

## Employee / Student Boundaries Policy

The School encourages a close, warm, and considerate relationship between students and teachers. Our teachers serve as the students' role models, guides and mentors in learning as well as living. The purpose of this policy is to give clear direction regarding appropriate conduct and boundaries between staff and students. The rules of conduct set forth in this policy are not intended to serve as an exhaustive list of requirements, limitations, or prohibitions on staff conduct and activities established by school. Rather, they are intended to:

- Alert employees to some of the more sensitive and often problematic matters involved in employee-student relationships;
- Specify boundaries related to potentially sexual situations and conduct that is contrary to accepted norms of behavior and in conflict with duties and responsibilities of employees; and
- Provide employees with clear guidance in conducting themselves in a manner that reflects high standards of professionalism.

It is important for the School to maintain a school-wide culture in which students and employees understand their responsibility to report misconduct without fearing retaliation from students, staff, or administration. In order to prevent abuse and/or exploitation, students and employees must know that the Administration will support them when they report possible misconduct.

Although this policy gives clear direction regarding appropriate conduct between employees and students, each staff member is obligated to avoid situations that could prompt suspicion by parents, students, colleagues, or school leaders. One helpful standard that can be quickly applied when assessing whether your conduct is appropriate is to ask yourself, "Would I be doing this if the student's family or my colleagues or family were standing next to me?"

### **1. Boundaries**

For the purpose of this policy, the term "boundaries" is defined as acceptable professional behavior by employees while interacting with a student. Trespassing the boundaries of a student/teacher relationship is deemed an abuse of power and a betrayal of public trust.

### **2. Acceptable and Unacceptable Behavior**

Some activities may seem innocent from a staff member's perspective, but can be perceived as flirtation or sexual insinuation from a student or parent point of view. The objective of the following lists of acceptable and unacceptable behavior is not to restrain positive relationships between staff and students, but to prevent relationships that could lead to, or may be perceived as, sexual misconduct.

Staff must understand their own responsibility for ensuring that they do not cross the boundaries as written in this policy. Disagreeing with the wording or intent of the established boundaries will be considered irrelevant for disciplinary purposes. Thus, it is crucial that all employees learn this policy thoroughly and apply the lists of acceptable and unacceptable behavior to their daily activities. Although good-natured, heartfelt interaction with students certainly fosters learning, student/staff interactions must always be guided by appropriate boundaries regarding activities, locations, and intentions.

### **3. Unacceptable Behaviors**

The following non-exhaustive list of behavior shall be considered violation of this policy:

- Giving gifts to an individual student that are of a personal and intimate nature;
- Kissing of any kind;
- Any type of unnecessary physical contact with a student in either a public or private situation;
- Intentionally being alone with a student on campus or away from the school;
- Making, or participating in sexually inappropriate comments;
- Sexual jokes, stories, or jokes/comments with sexual innuendo;
- Seeking emotional involvement with a student for your benefit;
- Discussing inappropriate personal troubles or intimate issues with a student; or
- Becoming involved with a student so that a reasonable person may suspect inappropriate behavior.

### **4. Unacceptable Behaviors without Parent and Supervisor Permission**

The following behavior should only be exercised when an employee has parent and supervisor permission:

- Giving students a ride to/from school or school activities;
- Being alone in a room with a student at the school with the door closed;
- Allowing students in your home; or
- Sending emails, text messages, or letters to students if the content is not about school activities.

### **5. Cautionary Behaviors**

Employees should only engage in the following behavior when a reasonable and prudent person, acting as an educator, is prevented from using a better practice or behavior. Employees should inform their supervisor of the circumstances and occurrence prior to, or immediately after, the occurrence.

- Being alone in a room with a student at school with the door closed;
- Remarks about the physical attributes or development of anyone;

- Excessive attention toward a particular student; or
- Sending emails, text messages or letters to students if the content is not about school activities.

## **6. Acceptable and Recommended Behaviors**

- Getting a parent's written consent for any after-school activity;
- Obtaining formal approval to take students off school property for activities such as field trips or competitions;
- Emails, text, phone, and instant messages to students must be very professional and pertaining to school activities or classes (and communication should be limited to school technology);
- Keeping the door open when alone with a student;
- Keeping reasonable space between you and your students;
- Stopping and correcting students if they cross your own personal boundaries;
- Keeping parents informed when a significant issue develops about a student;
- Keeping after-class discussions with a student professional and brief;
- Asking for advice from fellow staff or administrators if you find yourself in a difficult situation related to boundaries;
- Involving your supervisor if conflict arises with the student;
- Informing your supervisor about situations that have the potential to become more severe;
- Making detailed notes about an incident that could evolve into a more serious situation later;
- Recognizing the responsibility to stop unacceptable behavior of students or co-workers;
- Asking another staff member to be present if you will be alone with any type of special needs student;
- Asking another staff member to be present when you must be alone with a student after regular school hours;
- Giving students praise and recognition without touching them;
- High fives, and handshakes are acceptable;
- Keeping your professional conduct a high priority; or
- Asking yourself if your actions are worth your job and career.

## **7. Duty to Report**

When any employee becomes aware of another employee crossing the boundaries specified in this policy, he/she must speak directly to this employee if the violation appears minor, and/or report the matter immediately to the Head of School. If the observed behavior appears significant, it is the duty of every employee to immediately report the matter to the Head of School. It is the duty of the Head of School or designee to thoroughly investigate and remediate the situation as necessary. Employees must also report to the Head of School any awareness or concern of student behavior that crosses appropriate boundaries, or where a student appears to be at risk of sexual abuse.