

Sylvan Heights Science Charter School

Policy Title: Maintaining Professional Adult/Student Boundaries
Policy Number: 824
Adopted: November 25, 2019
Revised: November 16, 2020

Authority

This policy applies to Sylvan Height Science Charter School (School) employees, volunteers, student teachers, and independent contractors and their employees who interact with students or are present on school grounds. For purposes of this policy, such individuals are referred to collectively as adults.

All adults shall be expected to maintain professional, moral, and ethical relationships with School students that are conducive to an effective and safe learning environment. This policy addresses a range of behaviors that include not only unlawful or improper interactions with students, but also precursor grooming and other boundary-blurring behaviors that can lead to more egregious misconduct.

The Board directs that all adults shall be informed of conduct that is prohibited and the disciplinary actions that may be applied for violation of Board policies, administrative regulations, rules, and procedures.

This policy is not intended to interfere with appropriate pre-existing personal relationships between adults and students and their families that exist independently of the School or to interfere with participation in civic, religious or other outside organizations that include School students.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, legitimate educational reasons include matters or communications related to teaching, counseling, athletics, extracurricular activities, treatment of a student's physical injury or other medical needs, school administration or other purposes within the scope of the adult's job duties.

Delegation of Responsibility

The Principal/Chief Academic Officer (CAO) or designee will annually inform students, parents/guardians, and all adults regarding the contents of this Board policy through employee and student handbooks, posting on the School website, and by other appropriate methods.

The Principal/CAO or designee will be available to answer questions about behaviors or

activities that may violate professional boundaries as defined in this policy.

Independent contractors doing business with the School, and having direct contact with children thus requiring criminal clearances, will be given notice of this policy and will ensure that their employees who have interaction with students or are present on School grounds are informed of the provisions of this policy.

Guidelines

Adults will establish and maintain appropriate personal boundaries with students and will not engage in any behavior that is prohibited by this policy or that creates the appearance of prohibited behavior.

Prohibited Conduct

Physical Contact

Adults will treat students with dignity and respect.

Adults will promote the health, safety and well-being of students by establishing and maintaining appropriate verbal, physical, emotional, and social boundaries. Engage in physical conduct only where there is a clearly defined purpose that benefits the student and continually keeps the safety and well-being of the student in mind.

Gestures that are appropriate include “high fives,” “handshakes,” “open-handed pats on the back,” and “fist bumps.” Such gestures shall be done in a public setting and include only those gestures that would be appropriate in front of the Principal/CAO and the student’s parents. It is not appropriate to initiate a hug with a student. Students may initiate hugs.

In lieu of physical gestures, consider positive vocal encouragement.

Romantic or Sexual Relationships -

Adults will be prohibited from dating, courting, or entering into or attempting to form a romantic or sexual relationship with any student enrolled in the School, regardless of the student's age. Students of any age are not legally capable of consenting to romantic or sexual interactions with adults.

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 that would be deemed inappropriate or of relating to a sexual nature.
5. Sexual jokes, notes, stories, drawings, gestures or pictures.
6. Spreading sexual or romantic rumors.
7. Touching a student's body or clothes in a sexual or intimate way.
8. Accepting massages, or offering or giving massages other than in the course of injury care administered by an athletic trainer, coach, or health care provider.
9. Restricting a student's freedom of movement in a sexually intimidating or provocative manner.
10. Displaying or transmitting sexual objects, pictures, or depictions.

Social Interactions –

In order to maintain professional boundaries, adults will ensure that their interactions with students are appropriate.

Examples of prohibited conduct that violates professional boundaries include, but are not limited to:

1. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns or other private matters to one or more students.
2. Exchanging notes, emails (regardless whether the account is personal or professional), or other communications of a personal nature with a student.
3. Giving personal gifts, cards, or letters to a student without informing the Principal/CAO.
4. Touching students without a legitimate educational reason. Some appropriate examples include, but are not limited to, the need for assistance when injured, a student having a toileting accident and requiring assistance, appropriate coaching instruction, and/or appropriate music instruction.
5. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention or friendship beyond the ordinary professional adult-student relationship.
6. Taking a student out of class without a legitimate educational reason.

7. Being alone with a student behind closed doors without a legitimate educational reason.
8. Initiating or extending contact with a student beyond the school day or outside of class times without a legitimate educational reason.
9. Sending or accompanying a student on personal errands.
10. Inviting a student to the adult's home.
11. Going to a student's home without a legitimate educational reason.
12. Taking a student or students on outings without prior notification to and approval from both the parent/guardian and the Principal/CAO.
13. Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a nonemergency situation without prior notification to and approval from both the parent/guardian and the Principal/CAO.
14. Addressing students or permitting students to address adults with inappropriate personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner.
15. Sharing or telling personal secret(s) with/to a student.
16. For adults who are not guidance/counseling staff, psychologists, social workers or other adults with designated responsibilities to counsel students, encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. If a student initiates such discussions, the student should be referred to the appropriate school resource.
17. Engaging in harassing or discriminatory conduct prohibited by other School policies or by state or federal law and regulations.
18. Furnishing alcohol, drugs or tobacco to a student, or being present where any student is consuming these substances.
19. Engage in electronic communication with a student. For the purposes of this policy, electronic communication shall mean a communication transmitted by means of an electronic device including but not limited to, a telephone, cellular telephone, computer, computer network, personal data assistant, pager, or any developing technology, application, or interface used to communicate. Electronic communications include, but are not limited to, emails, instant messages, and personal networking websites. Such communications include pictures and symbols, snapchat, and/or any technology, applications, or interface used to communicate and/or submit the same. Electronic communication with students shall be for legitimate educational reasons only. When available, School-provided email or other School-provided communication devices or

