Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries

The purpose of this procedure is to provide all staff, students, volunteers and community members with information to increase their awareness of their role in protecting children from inappropriate conduct by adults.

In a professional staff/student relationship, school employees maintain boundaries that are consistent with the legal and ethical duty of care that school personnel have for students.

A boundary invasion is an act, omission, or pattern of behavior by a school employee that violates professional staff/student boundaries, does not have an educational purpose, and has the potential to abuse the staff/student relationship.

This regulation addresses the relationship between students and District staff. The Board recognizes that staff may have familial and pre-existing social relationships with parents or guardians and students. Staff members should use appropriate professional judgment when they stand in a dual relationship to students so as to avoid violations of District policy, the appearance of impropriety, or the appearance of favoritism.

Unacceptable Conduct

Examples of inappropriate boundary invasions by staff members include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Any type of inappropriate physical contact or communication with a student or any other conduct that violates the Board’s policies on Employee Conduct (Policy 5010), Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (Policy 5207), Non-Discrimination (Policy 5265), or Sexual Harassment (Policy 5266), Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), or the Washington State Law Against Discrimination (Chapter 49.60 RCW), constitutes misconduct under RCW 28A.640 and .642 or WAC 181-88-060, or any conduct between staff and students that would constitute a violation of Chapter 9A.44 or 9A.88 RCW;
- Showing pornography to a student;
- Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the professional staff/student relationship;
- Socializing where students are consuming alcohol, drugs or tobacco or providing alcohol, drugs, or tobacco to students;
- 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 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;
- Sending or taking students on personal errands unrelated to any educational purpose;
- Banter, allusions, jokes or innuendos of a sexual nature with students;
- Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns, or other private matters to one or more students;
- Addressing students, or permitting students to address staff members with personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner;
- Maintaining personal contact with a student outside of school by electronic means such as Instant Messenger or Internet chat rooms or social networking Web sites;
• Sending phone, email, text messages, or other forms of written or electronic communication to students when the communication is unrelated to school work or other legitimate school business;
• Exchanging personal gifts, cards or letters with an individual student which are unrelated to school activities;
• 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;
• Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation; and/or
• Unnecessarily invading a student’s privacy, (e.g. intentionally walking in on the student in the bathroom).

Appearances of Impropriety
The following activities can create an actual impropriety or the appearance of impropriety. Whenever possible, staff should avoid these situations. If unavoidable, these activities should be pre-approved by the appropriate administrator. If not pre-approved, the staff person must report the occurrence, to the appropriate administrator, as soon as possible.

• Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others;
• Inviting or allowing individual students to visit the staff member’s home unless other adults are present, the student(s) are invited for an activity related to school, and the student’s parent or guardian is informed and has consented;
• Visiting a student, in his/her home, unless invited by the student’s parent or guardian as part of a school activity; and/or
• Sending e-mails, text messages or other electronic communications to the student, even when the communication relates to school business, except where the parent or guardian has consented to such communications and receives a copy of the communication. Staff should use school e-mail address and phone numbers and the parents’ phone numbers for communications with students, except in an emergency situation.

Reporting Violations
Students and their parents/guardians who believe a teacher, other staff member, contractor, or volunteer may be engaging in conduct that constitutes boundary invasion are strongly encouraged to notify the building principal or the supervisor of the person suspected of engaging in inappropriate conduct.

Staff members who become aware of conduct by a staff member, contractor, or volunteer that may constitute a boundary invasion are required to promptly notify the building principal or the supervisor of the employee or volunteer suspected of engaging in inappropriate conduct.

All school personnel who have reasonable cause to believe that a student has experienced sexual abuse by a staff member, contractor, or volunteer working in the school are required to make a report to Child Protective Services or law enforcement pursuant to Policy 3421, Regulation 3421R, and RCW 26.44. Reporting suspected abuse to the building principal or supervisor does not relieve school personnel from their reporting responsibilities and timelines.

Disciplinary Action
Staff violations of this regulation may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. The violation will also be reported to the state Office of Professional Practices, as appropriate. Violations involving sexual or other abuse will also result in referral to Child
Protective Services and/or law enforcement in accordance with the board’s policy on Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect.

Training
All new employees will receive training on appropriate staff/student boundaries within three months of employment and will receive retraining every three years thereafter.

Dissemination of Policy and Reporting Protocols
Policy 5243 and this regulation shall be included on the district Web site and in all employee, student and volunteer handbooks.

Date: 03.11