

STAFF CONDUCT AND COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

The MSAD #8 School Board expects all staff members, including teachers, support staff, coaches, counselors administrators and others, including volunteers, to maintain the highest professional, moral and ethical standards in their conduct with students.

The interactions and relationships between staff members and students must be based upon mutual respect and trust, predicated upon an understanding of the appropriate boundaries between adults and students in an educational setting, and consistent with the educational mission of the school.

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

The School Board is appreciative of, and wishes to be supportive of staff members as they attempt to care for students in a personalized and caring manner, and do not wish to place unnecessary barriers to the myriad of times, places and ways that staff work to serve our students. The School Board also realizes that in our community staff members are themselves parents, neighbors and/or relatives of our students, and that consequently informal and outside relationships with students are healthy, normal and appropriate. Due to this circumstance, note that numbers 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 below include the language “unless such contact is linked to a legitimate relationship with a student outside the school.”*

In attempting to legislate behavior in this realm, the School Board is primarily attempting to make explicit its intolerance of behavior motivated or prompted by an unwillingness or inability to respect the physical and/or emotional health of our students. The Board recognizes that by adopting a policy it cannot mandate safe and appropriate behavior to those bent on doing otherwise. The Board explicitly states that its support for collegial relationships or its decision to not ban outright many sorts of student/staff interactions should in not any way be seen as a plausible defense to inappropriate contact with students.

Prohibited Conduct

Examples of unacceptable conduct by staff members that are expressly prohibited including, but are in no way limited to, the following:

1. Any type of sexual or inappropriate physical conduct with a student, or any conduct that might be considered harassment under Board Policies ACAA-R.

*Students providing a service for a fee is permissible: i.e. childcare and lawn care.

2. Using sexual banter, allusions, jokes, innuendos, flirtations or unduly coarse language with students.
3. Encouraging or allowing a student to confide to the staff member or with a student the staff member's personal or family problems and/or relationships or other private matters with the intent or result that the staff member's relationship with the student blurs the professional boundaries between student and staff member, and as a consequence is or may become unhealthy or unsafe for the student. It is professionally appropriate for the staff member to be empathic and to help a student process and cope with a challenging situation. It is not appropriate to "over share with a student. Staff members are expected to promptly refer acute or serious chronic problems expressed by students to administrative, counseling, or health care staff.
4. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention or friendship or ridicule within the school environment that displays or appears to display a lack of fairness and equity for all students and is done for other than appropriate educational purposes.
5. Maintaining contact with a student(s) by telephone/text, email, Instant Messenger, or other social media, unless such contact is school related or linked to a legitimate relationship with a student outside the school. It is preferred that staff use school provided communication platforms when communicating with students. When emailing, staff personal email accounts may not be used.
6. Referencing in a negative fashion, either explicitly or implied, Vinalhaven School or its students, staff and parents/guardians on personal social media platforms, including Facebook, unless such reference is linked to a legitimate relationship with a student, staff member or parent/guardian outside the school.
7. "Friending" a student on Facebook or other social media unless such "friending" is linked to a legitimate relationship with the student outside the school.

Conduct or communication requiring administrative approval

Before engaging in conduct such as the following, staff members shall review the activity with the superintendent or principal.

8. Facebook and other social media may be used for school purposes (i.e. a National Honor Society page) to communicate with students, families and the community, and must be administered by a staff member who will approve all followers and will monitor the page.
9. Inviting or allowing students to visit the staff member's home, or visiting a student's home, unless on official school business, or linked to a legitimate relationship with a student outside the school.

10. Exchanging personal gifts beyond customary student/staff gifts unless the exchange occurs as part of a legitimate relationship with the student outside of school.
11. Socializing with students outside of school-sponsored or community organized events unless the socializing arises out of a legitimate relationship with the student outside of school, or is incidental to socializing with other adults.

Reporting Suspected Violations

Students and/or parents or guardians are encouraged to notify the superintendent or principal if they believe a teacher or staff member may be engaging in conduct that is inappropriate and/or violates this policy.

Staff members are required to notify promptly the superintendent or principal if they reasonably believe a violation of this policy has occurred.

Students, parents/guardians, or other staff should not undertake an investigation before notifying the administrator. They need only have reasonable grounds to suspect that a violation may be occurring to make a referral.

Disciplinary Action

Staff violations of this policy shall result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Violations involving possible sexual or other abuse will also be referred to the Maine Department of Human Services, law enforcement, and/or other officials in accordance with Board Policy JRF-R

Approved 01/24/2018