



**Standards of Conduct for
Maintaining Professional Boundaries
between Staff and Students**

**Effective September 8, 2020
Version 2.0**



Chicago Public Schools
Standards of Conduct for Maintaining Professional Boundaries between Staff and Students
(formerly known as the “Guidelines Regarding Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries”)
Version 2.0 - Last Revised on 9.4.20

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Section 1: Purpose

Chicago Public Schools (CPS) employs dedicated and professional staff members who provide students with a safe and supportive learning environment. The District encourages healthy relationships between students and school staff and administrators to promote student achievement and success. These standards define appropriate and reasonable boundaries for staff members and students to (1) protect students from sexual misconduct and abuse, and (2) to protect staff members from misunderstandings and false accusations.

Section 2: Applicability

The Standards apply to all employees (including and without limitation to teachers, coaches, counselors, administrators), volunteers, vendors, consultants and their employees, and other third-parties who interact with students (hereinafter “staff” or “staff members”).

For staff members whose children are students of CPS or who have family members who attend a CPS school, these Standards do not apply to the usual parent/child or familial relationship. **See below for excluded conduct.*

Section 3: General Standards

The following general standards apply to all staff/student interactions.

- Personal contact between students and staff members must always be appropriate to the circumstances, non-sexual and unambiguous in meaning.
- Staff members shall maintain a strictly professional relationship with students, whether on or off school property and during or outside of school hours.
- Staff members are responsible for maintaining professional and appropriate physical and emotional boundaries with students at all times.
- Interactions between staff members and students should be based on mutual respect and trust.
- Staff members are responsible for treating all students consistently and in line with the educational mission of the District.

Section 4: Unacceptable Behavior

The following behaviors are unacceptable and therefore strictly prohibited. Each behavior is an example of the ***inappropriate*** and ***prohibited*** crossing of a boundary and violation of the professional role of a staff member. This list is not exhaustive.

- Staff members shall not target a particular student or students for personal attention or friendship. Gossiping with or about other students or staff and confiding in students beyond the normal staff member-student relationship is prohibited.
- Staff members shall not ask a student to keep a secret, promise to keep a student’s secret or coerce a student to confide their personal or family problems. This example does not apply when counseling staff are meeting with students. If a student initiates a discussion of their personal or family problems, staff members are expected to be supportive and to refer the student to the counseling staff member, if appropriate.

- Staff members shall not engage in sexual, racial or religious banter, jokes or innuendoes with students. Discriminatory and/or banter that marginalizes a student or groups of students is strictly prohibited. This applies to one's actual or perceived membership in one or more of the Protected Categories* (such as actual or perceived gender identity or sexual orientation).
- Staff members shall not show inappropriate images, including pornography, violence or explicit language to students.
- Staff members shall not engage in, discuss or plan future romantic or sexual relationships with students.
- Staff members shall not make sexual advances towards students or flirt with students.
- Staff members shall not engage with a student's flirting or sexual overtures. Any incidents of a student flirting with a staff member or making sexual overtures towards a staff member must be reported pursuant to the section "Reporting Possible or Actual Violations of These Professional Standards."
- Staff members shall not provide or offer to provide alcohol, drugs, tobacco, or paraphernalia to students.
- Staff members shall not single out any one student and provide the student with gift(s) or accept expensive or numerous gifts from students. Nominal gifts to multiple students/classroom are permissible. Nominal gifts to teachers as a form of appreciation are acceptable.
- Staff members shall not address students with unique pet names or personalized terms of endearment that suggest a unique and overly familiar relationship. Staff members shall not allow students to address them by their first name alone, nickname, pet names or personalized terms of endearment that suggest an overly familiar relationship.
- Staff members shall not comment on a student's physical appearance.
- Staff members shall not engage in any type of inappropriate physical contact with students or any other conduct that might be considered harassment, discrimination, or retaliation under the Chicago Board of Education's (Board) [Interim Comprehensive Non-Discrimination, Harassment, Sexual Harassment, Sexual Misconduct and Retaliation Policy](#).
- Staff members shall not use corporal punishment or engage in any disciplinary action with the intention of producing physical or emotional pain (such as humiliation, embarrassment, threats, or other punitive or demoralizing actions toward a student), this includes conduct towards the children of staff members enrolled in CPS

**Protected Categories: An individual's actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender or sex (includes gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding, and pregnancy related medical conditions), race or ethnicity, ethnic group identification, ancestry, nationality, national origin, religion, color, mental or physical disability, age (40 and above), immigration status, marital status, registered domestic partner status, genetic information, political belief or affiliation (not union related), military status, unfavorable discharge from military service, or on the basis of a person's association with a person or group with one or more of these actual or perceived characteristics, or any other basis protected by federal, state or local law, ordinance, or regulation.*

Section 5: Acceptable Supportive/Encouraging Behavior

It is acceptable to show your students that you care. You should promote affirming, inclusive and positive environments for students with your words and body language, such as actively listening, appropriately responding and relaying that you are concerned for students. It is acceptable to high five, fist bump, handshake, or say "give yourself a pat on the back." In order to console a student it is permissible to offer tissue, offer them time to take a walk, or give the student a quick side hug.

