PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES OF STAFF WITH STUDENTS

Purpose

District staff show extraordinary dedication and care in their daily work with students. A hallmark of this commitment is the development of strong relationships between adults and students. We believe that:

a. Children are always learning about healthy relationships, and their most significant learning about relationships comes from how adults behave.
b. Consistent relationship boundaries help children feel safe. Boundaries help them trust adults and help them know what healthy behavior is.
c. Children need adults to be adults. Adults' behaviors set the conditions for healthy relationships.
d. Adults are responsible for creating safe spaces.
e. Students are also expected to maintain appropriate boundaries with adults.

The purpose of this administrative regulation is to establish common understanding and expectations for all adults in our District on setting consistent and safe boundaries with students. Those boundaries maintain the healthy relationships and safe spaces that students need to thrive.

General Standards & Definitions

a. For purposes of this administrative regulation, **except as specifically noted,** "adults" include any and all District employees, coaches, substitutes, contracted service providers, and volunteers in their interactions with students in District schools and programs.

b. "Student" means any person: (1) Who is (a) in any grade from pre-kindergarten through grade 12; or (b) Twenty-one years of age or younger and receiving education or related services from an education provider that is not a post-secondary institution or education; or (2) Who was previously known to the adult covered in this administrative regulation as a student and who left school or graduated from high school within 90 days of any alleged conduct violating this administrative regulation.

c. For purposes of this administrative regulation, the term "legitimate educational purpose" includes matters or communications related to teaching, counseling, athletics, extracurricular activities, social-emotional support that serves the interest of the student, treatment of a student's physical injury or other medical needs, school administration, or other purposes within the scope of the adult's employment or other District-related duties.

d. A "boundary violation" is behavior or interaction by an adult with a student that has no legitimate educational purpose and has the potential to cause harm to the student.

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e. All adults should maintain the highest professional and ethical standards when interacting with students. These standards are defined by the Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission and by District policy.

f. Volunteers play unique and important roles in students' lives, and many also have relationships outside the school setting. **This administrative regulation applies to volunteers in the context of their volunteer commitment with the District.** The District expects volunteers to maintain appropriate conduct with students when they are engaged in District-authorized activities as outlined in this and other policies.

Guidelines for Interactions between Adults and Students

a. General Guidelines and Required Training

The interactions and relationships between adults and students should be based on 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 our schools. Adults may not intrude or appear to intrude on a student's physical and emotional boundaries unless the purpose of the interaction is to serve a legitimate educational purpose.

Employees are required to complete annual training provided by the District on sexual conduct prevention to provide guidance and establish appropriate professional boundaries for student-adult interactions.

We recognize that forming a relationship with students is an important aspect of teaching; however, adults should not engage in discussions with students when its purpose is to meet the adult's personal needs rather than the student's needs. If a student initiates a discussion about a significant personal or family problem, adults are encouraged to seek guidance from appropriate resources such as their principal or school counselors, as needed.

b. Conduct Outside a School Setting

Adults shall use good judgement in their relationships with students beyond their work responsibilities and/or outside the school setting. Informal and social involvements with individual students should be based on appropriate professional boundaries. Volunteers and staff with community-based relationships with students are not subject to this provision in their relationships with those students in non-District settings.

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In addition to regular classroom instruction and extracurricular activities, staff members may also act in their professional capacity outside of the school day – for example, in providing before- and after-care, tutoring to improve students' academic skills, mentoring that provides students with positive role models, answering questions about school assignments, hosting school-sanctioned or school-sponsored activities and events. We recognize that adults will also encounter students out in our community in the normal course of their personal lives.

Even during non-school hours, when District employees and third party contractors are acting in their professional capacity, they must maintain at all times ethical standards consistent with the Alaska Professional Teaching Practices Commission and by District policy.

One-to-one tutoring and mentoring offered during school or non-school hours must take place at the school unless the principal or appropriate supervisor has received prior notification of an off-site location and written permission from the parent/guardian has been obtained. Unless otherwise approved by the principal or other District administrator, volunteers on District property must be under the supervision of a District staff member.

c. Appropriate Personal and Community Relationships

There may be circumstances where there is an appropriate personal relationship between staff and a student's family that exists independently of the staff member's position with the District (e.g., when the families' children are friends). This policy is not intended to interfere with such relationships or to limit activities that are normally consistent with such relationships.

The District understands that adults may be involved in other roles in the community through civic, religious, family, athletic, scouting, private tutoring, or other organizations and programs whose participants may include District's students. This policy is not intended to interfere with or restrict an adult's ability to serve in those roles; however, staff members are strongly encouraged to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity with regard to all youth with whom they interact in the course of their community involvement.

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d. **Appropriate Use of Email, Websites & Social Media**

The District allows and supports the use of technology to communicate transparently and for legitimate educational purposes. As with all forms of communication, adults are expected to maintain professional boundaries with students when communicating via electronic communications and social media.

