



Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries

Purpose

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) employs dedicated and professional staff members who provide students with a safe and supportive learning environment. The District encourages healthy relationships between students and school staff and administrators to promote student achievement and success. This guidance defines appropriate and reasonable boundaries for staff members and students to (1) protect students from sexual misconduct and abuse, and (2) to protect staff members from misunderstandings and false accusations.

Applicability

This guidance applies to all staff members, including and without limitation to teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators, volunteers and other third-parties who interact with students.

For staff members whose children are students of CPS or who have family members that attend a CPS school, these guidelines do not apply to the usual parent/child or familial relationship.

General Standards

The following general standards apply to all staff/student interactions.

- Personal contact between students and staff members must always be appropriate to the circumstances, non-sexual and unambiguous in meaning.
- Staff members shall maintain a strictly professional relationship with students, whether on or off school property and during or outside of school hours.
- Staff members are responsible for maintaining professional and appropriate physical and emotional boundaries with students at all times.
- Interactions between staff members and students should be based on mutual respect and trust.
- Staff members are responsible for treating all students consistently and in line with the educational mission of the District.

Unacceptable Behavior

The following behaviors are unacceptable and therefore strictly prohibited. Each behavior is an example of the inappropriate and prohibited crossing of a boundary and violation of the professional role of a staff member. This list is not exhaustive.

- Staff members shall not target a particular student or students for personal attention or friendship beyond the normal staff member-student relationship.
- Staff members shall not ask a student to keep a secret, or coerce a student to confide his/her personal or family problems. This example does not apply when counseling staff are meeting with students. If a student initiates a discussion of his/her personal or family problems, staff members are expected to be supportive and to refer the student to the counseling staff member, if appropriate.
- Staff members shall not engage in sexual banter, jokes or innuendoes with students.
- Staff members shall not show inappropriate images, including pornography, to students.¹
- Staff members shall not engage in, discuss or plan future romantic or sexual relationships with students.
- Staff members shall not make sexual advances towards students or flirt with students.
- Staff members shall not engage with a student's flirting or sexual overtures. Any incidents of a student flirting with a staff member or making sexual overtures towards a staff member should be reported pursuant to the "Reporting Possible or Actual Violations of These Guidelines" section.
- Staff members shall not provide or offer to provide alcohol, drugs or tobacco to students.
- Staff members shall not single out any one student and provide him or her with gift(s) without the prior approval of the school administrator. Nominal gifts to multiple students/classroom are permissible.
- Staff members shall not address students with unique pet names or personalized terms of endearment that suggest a unique and overly familiar relationship. Staff members should not allow students to address them by their first name, nickname, pet names or personalized terms of endearment that suggest an overly familiar relationship.
- Staff members shall not engage in any type of inappropriate physical contact with students or any other conduct that might be considered harassment under the Chicago Board of Education's (Board) Comprehensive Non-Discrimination Title IX and Sexual Harassment Policy (16-0525-PO1).

Appearances of Impropriety

Most contact between students and staff is appropriate and professional. For example, it is appropriate for a teacher to address a student's concerns over an assignment after class or provide one-on-one tutoring support. However, there are instances or activities that could be considered to be invasions of appropriate boundaries and can create an actual impropriety or the appearance of impropriety.

In order to protect students and staff, the below activities should be avoided by staff members. This list is not exhaustive and there may be situations where these activities are within professional staff/student boundaries.

¹ Note: the CPS sexual health education curriculum contains medically accurate and age appropriate content. It is considered appropriate to share during sexual health education lessons.

- Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others, unless indicated on a student's individualized education plan (IEP), 504 plan or required service (e.g. vision or health screening);
- Inviting or allowing individual students to visit the staff member's home; or
- Visiting a student's home or meeting the student at another location outside of school for non-educational purposes.

Before an above activity has occurred, staff members should communicate with the appropriate administrator and obtain approval. If an above activity occurs and is not approved, the staff member must report the occurrence to the appropriate administrator as soon as possible.

Electronic Communication

Communicating via electronic means can be a valuable way to convey information. However, caution should be exercised when staff members are communicating with students via electronic means. At all times, staff members shall abide by the Board's Acceptable Use Policy (09-0722-PO3). Staff members communicating with students via electronic means must do so using the CPS network and for educational purposes only.

Staff members shall not engage in any unacceptable behavior with students via electronic means. Staff members should also avoid any appearances of impropriety with students via electronic means.

Staff members shall not accept or initiate connections with current students on social networking sites.

If a staff member has a social networking site for educational purposes, the staff member shall obtain permission from the principal and parents to engage with students via this site.

Travel/Transportation

Consistent with the Board's Student Travel Policy (10-0526-PO1), it is strongly discouraged for staff members to transport a student in the staff members' private vehicle(s). No staff member may transport any student without written consent from the principal and parent/guardian of the student. Written consent from the parent/guardian must be given in advance of the trip on the attached Form A. If the principal gives consent to a staff member to transport a student in a private vehicle, the principal must maintain a copy of the staff member's driver's license and insurance documentation.

If a staff member transports a student with permission from the parent/guardian and the principal, efforts should be made for an additional adult to be in the car such that the staff member is not alone with a student outside the view of others.

Report Suspected Child Abuse

All school personnel are mandated reporters. A mandated reporter who has reasonable cause to believe that a child known to him/her in his/her official capacity may have been abused or neglected shall immediately call the DCFS Hotline at 1-800-252-2873 (1-800-25-ABUSE). For

additional information on this requirement, please see the Board's Reporting of Child Abuse and Child Neglect Policy (08-0723-PO2).

Reporting Possible or Actual Violations of These Guidelines

Students, parents/guardians and staff members shall notify the principal, assistant principal, or Network Chief if they believe a staff member may be engaging in conduct that violates these Guidelines. Prompt reporting protects all personnel. Staff should immediately notify the principal if they believe that they are receiving inappropriate attention from a student, or if they have been subject to sexual advances, comments or communications by a student. Any complaints/notifications shall be logged into Verify by the principal or assistant principal within five school days of receipt.

The failure of a staff member to timely notify the school principal of conduct that violates these Guidelines could result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from employment.

Staff members also have an independent obligation to notify DCFS if they suspect that child abuse has occurred.

FORM A

I give permission for _____[staff member]_____ to transport my student _____ in his or her private vehicle. This permission extends to the following scenarios/situations:

[insert days of the week/times or specific situations, etc.]

In giving this permission, I acknowledge that _____[staff member]_____ may be alone in his or her private vehicle with my student.

Parent/Guardian signature

Principal signature

Date