

Staff/Student Social Media Policy

Definitions

Educational Purpose — A reason associated with the staff member's duties for DCS including, but not limited to: counseling, the treatment of a student's physical injury, or coordination of an extracurricular activity, depending on the staff member's job description or other assigned duties.

Staff Member— For the purposes of this policy, a staff member is any individual employed by DCS, including part-time and substitute employees and student teachers.

Student — Individuals currently enrolled in a DCS managed or provided program or activity.

General

Staff members are expected to maintain courteous and professional relationships with students. All staff members have a responsibility to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning through consistently and fairly applied discipline and the maintenance of physical and emotional boundaries with students. These boundaries must be maintained regardless of the student's age, the location of the activity, whether the student allegedly consents to the relationship or whether the staff member directly supervises the student. Maintaining these boundaries is an essential requirement for employment by DCS.

Although this policy applies to the relationships between staff members and DCS students, staff members who inappropriately interact with any child may be disciplined or terminated when DCS determines such action is necessary to protect students or the reputation of DCS.

Absolute Prohibitions

There are some interactions between staff members and students that are never acceptable and are absolutely prohibited including, but not limited to:

1. Touching, caressing, fondling or kissing students in a sexual or sexually intimate manner.
2. Dating a student or discussing or planning a future romantic or sexual relationship with a student. DCS may presume that this provision has been violated if a staff member begins a dating or sexual relationship with a student immediately after graduation or immediately after a student has left school.
3. Making sexual advances towards a student or engaging in a sexual relationship with a student.
4. Engaging in any conduct that constitutes illegal harassment or discrimination or that could constitute a violation of that policy if pervasive and continuous.
5. Engaging in any conduct that violates DCS policies, regulations or procedures or constitutes criminal behavior.

Exceptions to This Policy

The goal of this policy is to protect students from harm and staff members from allegations of misconduct by requiring staff members to maintain professional boundaries with students. DCS does not intend to interfere with or impede appropriate interaction between staff members and students.

An emergency situation or an educational purpose might justify deviation from some of the professional boundaries set out in this policy. Likewise, staff members might be related to students or have contact with students outside the school environment through friends, neighborhood or community activities, or participation in civic, religious or other organizations. These contacts might justify deviation from some of the standards set in this policy, but under no circumstance will an educational or other purpose justify deviating from the “Absolute Prohibitions” section of this policy.

A DCS staff member must be prepared to articulate the reason for any deviation from the requirements of this policy and must demonstrate that he or she has maintained an appropriate relationship with the student. To avoid confusion, DCS encourages staff members to consult with their supervisors prior to engaging in behaviors or activities that might violate professional boundaries as defined in this policy.

Failure to Maintain Boundaries

Unless an educational purpose exists or an exception as defined in this policy applies, examples of situations where professional, physical and emotional boundaries are violated by example include, but are not limited to:

- 1) Being alone with a student in a room with a closed or locked door or with the lights off. Counselors or others who need to work with students confidentially must discuss with their supervisors the appropriate manner of meeting with students.
- 2) Meeting students in non-work settings without the parent/guardian being present, even if the parent/guardian grants permission.
- 3) Associating with students in any setting where students are provided, are consuming or are encouraged to use or consume alcohol, tobacco, drugs or any other product or service prohibited to minors.
- 4) Communicating with students about sexual topics verbally or by any form of written, pictorial or electronic/digital communication.
- 5) Discussing the staff member’s personal problems with or in the presence of students.

- 6) Sponsoring parties for students outside of school unless as part of an extracurricular activity that is appropriately supervised by additional staff members.
- 7) Inviting students to the staff member's home.
- 8) Being present when students are fully or partially nude.
- 9) Sending students on personal errands.
- 10) Allowing a student to drive the staff member's vehicle.
- 11) Providing a student (other than the staff member's children, stepchildren or other children living in the staff member's home) transportation in the staff member's personal vehicle without a supervisor's approval, unless another staff member or the student's parent/guardian is also present in the vehicle.
- 12) Allowing any student to engage in behavior that would not be tolerated if done by other similarly situated students.
- 13) Giving gifts to individual students.
- 14) Frequently pulling a student from another class or activity to be with the staff member.