Staff or students may use approved educational websites if such sites are used solely for legitimate educational purposes.

1) **Email Communications**

All email communications from employees to students must be through a WPS-provided email address.

2) **Social Media**

District employees who wish to use social media as a tool to assist them in their professional duties must maintain separate accounts for professional and personal social media use and may follow or accept requests to connect from students only through their professional social media presence. Staff should have no expectation of privacy when communicating to students, including on a social media platform (e.g., Facebook, Twitter). Staff should not promise students absolute confidentiality in their communications.

3) **Group Text Messages**

The use of group text messaging has become a convenient tool for coaches and other staff working with students to relay information. District employees and third-party contractors shall use this method of communication only with approval and parental knowledge. Text messages to individual students shall contain only information with a legitimate educational purpose.

e. **In-person Interactions**

1) **One-on-one Meetings with Students**

There will be times when adults are alone with students to discuss legitimate educational issues, including discipline or academic performance. When possible, adults should meet one-on-one with students in a public space, such as libraries, open classrooms, or in places observable by others, such as offices or classrooms with windows and unlocked, ajar doors. When supporting students with sensitive issues, as is common for staff such as counselors and social workers, it is appropriate to provide a private setting.

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To maintain transparency, it is also good practice to let others know when and where meetings with a student will occur.

2) **Personal Communication with Students**

Connecting with students and building rapport is an important component to the staff-student relationship, and adults should promote healthy relationships with all students.

There are many times when a staff member's request for personal information is for a legitimate educational purpose. For example, personal reflection, relationships, or experiences are often part of a journaling exercise, and this administrative regulation is not intended to interfere with or impede this type of educational activity. It is appropriate for adults to check in with students about their well-being and/or whether they need any support with their schoolwork. This policy does not prohibit that kind of healthy support of students.

If a student discloses information about the student's significant personal or family problems, adults are expected to see guidance from appropriate resources such as their principal or school counselor, as needed.

Adults are also expected to bring their concerns to their supervisor's attention when they have reason to believe a student is or may be becoming overly attached to or interested in them or other staff.

3) **Traveling with or Transporting Students**

When transporting student to athletic events and other extracurricular activities, adults need to notify the District and the student's parent/guardian of the travel itinerary and may not transport students in a personal vehicle in a non-emergency situation without advance authorization by the District.

If an emergency situation arises that requires a staff member to transport a student without prior approval, the staff member shall alert a direct supervisor and the parent of the situation as soon as practicable.

When traveling out of town, adults are prohibited from entering a student's hotel room without another adult present, except in an emergency.

4) **Physical Contact with Students**

Adults should not initiate any physical contact without a legitimate educational purpose, including offering public greetings, positive acknowledgements or responding to a crisis.

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There are times when adults have a legitimate educational purpose to initiate physical contact with a student, and non-invasive contact, such as "high fives" or fist bumps to acknowledge a job well done are fine. In other instances, adults may be required to assist an injured student or a student with special needs who requires physical assistance. Likewise, adults may need to touch a student's arms or hand to redirect them in an activity. Coaches, music teachers, and other instructors may have a need for physical contact as a method of instruction. Adults need to be aware of what kinds of physical contact with which a student is and is not comfortable and limit physical contact to only that which is necessary for a legitimate purpose.

5) **Respecting Student Privacy**

Adults must honor a student's physical and emotional boundaries unless the interaction serves a legitimate educational purpose or is in response to an emergency.

Examples:

Physical Surroundings: Adults should not invade a student's privacy by entering a restroom, locker room, or other space where a student may not be fully clothed unless it falls within a staff member's regular job duties under an established written protocol, an emergency, or the staff needs to use the facility for a legitimate and intended purpose (e.g. it is not practical due to distance and time constraints to use a staff-only restroom).

Personal Space: Adults should respect a student's private space and be conscious of a student's cultural and personal boundaries when communicating (e.g. adults should be conscious of standing too close to students when interacting with them).

6) **Exceptions**

An emergency or a legitimate educational purpose may justify deviation from professional boundaries set out in this administrative regulation. Adults shall be prepared to articulate the reason for any exception from the requirements of this policy and demonstrate that an appropriate relationship was maintained with the student at all times. Adults must report obvious breaches of professional boundaries to their supervisor within 24 hours.

Boundary Violations

A boundary violation is behavior or interaction by an adult in a position of power with a student that has not legitimate educational purpose and has potential to cause harm to the student.

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A. **Examples of Boundary Violations/Prohibited Conduct**

Examples of conduct that violates professional adult/student boundaries in or outside of school hours include but are not limited to the following:

1) Any type of conduct that would be considered sexual harassment under the District's Non-discrimination/Anti-harassment Policy.

