

SECC Office of Education Board Policy

2023

All School Personnel – Professional Adult/Student Conduct/Expectations/Boundaries

Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide all SECC school employees, substitutes and regular volunteers with guidelines to maintain appropriate boundaries and professional relationships with students and to protect children from inappropriate conduct. All adults are expected to maintain the highest professional, moral, and ethical standards in their interaction with students that are conducive to an effective, safe learning environment. The interactions and relationships between adults and students should be based upon mutual respect and trust, and an understanding of the appropriate boundaries between adults and students both in AND outside of the educational setting.

This policy addresses a range of behaviors that include not only obviously unlawful or improper interactions with students, but also boundary-blurring and grooming behaviors that undermine the professional adult/student relationship and can lead to misconduct or the appearance of impropriety.

Avoiding the Appearance of Impropriety

Employees are expected to be aware of the appearance of impropriety in their own conduct and the conduct of other adults when interacting with students. Although an employee's intention may be for a professional and/or legitimate educational purpose, the following situations can create the appearance of impropriety and should be avoided whenever possible:

1. Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others;
2. Inviting or allowing individual students to visit the employee's home;
3. Visiting a student's home unless home visits are a required and expected duty of the adult.

If unavoidable, these activities must be pre-approved by the appropriate school administrator. If not pre-approved, the employee must report the occurrence to the appropriate school administrator as soon as possible.

Electronic Communication with Students

As with other forms of communication, when communicating electronically, employees shall maintain professional boundaries with students at all times.

Electronic and other communications with students shall be used for legitimate educational purposes only. Employees shall not maintain personal contact with a student outside of school by phone, letter, electronic communication, or other means (beyond legitimate educational purposes) without including the parent/guardian and/or a school administrator on the communication.

Where an electronic communication needs to be sent to a team or club members, the electronic communication shall concern only legitimate educational purposes and shall be sent in a single

communication to all participating team or club members. Where a communication concerns an individual's medical or academic privacy matters and needs to be sent to only that student, the school principal should also be copied and included in that communication.

When available, employees should use their school-issued email accounts, school-provided communication devices, and/or classroom parent-communication apps such as Remind or ClassDojo to communicate electronically with students.

Employees shall not communicate with students, for any reason, through use of a medium that is designed to eliminate all traces or records of the communication (e.g. "Snapchat" or other non-traceable messaging apps).

Employees shall not follow or accept friend requests from current students or non-adult former students or make social connections on personal social networking sites. Employees shall not create or participate in any networking site for communication with students other than those provided by the school for this purpose, without the prior written approval of the school principal.

Boundary Violations

A boundary violation is an act or omission by an employee that does not have a legitimate educational purpose and has the potential to blur and/or abuse the professional adult/student relationship. Examples of employee conduct that violate professional adult/student boundaries include but are not limited to the following:

1. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the professional staff-student relationship.
2. For non-guidance/counseling staff, encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. Should a student initiate such discussions of a personal matter, employees should take great care with the information and possibly refer the student to appropriate counseling resources.
3. Addressing students or permitting students to address staff members with personalized terms of endearment, pet names or otherwise in an overly familiar manner.
4. Contacting and/or communicating with a student outside of the educational setting by phone, e-mail, instant messenger or Internet chat rooms, social media apps or social networking websites such as Facebook, Instagram, or TikTok or letters beyond homework or other legitimate educational purposes without including the parent/guardian on the communication.

This prohibition specifically includes "friending" or "following" students on social media unless the social media page is dedicated to a legitimate school business. This also specifically includes the posting of student images or other personally identifiable information of students on an adult's personal website or social media site.

5. Exchanging personal gifts, cards or letters with an individual student for which it is directly or implicitly suggested that a student is to say or do something in return.
6. Touching students or initiating physical contact with a student that serves no legitimate

educational purpose.

Legitimate purposes include the following: (a) Assisting an injured student; (b) assisting a student with special needs who needs assistance with toileting (ECE's) or other physical assistance; (c) appropriate coaching instruction; (d) appropriate music instruction; or (e) to protect the safety of students or staff.

7. Socializing or spending time with students (including but not limited to activities such as going out for beverages, meals or movies, shopping, traveling, recreational activities and visiting the student's home) outside of school-sponsored events, except where the student and adult are participating in a separately organized community activity.
8. Being alone with a student without a legitimate educational purpose.

Boundary Violations Constituting Serious Misconduct

A boundary violation that constitutes serious misconduct is an act, omission, or pattern of such behavior by an adult that does not have a legitimate educational purpose; and results in abuse of the staff/student professional relationship.

A. Romantic or Sexual Relationships

Employees are prohibited from dating, courting, or entering into or attempting to form a romantic or sexual relationship with any student, regardless of the student's age.

