

Superintendent Procedure 5253SP Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries

Approved by: s/Denise Juneau Date: 2/16/21

Denise Juneau, Superintendent



A. INTRODUCTION

Many educators, volunteers, and contracted service providers who violate professional boundaries may not consciously begin with a predatory motivation in mind. However, they do allow themselves to develop an unprofessional personal relationship with a student that results in inappropriate interaction. Sometimes, this includes sexual misconduct. This can be prevented by always maintaining professional boundaries with all students.

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

For the purposes of this procedure, the terms “district staff,” “staff member(s),” and “staff” also include volunteers and contracted service providers.

B. Reporting Violations

All staff must immediately notify the school/program/department administrator of any individual suspected of engaging in a boundary invasion toward a student.

Staff should:

- Not wait before reporting suspicious behavior
- Not confront or discuss the matter with the staff member at issue or with anyone else, including but not limited to the student, but maintain confidentiality to protect privacy and avoid rumors, and to protect the integrity of any potential investigation
- Document for their own records, that they notified an administrator, including to whom and what they reported

Students and their parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to notify the principal (or school/program/department administrator) if they believe any staff may be engaging in inappropriate boundary invasion conduct with a student.

Any person reporting a boundary violation may also report the violation directly to Human Resources by emailing employeemisconduct@seattleschools.org or by calling 206-252-0315. Human Resources should be contacted if the employee’s supervisor and/or evaluator is the subject of the report.

C. BOUNDARY INVASION

Professional boundaries must be consistent with the legal and ethical duty of care that District employees have for students. A boundary invasion is an act or pattern of behavior by a staff member that does not have a legitimate educational or school business purpose connected to the staff's job, or an emergency situation. Such situations are the opposite of maintaining professional boundaries with students. Staff 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; taking inappropriate photographs of a student, or taking an inordinate number of photographs of a student.
- C. Any kind of flirtatious or sexual communications with a student;
- D. 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, unilaterally removing a student from another class or activity, or engaging in "peer like" behavior with one or more students;
- E. Providing alcohol, drugs, or tobacco to students or failing to report their use of these substances;
- F. For non-guidance/counseling staff, soliciting students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. If a student initiates such discussions, staff shall consider referring the student to appropriate guidance/counseling staff.
- G. Sending students on personal errands unrelated to any educational purpose;
- H. Banter, allusions, jokes, or innuendos of a sexual nature with students;
- I. Favorably commenting on a student's appearance in a way that could be construed as flirtatious or sexual in nature, or if the comments have no educational value;
- J. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns or other private matters to one or more students;
- K. Staff may not permit students to address them with personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner. Staff may not address students using personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or terms to which the student has objected. Staff should refer to students by the name and pronouns.
- L. Maintaining private personal contact (including "friending" or "following") a student on any social networking application or device; a student following a public social media account managed by a staff member does not constitute a violation.
- M. Sending phone, e-mail, text, instant messenger, or other forms of written or electronic communication to students when the communication is unrelated to the staff's job or other legitimate educational or school business, or an emergency. Staff should use their school e-mail addresses and phone numbers for communications with students, except in an emergency situation.
- N. Exchanging or providing personal gifts, cards, or personal letters with an individual student that goes beyond a legitimate educational or school business purpose;

- O. 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;
- P. Driving a student (or students) in a personal vehicle, except in an emergency situation, which is timely reported to a supervisor; or in a non-emergency situation with prior supervisory approval. As stated in Board Policy No. 5253, staff members must notify, in writing, their building administrator or supervisor of any pre-existing social relationships with parents/guardians and students. This will ensure that staff driving a student (or students) in a personal vehicle due to the staff/student pre-existing social relationship may not necessarily be considered a violation.
- Q. Providing a student with personal/private information or views about other students or staff members without a legitimate educational or school business purpose related to the staff's job;
- R. Asking a student to keep a secret or not to disclose any inappropriate communications or conduct;
- S. Unnecessarily invading a student's personal private space, (e.g. walking in on the student in a bathroom stall or unannounced into a hotel room on a field trip absent an emergency situation);
- T. Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others, except in situations related to a legitimate educational or school business purpose related to the staff's job, or an emergency situation; and/or
- U. 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 the appropriate supervisor are informed and have consented.

D. COMPLAINT PROCEDURES

When an administrator or supervisor receives information that a boundary invasion has occurred or might have occurred, the administrator or supervisor must document, in writing, the concern and provide a copy of the documentation to the Human Resources Division ("HR"). Staff who are concerned that they may have violated the policy should contact their supervisor. HR will see that the matter is investigated and documented, and if boundary invasions have occurred without a legitimate educational or school business purpose related to the staff's job, or an emergency, that appropriate action is taken and documented. HR will maintain a file documenting reports, letters of direction and/or counseling, and discipline relating to professional boundary investigations.

E. REPORTING SEXUAL ABUSE

In some situations, the person engaging in boundary invasions with a student may also have engaged in child abuse or sexual abuse, which is defined in Board Policy 3421 - Child Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation Prevention. Remember that according to law (RCW 26.44.020) and Board Policy 3421, 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 3421.) Reporting suspected abuse to the building principal or supervisor does not relieve professional school personnel from their reporting responsibilities and timelines.

F. DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Staff violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination. 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 the conduct violates the Code of Professional Conduct in Chapter 181-87 WAC and determine whether a report to the Office of Professional Practices is warranted.

G. TRAINING

All new staff will receive training on appropriate staff/student boundaries within three (3) months of employment or beginning of service. Such initial training may be on-line training. Site administration and classified employee supervisors will also address professional boundaries at staff meetings early in the year.

H. DISSEMINATION OF POLICY AND REPORTING PROTOCOLS

This policy and procedure will be included on the district 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.

Approved: February 2021

Revised:

Cross Reference: Policy Nos. 3200; 3207; 3207sp.a; 3208; 3208sp; 3240; 3421; 5006; 5010; 5010sp; 5201; 5251; 5253