

Walla Walla Public Schools

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE

No. P-5253

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MAINTAINING PROFESSIONAL STAFF/STUDENT BOUNDARIES

Educators, volunteers, students, parents, and other concerned adults are the key to stopping unprofessional conduct against students. This can be prevented by maintaining professional boundaries with students. The following information will protect students and the profession.

Reporting Violations

All school staff members, board members, contractors or volunteers must promptly notify their supervisor or appropriate administrator if they suspect a staff member, contractor or volunteer is suspected of engaging in a boundary invasion toward a student.

Reporters should:

- Immediately report suspicious behavior rather than trying to determine whether there is an appropriate explanation;
- Not confront or discuss the matter with the individual at issue or with anyone else, but maintain confidentiality to protect privacy and avoid rumors; and
- Document for their own records that they notified an administrator/supervisor, including to whom and what they reported.

Students, parents/guardians and community members should also immediately notify the principal (or other administrator) if they believe a staff member, contractor or volunteer might be engaging in inappropriate boundary invasion conduct with a student. If a student, parent/guardian or community member is uncomfortable reporting to the principal or administrator, they should make a report using the district's Safe Schools Tip Line at 855-976-8772 or through the online portal at: <https://wwps-wa.safeschoolsalert.com/>.

Boundary Invasion

A boundary invasion is an act or pattern of behavior by a staff member, contractor 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.

Adults should always seek to maintain appropriate, adult-student boundaries consistent with these procedures. The board recognizes that familial or pre-existing social relationships with parents, guardians and their students outside of school may impact how staff, volunteers, and contractors interact with specific students outside of school. If a staff member, contractor, or volunteer has questions about their relationship and interaction with students outside of school, they should visit with their supervisor or school administrator.

Staff members, contractors, and volunteers shall not engage in boundary invasions of students, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

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- A. Any type of inappropriate physical or sexual contact with a student or any other conduct that violates the board's policies regarding student welfare, the educational environment, or conduct toward students. Inappropriate physical conduct includes, but is not limited to, sensual caressing that involves close, intimate physical contact beyond congratulatory-type hugs, 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 photographs of a student without any legitimate educational or professional purpose;
- D. Any kind of flirtatious or sexual communication 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, or engaging in "peer like" behavior with one or more students;
- F. Providing alcohol, drugs, or tobacco to students, or socializing where students are illegally consuming alcohol, drugs or tobacco;
- G. For non-guidance/counseling staff, soliciting intimate information about a student's personal or family problems and/or relationships. If a student initiates such discussions, when appropriate, staff members should refer the student to guidance/counseling staff;
- 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;
- K. Disclosing overly personal, sexual, or other private matters to one or more students when there is no legitimate educational value;
- L. Addressing students or permitting students to address staff members, contractors or volunteers with personalized terms of endearment;
- M. Maintaining personal contact (including "friending" or "following") a student on any social networking application or device unless there is a legitimate educational interest, or when a familial or pre-existing social relationship with the parents or guardians and students is present;
- N. Sending phone, e-mail, text, instant messenger, or other forms of written or electronic communication to individual students when the communication is unrelated to school work,

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legitimate school business, or when there is a familial/pre-existing social relationship exemption. If staff members have educational or legitimate school business to conduct, they shall normally use district email or a pre-approved district communication tool (e.g. ParentSquare). When it is necessary to communicate with an individual student using means other than district email or pre-approved communication tool, such as text, messenger or other form, the staff member shall ensure that the correspondence is archived and maintained pursuant to public records retention. When communicating using such alternate platforms, it is recommended that staff consider including a parent/guardian, another student, colleague or a school administrator on the communication, or notifying their school administrator of the communication to avoid the appearance of possible impropriety. All communication, regardless of platform, will respect adult-student boundaries as outlined in policy and procedures;

- O. Exchanging or providing personal gifts, cards, or personal letters with an individual student, except when there are familial or pre-existing social relationship with families, or during customary recognition or celebrations of accomplishment (e.g. graduation cards, recognition of athletic or academic accomplishments);
- 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 or unless there is a familial or pre-existing social relationship with the parents or guardians and student;
- Q. Giving a student a ride in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation without a legitimate professional purpose unless parental approval is given or there is a familial or pre-existing social relationship with the parents or guardians and student;
- 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. Being alone with an individual student without line of site from outside the room (see below for additional information); and/or
- U. Any home visits unless other adults are present, parental approval is given, or if there is a familial or pre-existing social relationship with the parents or guardians and student.

