

## **STAFF CONDUCT WITH STUDENTS**

The Scarborough Public School's 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.

### **Acceptable Conduct**

The benefits of positive staff-student relationships on student success are well-documented and are encouraged. Examples of acceptable conduct by staff members include the following:

- A. Using appropriate and professional language in all spoken, written, and digital communications;
- B. Using discretion in sharing personal information to ensure it is relevant and appropriate to the learning topic;
- C. Acting within the professional boundaries of the staff member's role, duties, and responsibilities;
- D. Communicating with students on legitimate school business;
- E. Maintaining professional appearance and attire;
- F. Modeling professional non-verbal communication, body language, eye contact, and facial expressions; and
- G. Treating all students equitably.

### **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 (policy ACAA);
- B. Engaging in sexual banter, allusions, jokes, or innuendos with students;
- C. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the normal teacher-student relationship;
- D. 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 for assistance.
- E. Asking a student to keep secrets;
- F. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns, or other private matters to student(s);
- G. Associating with students in any situation or activity that includes alcohol, drugs, or tobacco, or that involves sexual conversations or activity;
- H. Addressing students with terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner (not to be confused with nicknames); and
- I. Permitting students to address staff in an overly familiar manner, such as by their first name.
- J. Personal contact with a student outside of school by phone, letter, note, email, text message, social media, or any digital application. The only exceptions are:
  - a. For school related activities (by means approved by the school);
  - b. For legitimate non-school related activities with the parent/guardian's approval (e. g, in the context of employment or participation in community activities)

#### CONDUCT REQUIRING CAUTION

Staff members should strive to avoid engaging in the following activities. If one of these activities is unavoidable, staff members should review the activity with their principal or supervisor, as appropriate:

- A. Being alone with individual students in private or out of the view of others;
- B. Being alone with individual students or driving individual students home or to other locations;
- C. Inviting or allowing students to visit the staff member's home;

- D. Visiting a student's home, unless on official school business that is known and agreed to by the parent;
- E. Exchanging personal gifts (beyond the customary student-teacher gifts); and/or
- F. 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.
- G. Taking photographs and/or videos of students for personal purposes or any reason other than capturing images of a school event for school purposes.

### **Reporting Violations**

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

Staff members must promptly notify the Superintendent or building principal 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, the District Attorney and/or law enforcement in accordance with the Board's policy on Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect (Policy JLF).

### **Scarborough Public Schools' 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 Superintendent/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 Scarborough Public Schools determined that a student's health, safety or welfare was endangered.

As soon as practicable, Scarborough Public Schools will provide to the MDOE any final report produced in support of the school unit'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 Superintendent/designee will notify the MDOE immediately if a credential holder who is the subject of a covered investigation leaves Scarborough Public Schools' employment for any reason prior to the conclusion of the covered investigation.

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. Supervisors shall review this policy with new employees upon hire and with all employees annually.

Cross Reference:     ACAA - Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students  
                              GCSA - Staff Computer/Internet Use  
                              JLF - Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Adopted:             January 6, 2011

Revised:            May 2, 2013  
                          November 16, 2023