

STAFF CONDUCT WITH STUDENTS

The Augusta School Department Board of Education expects all staff members, including teachers, educational technicians, secretaries, nurses, custodians, maintenance, food service, coaches, counselors, administrators, and others, to maintain the highest professional, moral, and ethical standards in their conduct with students. For the purposes of this policy, staff members also include school volunteers, student teachers, and substitutes.

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that interactions and relationships between staff members and students are based upon mutual respect and trust; that staff members understand the importance of maintaining appropriate professional boundaries between adults and students in an educational setting; and that staff members conduct themselves in a manner consistent with the educational mission of the schools. It is understood that staff members may interact with and have friendships and/or extended family relationships with students' families outside of school. This policy is not intended to prohibit such interactions for families and friendships, provided that professional boundaries are maintained at all times.

Staff members are expected to be sensitive to the appearance of impropriety in their conduct with students and are encouraged to discuss issues with their building administrator or their supervisor whenever they are unsure whether particular conduct may constitute a violation of this policy.

Unacceptable Conduct

Examples of unacceptable conduct by staff members that are expressly prohibited include but are not limited to the following:

- A. Any type of sexual or inappropriate physical contact with students or any other conduct that might be considered harassment under the Board's policy on Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students;
- B. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the normal teacher-student relationship;

- C. For non-guidance/counseling staff, if a student initiates discussions confiding personal or family problems and/or relationships, staff members are expected to be supportive and listen but to refer the student to appropriate guidance/counseling staff;
- D. Engaging in sexual banter, allusions, jokes, or innuendos with students;
- E. Asking a student to keep a secret;
- F. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns, or other private matters to one or more students;
- G. Addressing students with terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner;
- H. Permitting students to address you by your first name, nickname or otherwise in an overly familiar manner. It is important for staff to maintain professional boundaries and respect in how they are addressed by students;
- I. “Friending” and/or gaming with students or engaging in any other interactions on social media or through digital applications (outside of any school-approved activity);
- J. Communicating with students on non-school matters through phone calls, email, text messages, Messenger or any other digital methods, or by notes, letters or any other means (unless the student’s parent approves of the activity, e. g, in the context of employment or participation in community activities);

Before engaging in the following activities, staff members should consult with the building principal or their supervisor, as appropriate:

- K. Being alone with individual students out of the view of others;
- L. Driving students home or to other locations;
- M. Inviting or allowing students to visit the staff member’s home (unless the student’s

parent approves of the activity, such as when a student babysits or performs chores for a staff member);

- N. Visiting a student's home or in another location, unless on official school business that is known and agreed to by the parent;
- O. Exchanging personal gifts (beyond the customary student-teacher gifts); and/or
- P. Socializing or spending time with students (including but not limited to activities such as going out for meals or movies, shopping, traveling, and recreational activities) outside of school-sponsored events except as participants in organized community activities.

Reporting Violations

Students and/or their parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to notify the Superintendent or building principal if they believe a teacher or other staff member may be engaging in conduct that violates this policy.

Staff members are required to notify the Superintendent or building principal if they become aware of a situation that may constitute a violation of this policy.

Disciplinary Action

Staff violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Violations involving sexual or other abuse will also result in referral to the Department of Human Services, the District Attorney and/or law enforcement in accordance with the Board's policy on Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect.

School Unit Obligation to Report to Maine Department of Education (MDOE)

Any staff member holding a credential should be aware that violation of this policy may result in revocation or suspension of a certificate if it endangers the health, safety or welfare of a student. The Superintendent/designee will notify the MDOE immediately if a credential holder is disciplined, suspended or terminated as a result of a "covered investigation" (as defined in 20-A MRSA § 13025) in which the school unit determined

that a student's health, safety or welfare was endangered. As soon as practicable, the school unit will provide to the MDOE any final report produced in support of the school unit's decision to discipline, suspend or terminate the credential holder. The credential holder may submit a written rebuttal to the report to the MDOE. The Superintendent/designee will notify the MDOE immediately if a credential holder who is the subject of a covered investigation leaves the school unit's employment for any reason prior to the conclusion of the covered investigation.

Dissemination of Policy

This policy shall be included in all employee, student and volunteer handbooks.

Cross Reference: ACAA - Harassment and Sexual Harassment of Students
 GCSA - Staff Computer/Internet Use
 JLF - Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect
 EEAG – Use of Private Vehicles on School Business

Adopted: January 13, 2021