2) Having any sexual conduct, including verbal or physical conduct or contact through written or electronic communications, with a student that is a sexual advance or request for a sexual favor or is of a sexual nature and is directed toward the student or that has the effect of unreasonably interfering with the student's educational performance, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational environment.

    a. Examples of this behavior include, but are not limited to the following:
        i. Engaging in romantic or sexual relationship with a student;
        ii. Dating, flirting with, or propositioning a student;
        iii. Showing pornography to a student;
        iv. Discussing, writing, texting, transmitting, and/or displaying material to students about sexual topics unrelated to curriculum or a legitimate educational purpose;
        v. Banter, allusions, jokes or innuendos of a sexual nature with students;
        vi. Patting buttocks or touching other intimate parts of a student;
        vii. Permitting students to engage in behaviors with an adult that cross appropriate physical boundaries, e.g. allowing students to give shoulder massages to the adult or allowing students to sit on an adult's lap;
        viii. Singling out a particular student or students for favoritism, special privileges, or exchanging of gifts beyond the employee-student relationship;
        ix. Disclosing personal or intimate sexual matters to a student.

3) Bullying or other violations of the District's Anti-harassment policy.

4) Favoring a student when its purpose is to meet the adult's personal needs rather than the student's needs;

5) Inviting individual students to the adult's home without parental notice and approval unless otherwise noticed in "Exceptions" section of the administrative regulation.

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6) Being in the company of students who are consuming alcohol, drugs or tobacco without intervening and report the conduct to the appropriate personnel;

7) Sending or accompanying a lone student on personal errand or travel unrelated to any legitimate educational purpose;

8) Telling a student to keep something secret from other adults;

9) Addressing students or permitting students to address adults with personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner that may cross appropriate professional boundaries;

10) Giving a student a ride alone in a non-emergency situation; except as permitted in this administrative regulation;

11) Engaging in prohibited social media and electronic communications between adults and students as defined by the District's Acceptable Use policy.

    a. Example of this behavior include, but are not limited to, the following:
        i. District employees acting in their District capacity are prohibited from inappropriate online socializing with students, including phone calls, texting, instant messaging, or use of any other telecommunications method, or from engaging in any conduct that violates the law, District policies, or other generally recognized professional standards.
        ii. Adults shall not communicate with students, for any reason, through use of a medium, blog, or app (software or phone application) that is designed to eliminate all traces or records of the communication (e.g. Snapchat).
        iii. District employees and third-party contractors may not communicate with current students through social media directly or through private messaging tools without both written District approval and parental notice.

Duty to Report Possible Violations

Adults shall discuss with their building administrator or supervisor whenever they suspect or are unsure whether their conduct, of the conduct of other adults, is inappropriate or constitutes a violation of this policy. If the adult is dissatisfied with the response of the building administrator or supervisor or does not feel comfortable discussing the situation with those individuals, they may bring it to the attention of the Human Resources Director. If the alleged behavior deals with discrimination, the process in Board Policy 1312.3 shall be followed.

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The District will investigate all complaints.

Any District employee who has reasonable cause to believe that another adult has exchanged in sexual conduct shall immediately report this behavior to the Building Principal. Additionally, any District employee or other mandatory reporter of abuse/neglect who has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused must promptly fulfill the mandatory reporting requirement to law enforcement and the Office of Children's Services and report the allegation to their principal or supervisor.

District employees whose conduct violates this administrative regulation or who fail to report violations of this policy, may face discipline and/or termination, consistent with the District's policies and applicable collective bargaining agreements.

Violations of this administrative regulation by volunteers or contracted service providers may result in a prohibition from working or serving on District properties or with District students in school programs, or may result in contract cancellation. The District shall notify law enforcement of any potentially unlawful conduct, as appropriate.

B. Student/Parent and Guardian Reporting

Students and/or parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to notify the principal or other appropriate administrator if they believe an adult may be engaging in conduct that violates this policy.

Confidentiality and Non-retaliation

Staff members making a report of potential boundary violations or other prohibited conduct are specifically advised of the following:

1) They must directly notify a supervisor of the conduct;
2) They are required to maintain confidentiality; and
3) They are neither permitted to investigate nor responsible for investigating when the conduct is inappropriate.

Confidentiality protects the student(s) as well as the adult who is the subject of the report. Failure to maintain confidentiality may impede the investigation and foster untrue and potentially harmful rumors. False reports are regarded as a serious offense and may result in disciplinary action or other appropriate sanctions.

The District prohibits retaliation against anyone who makes a good-faith report under this policy. Any District employee who retaliates against any complainant, reporter or other participant in an investigation may be subject to discipline, up to and including dismissal.

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Training

The Superintendent and his/her designee shall develop an annual training for all staff and ensure ongoing review of procedures to support this policy.

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