platforms shall be used when communicating electronically with students. The use of School-provided email or other School-provided communication devices or platforms shall be in accordance with Board policies and procedures. The preferred method of electronic communication with students is through Class DoJo and/or Google Classroom.

Exceptions

An emergency situation or a legitimate educational reason may justify deviation from the rules regarding communication or methods for maintaining professional boundaries set out in this policy. The adult will immediately notify the Principal/CAO when such issues arise. The adult will be prepared to articulate the reason for any deviation from the requirements of this policy and must demonstrate that s/he has maintained an appropriate relationship with the student.

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

There will be circumstances where personal relationships develop between an adult and a student's family, e.g. when their children become friends. This policy is not intended to interfere with such relationships or to limit activities that are normally consistent with such relationships. Adults are strongly encouraged to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity.

It is understood that many adults are involved in various other roles in the community through non-school-related civic, religious, athletic, scouting or other organizations and programs whose participants may include School students. Such community involvement is commendable, and 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.

Reporting Inappropriate or Suspicious Conduct

Any person, including a student, who has concerns about or is uncomfortable with a relationship or interaction between an adult and a student, will immediately notify the Principal/CAO or Title IX Coordinator. Reports may be made using the Discrimination/Sexual Harassment/Bullying/Hazing/Retaliation Report Form or by making a general report verbally or in writing. Upon receipt of a report, school staff shall promptly notify the Principal/CAO or designee.

All School employees, independent contractors and volunteers who have reasonable cause to suspect that a child is the victim of child abuse, will immediately report the suspected abuse, in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Board policy.

An educator who knows of any action, inaction, or conduct which constitutes sexual abuse or exploitation or sexual misconduct under the Educator Discipline Act will report such

misconduct to the Pennsylvania Department of Education on the required form, and will report such misconduct to the Principal/CAO, Title IX Coordinator, and his/her immediate supervisor, promptly but not later than fifteen (15) days following discovery of such misconduct.

If the Principal/CAO reasonably suspects that conduct being reported involves an incident required to be reported under the Child Protective Services Law, the Educator Discipline Act or the Safe Schools Act, the Principal/CAO will make a report, in accordance with applicable law, regulations and Board policy.

It is a violation of this policy to retaliate against any person for reporting any action pursuant to this policy or for participating as a witness in any related investigation or hearing.

Investigation

The Title IX Coordinator shall promptly assess and address allegations of inappropriate conduct in accordance with the procedures utilized for reports of discrimination or Title IX sexual harassment.

It is understood that some reports made pursuant to this policy will be based on rumors or misunderstandings; the mere fact that the reported adult is cleared of any wrongdoing will not result in disciplinary action against the person making the report or any witnesses. If as the result of an investigation any individual, including the reported adult, the person making the report, or a witness is found to have knowingly provided false information in making the report or during the investigation or hearings related to the report, or if any individual intentionally obstructs the investigation or hearings, this may be addressed as a violation of this policy and other applicable laws, regulations, and School policies. Obstruction includes, but is not limited to, violation of "no contact" orders given to the reported adult, attempting to alter or influence witness testimony, and destruction of or hiding evidence.

Disciplinary Action

A School employee who violates this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination, in accordance with all applicable School disciplinary policies and procedures. The employee may also be subject to criminal prosecution.

A volunteer, student teacher, or independent contractor or an employee of an independent contractor who violates this policy may be prohibited from working or serving in the School for an appropriate period of time or permanently, as determined by the Principal/CAO in his/her sole discretion.

Training

The School will provide awareness, with respect to the provisions of this policy, to current

and new School employees, volunteers and student teachers subject to this policy through related administrative procedures.

The School, in its sole discretion, may require independent contractors and their employees who interact with students or are present on School grounds to receive training on this policy and related procedures.

References:

18 Pa. C.S.A. § 3124.2

23 Pa. C.S.A. § 6301 et seq.

23 Pa. C.S.A. § 6311

24 P.S. § 5-510

24 P.S. § 13-1302.1-A

24 P.S. § 13-1303-A

24 P.S. § 20-2070.1a et
seq. 24 P.S. § 20-2070.9a

24 P.S. § 20-2070.9f

22 Pa. Code § 10.2

22 Pa. Code § 10.21

22 Pa. Code § 10.22

22 Pa. Code § 235.1 et seq.

Board Policies – 103, 103.1, 104, 113.1, 218, 233, 317, 317.1, 806, 815, 818