Prohibited romantic or sexual interaction involving students includes, but is not limited to:

1. Sexual physical contact;
2. Romantic flirtation, propositions, or sexual remarks;
3. Sexual slurs, leering, epithets, sexual or derogatory comments;
4. Personal comments about a student's body;
5. Sexual jokes, banter, innuendo, notes, stories, drawings, gestures or pictures of a sexual nature;
6. Spreading sexual or romantic rumors;
7. Touching a student's body or clothes in a sexual or intimate way or in a manner that is not age appropriate;
8. Restricting a student's freedom of movement in a sexually intimidating or provocative manner;
9. Displaying or transmitting sexual objects, pornography, pictures, or depictions to a student; or
10. Any type of conduct that would be considered harassment under the Pacific Union Education Code and School Handbook policy.

B. Social and Other Interactions

Employees are prohibited from engaging in social and other interactions with students which abuse the student/staff professional relationship.

Prohibited social and other interaction involving students includes, but is not limited to:

1. Sending or accompanying students on personal errands unrelated to any legitimate educational purpose;
2. Furnishing alcohol, drugs or tobacco to a student, or being present where any student is consuming these substances and failing to notify the proper authorities;
3. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns or other private matters to one or more students;
4. Sharing personal secrets with a student;
5. Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy (e.g. intentionally walking in on the student in the bathroom);
6. Taking a student out of class without a legitimate educational purpose;
7. Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation without prior notification to and/or approval from the school principal as described above or a parent/guardian's permission;
8. Engaging in harassing or discriminatory conduct prohibited by other school or conference policies or by State or Federal law and regulations.

Limited Exceptions

There may be limited exceptions where an emergency situation or a legitimate educational purpose may justify deviation from the professional boundary guidelines set out in this policy. However, the employee must be prepared to explain and articulate the reason for any such deviation and must demonstrate that he/she has maintained an appropriate relationship with the student.

Under no circumstance will an educational or any other reason justify deviation from the "Romantic and Sexual Relationship" section of this policy.

There may be circumstances where there is an appropriate pre-existing personal relationship between an employee and a student's family that exists independently of the employee's position with the school (e.g. when their children are friends). This policy is not intended to interfere with such relationships or to limit activities that are normally consistent with such relationships. Employees are strongly encouraged to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity.

It is understood that adults may be involved in other roles in the community through civic, religious, athletic, scouting or other organizations and programs whose participants may include the school's students. This policy is not intended to interfere with or restrict an adult's ability to serve in those roles; however, adults are strongly encouraged to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity with regard to all youth with whom they interact in the course of their community involvement.

The following section aligns with the Pacific Union Education Code E10-144 Relating to Sexual Misconduct Incidents Towards Students.

Duty to Report as a Mandated Reporter

When an employee observes conduct or has knowledge of another employee violating this policy that creates a reasonable suspicion of child abuse (including sexual abuse), or when an employee has reasonable suspicion of an adult harming or endangering a child, the employee shall report the conduct to the appropriate designated agency in accordance with California Law as a mandated reporter.

Investigation

Whenever the SECC Office of Education receives a report concerning a possible boundary violation, the superintendent will work with school administration, in-house SECC legal counsel and a Human Resources Administrator and if necessary, local authorities and Family and Child Services to conduct a prompt investigation utilizing the procedures for investigations of allegations of serious misconduct.

Immediate intervention shall be considered and implemented when necessary to protect student safety and/or the integrity of the investigation.

Disciplinary Action

Any employee who is found to have engaged in conduct in violation of law and/or this policy shall be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination. The Superintendent or designee shall notify local law enforcement as appropriate.

An employee who has knowledge of but fails to report inappropriate employee conduct may also be subject to discipline.

A volunteer, student teacher, independent contractor or an employee of an independent contractor who violates this policy may be prohibited from working or serving in SECC schools and programs for an appropriate period of time or permanently, as determined by the Superintendent or designee.

Confidentiality and Retaliation

The SECC prohibits retaliation against anyone who files a complaint under this policy. Any employee who retaliates against any such complainant, reporter, or other participant in the complaint process shall be subject to discipline.

Reporting employees are specifically advised of the following:

1. Reporting employees are neither permitted nor responsible for investigating whether the

conduct is inappropriate; and

2. Reporting employees are required to maintain confidentiality.

Confidentiality protects both the student(s) and the adult who is the subject of the complaint. Failure to maintain confidentiality may foster untrue and potentially harmful rumor and impede the investigation. Nothing in this policy shall prevent any represented employee from consulting with his/her exclusive representative.

This policy was voted to approve on March 6, 2023 by the SECC Education Board

Please sign and return the next page as directed.

SOUTHEASTERN CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE
Acknowledgement Form

Adult/Student Conduct Expectations and Boundaries

This is an acknowledgement form that attests that you have received this document and agree to abide by the tenants of this policy.

Please print, sign and date this receipt. You can scan and return to kathi.christenson@seccsda.org or print and mail to the address below.

Southeastern California Conference
Office of Education
PO Box 79990
Riverside, CA 92513-1990

Signature _____

Print Name _____

Date _____