Section 6: Appearances of Impropriety

Most contact between students and staff is appropriate and professional. For example, it is appropriate for a teacher to address a student's concerns over an assignment after class or provide one-on-one tutoring support. However, there are instances or activities that could be considered to be invasions of appropriate boundaries and can create an actual impropriety or the appearance of impropriety.

In order to protect students and staff, staff should avoid activities with students that present opportunities for inappropriate relationships or that create the appearance that the staff and student are in an inappropriate relationship. Examples of such activities are described below and must be avoided by staff members. This list is not exhaustive and there may be situations where these activities are within professional staff/student boundaries. Such situations where these activities may be within professional boundaries are when the staff member's child is friends with another student. In this circumstance the activity may be acceptable as long as the staff member is not alone with the student (the staff member's child or another person should be present) and the staff member's supervisor is aware of the staff member's activities.

- Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others, unless required in connection with providing educational services in accordance with your employment (e.g., health screening, counseling, therapy, nursing, personal care and other services required by individualized education plans, 504 plans or other medical condition action plans);
- Inviting or allowing individual students to visit the staff member's home;
- Visiting a student's home or meeting the student at another location outside of school for non-educational purposes.
- Transporting a student in a staff member's private vehicle without permission of the principal and the parent.

Before an above activity has occurred, staff members should communicate with the appropriate administrator and obtain approval. If any of the above activity occurs and is not approved, the staff member must report the occurrence to the appropriate administrator as soon as possible.

Section 7: Electronic Communication

Communicating via electronic means can be a valuable way to convey information. However, caution should be exercised when staff members are communicating with students via electronic means. At all times, staff members shall abide by the Board's [Staff Acceptable Use Policy](#). Staff members communicating with students via electronic means must do so using the CPS network and for educational purposes only.

- Staff members shall not engage in any unacceptable behavior with students via electronic means. Staff members should also avoid any appearances of impropriety with students via electronic means.
- Staff members shall not communicate with students via a student's mobile device, whether phone, text or instant message.
- Staff members shall not communicate with students via a student's personal email account.
- Staff members shall not accept or initiate connections with current students on social networking sites.
- If a staff member has a social networking site for educational purposes, the staff member shall obtain permission from the principal and parents to engage with students via this site.

Section 8: Travel/Transportation

Consistent with the Board's [Student Travel Policy](#), staff members are strongly discouraged from transporting a student in the staff members' private vehicle(s) under any circumstances. However, staff members may transport a student with the written consent of *both* the principal and parent/guardian of the student. Written consent from the parent/guardian must be given in advance of the trip on the attached Form A. If the principal gives consent to a staff member to transport a student in a private vehicle, the principal must maintain a copy of the staff member's driver's license and insurance documentation.

If a staff member transports a student with permission from the parent/guardian and the principal, efforts should be made for an additional adult to be in the car such that the staff member is not alone with a student outside the view of others.

Section 9: Reporting Suspected Child Abuse

All school personnel are mandated reporters. A mandated reporter who has reasonable cause to believe that a child known to them in their official capacity may have been abused or neglected shall immediately call the **DCFS Hotline** at 1-800-252-2873 (1-800-25-ABUSE).

For additional information on this requirement, please see the Board's [Reporting of Child Abuse and Child Neglect Policy](#).

Section 10: Reporting Possible or Actual Violations of These Standards

Students, parents/guardians and staff members shall notify the [Office of Student Protections and Title IX](#) (773-535-4400) and the [Office of the Inspector General](#) (833-835-5277) if they believe a staff member may be engaging in conduct that violates these Standards. Prompt reporting protects all personnel.

Staff shall immediately notify the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (773-553-1013) if they believe that they are receiving inappropriate attention from a student, or if they have been subject to sexual advances, comments or communications by a student. Any complaints/notifications shall be logged into Aspen by the principal or assistant principal immediately.

The failure of a staff member to timely report conduct that violates these Standards can result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal from employment.

Staff members are *mandatory reporters* and shall abide by the [Reporting of Child Abuse, Neglect and Inappropriate Relations between Adults and Students](#) and also have an independent obligation to notify the [Illinois Department of Children and Family Services \(DCFS\)](#) at 800-252-2873 (1-800-25-ABUSE) if they suspect that child abuse or neglect has occurred.