Electronic Communication

Staff members are encouraged to communicate with students and parents/guardians for educational purposes using a variety of effective methods, including electronic communication. As with other forms of communication, staff members must maintain professional boundaries with students while using electronic communication regardless of whether the communication methods are provided by the school or the staff member uses his or her own personal electronic communication devices, accounts, webpages or other forms of electronic communication.

DCS's policies, regulations, procedures and expectations regarding in-person communications at school and during the school day also apply to electronic communications for educational purposes, regardless of when those communications occur. Staff communications must be professional, and student communications must be appropriate. Staff members may only communicate with students electronically for educational purposes between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. Staff members may use electronic communication with students only as frequently as necessary to accomplish the educational purpose as defined in this policy.

- 1) When communicating electronically with students for educational purposes, staff members must use school provided devices, accounts and forms of communication (such as computers, phones, telephone numbers, e-mail addresses and school-sponsored webpages or social networking sites), when available. If school-provided devices, accounts and forms of communication are unavailable, staff members communicating electronically with students must do so in accordance with number two below. Staff members may communicate with students using school-provided forms of communication

without first obtaining supervisor approval. These communications may be monitored. With school permission, staff members may establish websites or other accounts on behalf of the school that enable communications between staff members and students or parents/guardians. Any such website or account is considered school-sponsored and must be professional and conform to all school policies, regulations and procedures.

- 2) A staff member's supervisor may authorize a staff member to communicate with students using the staff member's personal telephone numbers, addresses, web pages or accounts (including, but not limited to, accounts used for texting) to organize or facilitate a school-sponsored class or activity if the communication is determined necessary or beneficial, if a school-sponsored form of communication is not available, and if the communication is related to the class or activity. The school will provide notification to the parent/guardians of students participating in classes or activities for which personal electronic communications have been approved. Staff members may be required to send the communications simultaneously to the supervisor if directed to do so. Staff members are required to provide their supervisors with all education-related communications with school students upon request.
- 3) Staff use of any electronic communication is subject to the schools policies, regulations and procedures including, but not limited to, policies, regulations, procedures and legal requirements governing the confidentiality and release of information about identifiable students. Employees who obtain pictures or other information about identifiable students through their connections with DCS are prohibited from posting such pictures or information on personal websites or personal social networking websites without permission from a supervisor.
- 4) DCS discourages staff members from communicating with students electronically for reasons other than educational purposes. When an electronic communication is not for reasons other than educational purposes, the section of this policy titled "Exceptions to This Policy" applies, and if concerns are raised, the staff member must be prepared to demonstrate that the communications are appropriate.

Consequences

Staff members who violate this policy will be disciplined, up to and including termination of employment. Depending on the circumstances, DCS may report staff members to law enforcement and/or the local governmental Child Protective agency apparatus.

Reporting

Any person, including a student, who has concerns about or is uncomfortable with a relationship or activities between a staff member and a student should bring this concern immediately to the attention of the Administration, counselor or staff member's supervisor.

Any staff member who possesses knowledge or evidence of possible violations of this policy must immediately make a report to DCS. The anonymity of any DCS employee or whistleblower who reports a DCS employee in violation of the Social Media Policy shall be protected. All staff members who know or have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse shall immediately report the suspected abuse in accordance with DCS policy. Staff members must also immediately report

a violation or perceived violation of DCS's discrimination and harassment policy to DCS's nondiscrimination Compliance Officer. Staff members may be disciplined for failing to make such reports.

DCS will not discipline, terminate or otherwise discriminate or retaliate against a staff member for reporting in good faith any action that may be a violation of this policy.

Training

DCS shall provide training to DCS staff that includes current and reliable information on identifying signs of sexual abuse in children and potentially abusive relationships between children and adults. The training will emphasize legal reporting requirements and address how to establish an atmosphere where students feel comfortable discussing matters related to abuse.

Voice Mail and Electronic Mail

All electronic and telephone communication systems and all communications and information transmitted by, received from, or stored in these systems are the property of DCS and as such are intended for teaching or other job-related purposes. Personal use should be kept to a minimum. Electronic or telephone communication systems may not be used to transmit messages that may be considered inappropriate under DCS's policies, including those prohibiting harassment. Employees are not permitted to use a code, access a file, or retrieve any stored communication unless authorized to do so or unless they have received prior clearance from the Administration. DCS reserves the right to monitor any electronic, telephone, or other communications made using DCS systems or property.