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Additional Guidelines

The following guidelines have been developed to assist adults in helping to prevent boundary violations. In some situations, facility design, campus/room layouts, specific program delivery, or other circumstances may necessitate modifications or adaptations to these guidelines. When possible, adults should consult with their supervisor to seek clarification, accommodations or approval ahead of time. Staff or other adults with questions about the interpretation and application of these guidelines are encouraged to visit with their supervisor.

A. Prevention Measures to Help Minimize One-on-One Access to Students

1. Interior classroom windows (if any) should not be intentionally covered, except possibly during active lockdown situations, when specific classroom activities necessitate temporary darkened rooms, or other temporary legitimate educational purpose as reviewed and pre-approved by the site administrator. For example, while window hangings of student work or decoration may partially block views, door windows and sidelight windows, if available, should not normally be fully covered or obscured intentionally.
2. When an educator, counselor, administrator or other adult meets in a classroom/office space alone with a student and there is no window, door glass or side light, it is recommended that a door remain open when feasible. However, there are circumstances when this may not be practical (e.g. exterior classroom door).
3. When possible, assign two educators to monitor inside communal bathrooms and inside locker rooms of their gender.
4. When dealing with a toileting incident, when possible, two adults should assist the student.
5. Prohibit educators from
 - a. escorting a student without another adult or student present to private areas, such as storage closets or to their hotel room when on a field trip;
 - b. taking a student to an educator's home, unless parental approval is given or there is a familial or pre-existing social relationship with the parents or guardians and student.
6. When feasible, encourage staff and volunteers to use separate bathrooms. Staff should never change or use showers in the presence of students.
7. While under a distance learning model, utilizing official district email, telephone and approved videoconferencing technology for the explicit purpose of communicating individually with students related to school business may be necessary. Staff will ensure their communication is always appropriate and respects professional teacher-student boundaries. Additional communication safeguards to consider under remote learning may include:

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- When feasible, emailing and videoconferencing with more than one student at a time.
- A parent may request to monitor individual phone, email or video conferencing sessions by informing their child and notifying their teacher(s) in advance.
- When practical, having another adult in the same area/room of the teacher while one-on-one communication transpires.
- Families may arrange for additional adult proximity to their child while any one-on-one communication transpires.
- When other accommodations listed above cannot be implemented, the opportunity to record one-on-one videoconferencing sessions to protect students and staff may be considered. Under this scenario, sessions may be recorded by the teacher and securely stored for archive purposes only. Parents/guardians who do not consent to recording one-on-one sessions for student safety purposes must notify their child's teacher or school administrator in writing.

B. Enforcing Professional Boundaries with Supervision

1. Require that supervisors
 - a. receive training on professional boundaries;
 - b. make periodic unannounced visits in class and during activities;
 - c. correct and provide prompt feedback to educators regarding their adherence to professional boundaries; and
 - d. stop any interaction with a student that appears suspicious.

C. Coaching Sports/Activities

1. In coaching/supervising any sport or activity, be mindful of touching involved from coaches/advisors, and seek ways to mitigate.
2. If applicable, coaches/advisors should inform players/participants that sometimes their activity may involve physical touch for the purpose of teaching the sport/activity, but anyone uncomfortable can ask not to be touched and the coach/advisor will strive to respect the student's wishes. Students should have the opportunity to inform the coach/advisor privately that they do not want coaching/advising to include touch, and coaches/advisors should not publicly reveal such communication, but should share it with any assistants.
3. If possible, assign two coaches or a second adult at practices.

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 Assistant Superintendent or Director of Human Resources. The Assistant Superintendent or Director of Human Resources will see that the matter is investigated and documented, and if a boundary invasion has occurred without a legitimate educational or safety purpose, that

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appropriate action is taken and documented. The use of an outside investigator may be considered depending on the circumstances. The Assistant Superintendent or Director of Human Resources will maintain a file documenting reports, letters of direction, and discipline relating to professional boundary investigations. When it is determined that a boundary violation has occurred, the Superintendent shall be notified.

Reminder About Reporting Child Abuse, Sexual Abuse or Sexual Misconduct

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 and Neglect. 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.

Disciplinary Action

Staff member, contractor 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 the conduct violates the Code of Professional Conduct in Chpt. WAC 181-87 and whether to report a certificated employee to the Office of Professional Practices is warranted.

Training

All new staff members, contractors 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 procedure will be included on the district website and in all employee and volunteer handbooks. Annually, all administrators and staff will receive copies of the district's reporting protocol. The district shall also provide access to this policy and procedure to students and their parents each school year.

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