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Appendix A: Remote Learning

During remote learning, the District remains committed to ensuring students are learning in a safe and supportive environment. The District also understands that in order to serve students during remote learning, there may be times when one-on-one meetings between staff and students need to take place to facilitate learning. As our staff and students adjust to teaching and learning remotely, the standards of conduct outlined below for remote learning should guide staff and student interactions.

Mandated Reporting

It is important to remind all staff that they are mandated reporters. Staff may not be able to rely on in-person signs of abuse or neglect, such as unexplained bites, burns or bruises. However, a student's physical appearance, their environment, their behavior, their emotional state and/or their lack of access to a supportive adult can indicate that they are in need of help. Remind students that they have the right to be safe, that staff is here to support them, and that they are available to speak about concerns or connect them to support.

Essential services that help ensure student safety remain open and available, including:

- The Office of Student Protections and Title IX that can be reached by phone at 773-535-4400 or by email at osp@cps.edu; and
- The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services 24-Hour Child Abuse Hotline that can be reached at 1-800-25-ABUSE (1-800-252-2873) or via their new [online reporting system](#).

One-on-One Staff/Student Contact and Meetings

The following standards apply to scheduling one-on-one staff/student contact and meetings:

- All staff/student one-on-one remote interactions must occur on Google Meet.
- Invite the school principal or assistant principal, and the student's parents/guardians, to the meeting by adding them as optional meeting attendees. The invitation must also be sent at least four (4) calendar days before the meeting.
- The purpose of any one-on-one remote meeting must be clear and unambiguous and must be clearly communicated by the staff to the student, parent/guardian, and school principal or assistant principal before the interaction begins. To clearly communicate the purpose of any one-on-one remote meeting and for proper record-keeping, it should be listed in the Google Meet's calendar invite description.
- One-on-one meetings should be recorded¹ to avoid any appearance of secrecy for the benefit of both the staff and the student. In order to record the session you will need to obtain parent/guardian authorization for the recording by having them sign the [Consent Form for Recording of Virtual Meetings](#). Parent/guardian consent to record is needed during a one-on-one meeting between a staff member and student because the nature of the interaction is inherently private.
- If a parent/guardian does not give their consent to record the virtual meeting, the meeting cannot occur as a one-on-one session between a staff member and student. Instead, the school principal, assistant principal or parent/guardian must attend so that the session is no longer a meeting between one staff member and one student.

¹ One-on-one meetings that are required in connection with providing educational services in accordance with one's employment (e.g., health screening, counseling, therapy, nursing, personal care and other services required by individualized education plans, 504 plans or other medical condition action plans) are not required to be recorded.

When staff are meeting one-on-one with students using Google Meet, these standards must be followed:

- Video cameras are permitted to be turned off by students to protect privacy (staff are required to have their camera on at all times and must maintain an appropriate environment).
- If video cameras are on, the students and staff should be in an environment free from distraction.
- Everyone must be fully clothed during video meetings.
- The chat function can be used by either party to protect privacy if others are nearby.
- Images or content from remote learning must not be screen-captured or posted elsewhere for any reason.
- Any disclosure or allegations made must follow proper reporting procedures.
- If a staff member finds themselves in an unplanned one-on-one meeting with a student, they must end the interaction as soon as it is safe to do so and report the occurrence to the appropriate administrator as soon as possible.

Group Staff/Student Contact and Meetings

When adults are with students in group remote sessions or teaching synchronously in remote classrooms, the following standards apply:

- Talk about remote learning boundaries and everyone's right to safety, allowing students to provide feedback and ask questions.
- Provide feedback to students who are not following boundary guidance to model for other students, so that they are empowered to ask for boundaries to be followed. Some examples may include:
 - interrupting others who are speaking,
 - misuse of a person's preferred pronouns, or
 - making offensive comments during the session.
- Video cameras are permitted to be turned off by students to protect privacy (staff are required to have their camera on at all times and must maintain an appropriate environment);
- If video cameras are on, the students and staff should be in an environment free from distraction;
- Everyone should be fully clothed during video meetings;
- Give reminders that images or content from remote learning should not be screen-captured or posted elsewhere for any reason; and
- The chat function can be used to chat to the entire group, but should not be used privately between students.



Appendix B:

FORM A: CPS Written Consent Form for the Private Transportation of a Student

I, _____ [parent or guardian name] give permission for
_____ [staff member name] to transport my student
_____ in his or her private vehicle.

This permission extends to the following scenarios/situations:

This permission extends to the following days of the week and/or the following times:

In giving this permission, I acknowledge that _____ [staff member name]
may be alone in his or her private vehicle with my student.

Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Principal Signature

Date