply with the Professional Testing Practices for Educators, prepared and published by ISBE for educators who administer any standardized test. This document contains numerous examples of actions that violate test security; actions that must not be part of test preparation; actions that must not occur during test administration; and actions that must be avoided when reporting test results.

7. Honor the public trust when entrusted with public funds and property by acting with a high level of honesty, accuracy, and responsibility. Violations of this standard include but are not limited to:
 - a. Misusing public or school-related funds;
 - b. failing to account for funds collected from students or parents/guardians;
 - c. Submitting fraudulent requests for reimbursement of expenses or for pay;
 - d. Co-mingling District or school funds with personal funds or checking accounts; and
 - e. Using school property without the approval of the supervising school official.
8. Maintain integrity with students, colleagues, parents/guardians, community members, and businesses when accepting gifts and favors or concerning business dealings. Violations of this standard include, but are not limited to, soliciting students or parents/guardians to purchase supplies or services from the employee or to participate in activities that financially benefit the employee without fully disclosing the interest.
9. Respect the confidentiality of student and personnel records, standardized test material, and other information covered by confidentiality agreements. Violations of this standard include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Disclosing confidential information concerning student academic and disciplinary records, health and medical information, family status and/or income, and assessment/testing results, unless disclosure is required or permitted by law; and
 - b. Disclosing confidential information restricted by State or federal law.
10. Demonstrate conduct that follows generally recognized professional standards and attend all in-service trainings on educator ethics, teacher-student conduct, and school employee-student conduct for all personnel (105 ILCS 5/10-22.39). Unethical conduct is any conduct that impairs the employee's ability to function professionally in his or her employment position or a pattern of behavior or conduct that is detrimental to the health, welfare, discipline, or morals of students.
11. Comply with all State and federal laws and rules regulating public schools and Board policies.

Conviction of any employment-disqualifying criminal offense listed in 105 ILCS 5/10-21.9 or 5/21B-80 will result in dismissal.

Section B - Expectations and Guidelines for Employee-Student Boundaries

All District employees must maintain professional employee-student boundaries and relationships with students. This includes meeting expectations and following guidelines established by the District for employee-student boundaries. These expectations and guidelines apply to all professional, educational support, and contracted District employees.

The District understands that employees may have pre-existing relationships with families of students outside school. These expectations and guidelines do not apply to employee-student relationships based

on pre-existing relationships, including nuclear or extended families. These expectations and guidelines are not intended to prohibit such interactions, provided that an awareness of employee-student boundaries is maintained at all times. This document is not exhaustive, and an employee may be disciplined for boundary violations that are not specifically listed.

Employee-Student Boundaries

The relationship between students and school employees is inherently imbalanced, because school employees are in a unique position of trust, care, authority, and influence in relation to students. District employees breach employee-student boundaries when they misuse their position of power over a student in a way that compromises the student's health, safety, or general welfare. Employee-student boundaries are categorized into four areas that are not mutually exclusive:

1. **Emotional Boundaries** – both the employee's own emotional state and self-regulation, as well as students' emotional states and developmental abilities to self-regulate.
2. **Relationship/Power Boundaries** – recognizing, as noted above, that the employee-student relationship is unequal and employees must safeguard against misusing positions of power.
3. **Communication Boundaries** – how and what employees communicate to students, including communication that is verbal, nonverbal, in-person, or via electronic means.
4. **Physical Boundaries** – physical contact between employees and students.

While some employee-student boundaries are clear and easy to recognize, there are some unclear, grey areas that employees must plan for and respond to with sound judgment. This means recognizing the potential negative consequences for students and/or employees engaging in certain behaviors with students or allowing inappropriate conduct to continue. Employees may use *time, place, and circumstances* as a guiding principle by asking themselves:

- Is this the appropriate *time* for my planned action?
- Have I chosen the appropriate *place* for the planned action?
- Are these appropriate *circumstances* for me to take my planned action?
- How will my planned action be reasonably perceived by the student's parents/guardians? By my supervisors? By the community?

To avoid behavior or conduct which may lead to a breach of employee-student boundaries, employees should also recognize their own unique vulnerabilities. Examples of vulnerabilities that employees may experience include, but are not limited to:

1. Employees who regard students as peers;
2. Employees who too closely identify with students and their issues;
3. Employees who experience adult relationship issues;

4. Employees who are immature or have an underdeveloped moral compass;
5. Employees who feel a need for attention;
6. Employees who abuse alcohol or other substances; and
7. Employees who lack personal crisis management skills.

Employees experiencing difficulties in their personal lives may be particularly susceptible to engaging in at-risk behavior or conduct with students. Employees must be alert to such risks and ensure they maintain professional boundaries at all times.

Guidelines for Specific Boundary Areas

Boundary Area	Inappropriate	Appropriate
Emotional	Favoring certain students by inviting them to your classroom at non-instructional times to “hang out.” Favoring certain students by giving them special privileges. Engaging in peer-like behavior with students. Discussing personal issues with students.	Inviting students who need additional instructional support to your classroom for such additional support. Conducting one-on-one student conferences in a classroom with the door open.

<p>Relationship/Power</p>	<p>Meeting with a student off-campus without parent/guardian knowledge and/or permission. Dating, or requesting or participating in a private meeting with, a student (in person or virtually) outside your professional role. Transporting a student in a school or private vehicle without administrative authorization. Giving gifts, money, or treats to individual students. Sending students on personal errands. Intervening in serious student problems instead of referring the student to an appropriately trained professional. A sexual or romantic invitation toward or from a student. Taking and using photos/videos of students for non-educational purposes.</p>	<p>Meeting with a student off-campus with parent/guardian knowledge and/or permission, e.g., when providing pre-arranged tutoring or coaching services. Transporting a student in a school or private vehicle with administrative authorization. Taking and using photos/videos of students for educational purposes, with student and parent/guardian consent, while abiding by student records laws, policies, and procedures.</p>
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<p>Communication</p>	<p>Initiating or extending contact with a student beyond the school day in a one-on-one or non-group setting. Inviting students to your home. Adding students on personal social networking sites as contacts when unrelated to a legitimate educational purpose. Privately messaging students by any means. Maintaining intense eye contact. Making comments about a student's physical attributes, including excessively flattering comments. Engaging in sexualized or romantic dialog. Making sexually suggestive comments directed toward or with a student. Disclosing confidential or typically private information, such as discussing personal romantic relationships. Self-disclosure of a sexual, romantic, or erotic nature.</p>	<p>Limiting communication to what is necessary for educational and/or extracurricular activities. Using District-approved methods for communicating with students.</p>
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<p>Physical</p>	<p>Full frontal hugs. Invading personal space. Massages, shoulder rubs, neck rubs, etc. Lingering touches or squeezes. Tickling. Having a student on your lap. Physical exposure of a sexual, romantic, or erotic nature. Sexual, indecent, romantic, or erotic contact with a student. Assisting a young student or a student with special needs with a toileting issue without obtaining parent/guardian permission.</p>	<p>Occasionally patting a student on the back, shoulder, or arm. A hug in a public setting with other adults present. Momentary physical contact with limited force designed to prevent a student from completing an act that would result in potential physical harm to the student or another person or damage to property; or to remove a disruptive student who is unwilling to leave the area voluntarily. Assisting a young student or a student with special needs with a toileting issue when parent/guardian permission has been granted.</p>
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Adopted: January 23, 2023