**Lake Stevens School District**
**POLICY 4900P**
**Adopted 2-26-11**
**Revised 8-12-26**

# MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL STAFF/STUDENT BOUNDARIES

## PROCEDURES

Many educators or volunteers who cross the line of professional boundaries may not consciously begin with predatory motivation in mind. Instead, they allow themselves to develop a special relationship with a student that results in situations where their professionalism is compromised. Sometimes, this leads to sexual misconduct. All of this can be prevented by maintaining professional boundaries with students.

Educators, volunteers, students, parents, and other concerned adults are the key to stopping unprofessional conduct against students. Hence, the following information will help you to help protect students, your school, and the profession.

All school staff members or volunteers must promptly notify and discuss issues with their building administrator or supervisor whenever they suspect or are unsure whether conduct is inappropriate or constitutes a violation of policy 4900.

Staff members should:

- Not wait before notifying their supervisor of suspicious behavior or try to determine whether there is an innocent explanation;
- Not confront or discuss the matter with the staff member at issue or with anyone else, but maintain confidentiality to protect privacy and avoid rumors;
- Document for their own records, that they notified and discussed the issue with their building administrator or supervisor; and
- Use Form 4900F (Lake Stevens School District Report Form Potential Professional Boundary Violation) to report and document potential professional boundary violations

Students and their parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to notify the principal (or another administrator) if they believe a teacher or other staff member may be engaging in conduct that violates this policy. Students and parents/guardians should use Form 4900F (Lake Stevens School District Report Form Potential Professional Boundary Violation) to report potential professional boundary violations.

### Boundary Invasions

A boundary invasion is an act or pattern of behavior by a staff member or volunteer that does not have a bona fide health, safety, or educational purpose for the student. Such

situations are the opposite of maintaining professional boundaries with students. Staff members and volunteers shall not engage in boundary invasions of students, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

A. Any type of inappropriate physical or sexual conduct with a student or any other conduct that violates the board's policies regarding student welfare, the educational environment, or conduct toward current or former students. Inappropriate physical conduct includes hugging, kissing, or being "overly touchy" with students without any legitimate educational or professional purpose;
B. Showing intimate or unduly revealing photos to a student or asking a student to provide intimate or unduly revealing photos;
C. Taking inappropriate photographs of a student, or taking an inordinate number of photographs of a student;
D. Any kind of flirtatious or sexual communications with a student;
E. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the professional staff/student relationship. This includes, but is not limited to, favoring one or more students with special privileges, allowing them to remain in the classroom during non-class times, unilaterally removing a student from another class or activity, or engaging in "peer like" behavior with one or more students;
F. Providing alcohol, drugs, or tobacco to students or failing to report their use of these substances;
G. For non-guidance/counseling staff, allowing or encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. If a student initiates such discussions, staff members shall 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;
H. Sending students on personal errands unrelated to any educational purpose;
I. Banter, allusions, jokes, or innuendos of a sexual nature with students;
J. Favorably commenting on a student's appearance if it is unduly revealing or if the comments have no educational value;
K. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns or other private matters to one or more students;
L. Addressing students or permitting students to address staff members or volunteers with personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner;
M. Maintaining personal contact (including "friending" or "following") a student on any social networking application or device;
N. Sending phone, e-mail, text, instant messenger, or other forms of written or electronic communication to students when the communication is unrelated to school work or other legitimate school business. Staff members should use school e-mail addresses for communications with students, except in an emergency situation;
O. Exchanging or providing personal gifts, cards, or personal letters with an individual student;
P. Socializing or spending time with students (including but not limited to activities such as going out for beverages, meals or movies, shopping, traveling and recreational activities) outside of school-sponsored events, except as participants in organized community activities;
Q. Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation or failing to timely report that occurrence;
R. Providing a student with information or views about other students or staff members

without a legitimate professional purpose;

S. Asking a student to keep a secret or not to disclose any inappropriate communications or conduct;
T. Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy, (e.g., walking in on the student in the bathroom or a hotel room on a field trip);
U. Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others (when an educator meets in a classroom alone with a student, the door should be open. When a counselor or administrator meets alone with a student, the door should have windows that are not covered); and/or
V. Any home visits unless other adults are present, the student(s) are invited for an activity related to school, and the student's parent/guardian and an administrator are informed and have consented.

*Coaches/advisors, whether paid or volunteer, must avoid the prohibited behaviors listed here (A-V) or any other behavior that would have the perception of impropriety or constitute a boundary violation.

**Investigation and Documentation**

When an administrator receives information that a boundary invasion has occurred or might have occurred, the administrator must document, in writing, the concern and provide a copy of the documentation to the Human Resources administrator. This documentation requirement may be fulfilled by completing Form 4900F. The Human Resources Administrator will see that the matter is investigated and documented, and if a boundary invasion has occurred without a legitimate educational or safety purpose, that appropriate action is taken and documented. The Human Resources Administrator will maintain a record of documenting reports, letters of direction, and discipline relating to professional boundary investigations.

When Human Resources receives a concern regarding a potential staff/student boundary violation, HR will first determine whether mandatory reporting obligations apply and make any required reports. HR will then assess the concern, take any necessary interim measures, and investigate by interviewing relevant individuals, reviewing evidence, reviewing previous concerns, and providing the employee an opportunity to respond. The findings will be evaluated in reference to School Board policies and procedures, as well as any relevant laws/rules. HR will advise the employee whether the concern was substantiated or unsubstantiated and communicate any employment-related outcomes or follow-up. The individual who reported the concern will be advised that the investigation is complete and whether the concern was substantiated or unsubstantiated, while maintaining personnel confidentiality.

**Reminder about Reporting Sexual Abuse**

In some situations, the person engaged in a boundary invasions with a student may also have engaged in child abuse or sexual abuse, which is defined in Board Policy 5470: Child Abuse or Neglect. Remember that according to law (RCW 26.44.020) and Board Policy 5470, all school personnel who have reasonable cause to believe that a student has

experienced sexual abuse by an adult or student are required to make a report to Child Protective Services and/or law enforcement (See Board Policy 5470.) Reporting suspected abuse to the building principal or supervisor does not relieve professional school personnel to report from their reporting responsibilities and timelines. Form 5470F should be used to document and fulfill the mandated reporting requirement.

**Disciplinary Action**

Staff member or volunteer violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Violations of this policy may occur by ignoring professional boundaries as well as failing to report another staff member or volunteer who is ignoring professional boundaries. In any disciplinary situation, the Superintendent should consider whether conduct violates the Code of Professional Conduct in Chpt. WAC 181-87 and whether a report to the Office of Professional Practice is warranted.

**Training**

All new staff members and volunteers will receive training on appropriate staff/student boundaries within three months of employment or beginning of service. Such initial training may be on-line training. Site administration and classified employee supervisors shall see to it that more detailed, live training covering this entire procedure shall occur every two years for all schools and work sites. Site administration and classified employee supervisors will also address professional boundaries at staff meetings early in the year.

**Dissemination of Policy and Reporting Protocols**

This policy and its procedures shall be included on the District’s website and in all employee, student, and volunteer handbooks. Annually, all administrators and staff will receive copies of the district's reporting protocol The district shall also provide a copy of this policy and procedure to students and their parents during each school year.