



## USD 259 Guidelines for Maintaining Professional Boundaries

Staff of Wichita Public Schools are expected to know and understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate interactions with students and their families.

The district encourages healthy relationships that:

- Create a safe environment for students to learn and become future ready
- Promote achievement and success
- Encourage students to seek help in solving problems
- Help students develop social skills

At the same time, clear and reasonable boundaries for interactions between staff and students, and staff and the families of students, are necessary. These boundaries protect students from misconduct, harmful behaviors, and abuse, prevent the development of inappropriate relationships, and protect staff from misunderstandings and accusations of misconduct. Accordingly, staff are required to maintain appropriate professional and ethical relationships at all times, whether on or off district property, both during and outside of school hours. They must not engage in any behavior that is prohibited by law, regulation, or that violates these guidelines, or that creates the appearance of prohibited behavior. They must refrain from soliciting, encouraging, participating, or initiating inappropriate written, verbal, electronic, physical, sexual, or romantic relationships with students or the families of students.

The below nonexhaustive list provides just some examples of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors in different situations. Use your professional judgment, and if you have any questions or concerns either pertaining to yourself or the conduct of another staff member, contact the Director of Employee Relations and Title IX.

### **Physical Contact:**

#### **Appropriate:**

- Respect for personal space
- Exercising good judgment on when and whether to touch students; for example, whether to pat on the back, shoulder, or arm
- Being sensitive to individual and cultural preferences
- Asking permission before initiating a hug with a student

#### **Inappropriate:**

- Invading personal space
- Giving shoulder massages, lingering touches, squeezes, requesting affection, or touching the private parts of a student
- Touching students who may misinterpret the touch due to individual circumstances, cultural standards, or developmental stage

### **Relationships:**

#### **Appropriate:**

- Conducting student conferences in a manner consistent with educational purpose
- Having a relationship with the student that is centered on education, school events, and activities



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- Notifying administration if a student is suspected of having romantic feelings towards a staff member
- Maintaining fair and equal treatment of all students

### **Inappropriate:**

- Spending time alone with a student in a manner inconsistent with educational purpose
- Meeting with students off-campus (unless for a school-sponsored activity)
- Transporting a student alone and/or in a private vehicle when it is not a regular function of the staff member's assigned job duties
- Receiving or writing intimate communications from/to a student and/or giving gifts using district or personal funds.
- Having a pattern of giving special privileges or showing favoritism towards a particular student
- Providing excuses for or writing passes repeatedly for favored students to cover tardiness, absences, or misconduct
- Encouraging or condoning an atmosphere of loose and inappropriate boundaries, including around gender and harassment issues
- Failing to notify administration if a student is suspected of having romantic feelings toward a staff member
- Having a relationship that becomes peer-to-peer, rather than adult-to-student
- Having a personal relationship with a family member of a student that adversely affects the student's learning environment

### **Electronic Communication:**

#### **Appropriate:**

- Using social media appropriately in compliance with Policies 1231 and 1231b
- Limiting electronic and media communication with students to what is necessary for educational and/or school-sponsored or other appropriate activities. Remember, ANYTHING you post to the internet could be viewed by everyone with internet access, including students, parents and guardians of students, colleagues, administrators, and community members

#### **Inappropriate:**

- Conversing with students via email or social media beyond what is necessary for educational purposes and/or school-sponsored or other appropriate activities
- Discussing personal issues with students via text messaging, social networking sites, email etc.
- Linking personal accounts on Facebook or other personal social media networks with students or the parents of students.

### **Personal Communication:**

#### **Appropriate:**

- Dialoging about the academic environment and school activities
- Having a conversation that supports a student's learning and growth, where the student's perspective is the focus of the conversation



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- Maintaining personal space and reasonable eye contact

### **Inappropriate:**

- Making derogatory comments about students or families
- Making comments that are personal or physical in nature, e.g. “you have great legs,” “you should wear that sweater more often,” or that may have sexual overtones
- Condoning inappropriate subjects for discussion or verbal comments with sexual overtones
- Communicating with the student with implied, inside messages that are unknown by the general population
- Sharing or requesting personal confidential information in which the adult becomes the focus of the conversation
- Having dialogue that makes the student feel personally vulnerable or uncomfortable, or makes the student a confidant of the adult
- Discussing or mentioning confidential information about a student (for example, medical needs, adoption history, or family situation) in the presence of anyone who should not have access to that information, which may include the student.
- Maintaining intense eye contact and not respecting personal space

### **Conflicts of Interest/Dual Relationships:**

Staff should not engage in dual or multiple relationships with students or their families in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the student or their family. Dual or multiple relationships occur when staff relate to students and families in more than one relationship, whether professional, social, or business. In instances where dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, staff should take steps to protect students and families and are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries. Staff should not enter into any activity in which conflicts of interest or multiple relationships with a student or student’s family (for example, that of both teacher/student and employer/employee) may interfere with the employee’s duties and responsibilities as an employee of Wichita Public Schools.

### **Report Suspected Abuse:**

All staff members are mandated by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect immediately to the Department of Children and Families (reporting to a co-worker or supervisor in lieu of making a report to the Department of Children and Families is not sufficient). KSA 38-2223 requires such reporting, and it is a misdemeanor offense not to report child abuse or neglect. Reporting obligations are in effect at all times. Please refer to Policy 5117 (Reporting Suspected Child Abuse and/or Neglect).