

		SUBJECT	
		<b>PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES: STAFF/STUDENT INTERACTION POLICY</b>	
DATE ISSUED 04/30/2015	DATE REVISED 10/19/2017 8/9/2020		NOVA POLICY #
ISSUED BY	REVIEWED BY	APPROVED BY <b>NOVA BOARD</b>	COA POLICY #

**SUBJECT**

Professional Boundaries: Staff/Student Interaction Policy

**POLICY STATEMENT**

NOVA Academy recognizes its responsibility to make and enforce all rules and regulations governing student and employee behavior to bring about the safest and most learning-conducive environment possible.

**Corporal Punishment**

It is the policy of NOVA Academy that no teacher or other staff member will use corporal punishment against a student. This prohibition includes spanking, slapping, pinching, hitting, tying, taping, or the use of any other physical force as retaliation or correction for inappropriate behavior.

For purposes of this policy, corporal punishment does not include an employee's use of force that is reasonable and necessary to protect the employee, students, staff or other persons or to prevent damage to property.

For clarification purposes, the following examples are offered for direction and guidance of School personnel:

- A. Examples of PERMITTED actions (NOT corporal punishment)
  - 1. Stopping a student from fighting with another student;

2. Preventing a pupil from committing an act of vandalism;
3. Defending yourself from physical injury or assault by a student;
4. Forcing a pupil to give up a weapon or dangerous object;
5. Requiring an athletic team to participate in strenuous physical training activities designed to strengthen or condition team members or improve their coordination, agility, or physical skills;
6. Engaging in group calisthenics, team drills, or other physical education or voluntary recreational activities.

B. Examples of PROHIBITED actions (corporal punishment)

1. Hitting, shoving, pushing, or physically restraining a student as a means of control;
2. Making unruly students do push-ups, run laps, or perform other physical acts that cause pain or discomfort as a form of punishment;
3. Paddling, swatting slapping, grabbing, pinching, kicking, or otherwise causing physical pain.

### Staff-Student Interactions

This policy is intended to guide all School faculty and staff in conducting themselves in a way that reflects the high standards of behavior and professionalism required of school employees and to specify the boundaries between students and staff.

Although this policy gives specific, clear direction, it is each staff member's obligation to avoid situations that could prompt suspicion by parents, students, colleagues, or school leaders. One viable standard that can be quickly applied, when you are unsure if certain conduct is acceptable, is to ask yourself, "Would I be engaged in this conduct if my family or colleagues were standing next to me?" While the use of appropriate touching is part of daily life and is important for student development, teachers and other staff members must ensure that they do not exceed the boundaries of appropriate behavior. If a child specifically requests that he or she not be touched, then that request must be honored without question.

### Boundaries Defined

For the purposes of this policy, the term "boundaries" is defined as acceptable professional behavior by staff members while interacting with a student. Trespassing the boundaries of a student/teacher relationship is deemed an abuse of power and a betrayal of public trust.

### Acceptable and Unacceptable Behaviors

Some activities may seem innocent from a staff member's perspective, but can be perceived as flirtation or sexual insinuation from a student or parent point of view. There is no single reasonable person standard. The objective of the following lists of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors is not to restrain innocent, positive relationships between staff and students, but to prevent relationships that could lead to, or may be perceived as, inappropriate

or sexual misconduct or “grooming.” Grooming is defined as an act or series of acts by a sexual predator to gain physical and/or emotional control by gaining trust (of staff and/or family and a minor) and desensitizing the minor to various forms of touching and other intimate interaction.

Staff must understand their own responsibility for ensuring that they do not cross the boundaries as written in this policy. Violations could subject the teacher or staff member to discipline up to and including termination. Disagreeing with the wording or intent of the established boundaries will be considered irrelevant for disciplinary purposes. Thus, it is crucial that all employees learn this policy thoroughly and apply its spirit and intent in their daily activities. Although sincere, competent interaction with students certainly fosters learning, student/staff interactions must have boundaries surrounding potential activities, locations and intentions.

### Examples of Specific Behaviors

#### *Unacceptable Staff/Student Behaviors (Violations of this Policy)*

- a) Giving gifts of a personal and intimate nature (including photographs) to a student; or items such as money, food, outings, electronics, etc. without the written pre-approval of the Principal. It is recommended that any such gifts be filtered through the Business Office along with the rationale therefore.
- b) Accepting anything other than a small gift from a student.
- c) Kissing of any kind.
- d) Massage [Note: Prohibited in athletics unless provided by massage therapist or other certified professional in an open public location. Coaches may not perform massage or rub-down. Permitted in special education only as instructed under an IEP or 504 Plan.]
- e) Full frontal or rear hugs and lengthy embraces.
- f) Sitting students on one’s lap.
- g) Touching buttocks, thighs, chest or genital area.
- h) Wrestling with students except in the context of a formal wrestling program.
- i) Tickling or piggyback rides.
- j) Any form of sexual contact.
- k) Furnishing alcohol, tobacco products, or drugs, or failing to report knowledge of such.
- l) “Dating” or “going out with” a student.
- m) Remarks about physical attributes or physiological development of anyone. This includes comments such as “Looking fine!” or “Check out that [body part].”
- n) Taking or requesting photographs or videos of students for personal use or posting online.
- o) Either partially or fully undressing in front of a student or asking a student to undress, with the intent to view/expose private body parts.
- p) Leaving campus alone with a student for lunch.
- q) Sharing a bed, mat, or sleeping bag with a student.
- r) Being alone in a room with a student at school with the door closed and/or windows blocked from view.
- s) Any type of unnecessary physical contact with a student in a private situation.
- t) Intentionally being alone with a student away from the school.

- u) Making or participating in sexually inappropriate comments.
- v) Sexual jokes or jokes/comments with sexual overtones or double-entendres.
- w) Seeking emotional involvement (which can include intimate attachment) with a student beyond the normative care and concern required of an educator.
- x) Listening to or telling stories that are sexually oriented.
- y) Discussing your personal troubles or intimate issues with a student.
- z) Becoming involved with a student so that a reasonable person may suspect inappropriate behavior.
- aa) Giving students a ride to/from school or school activities without the express, advance written permission of the Principal and the student's parent or legal guardian.
- bb) Allowing students at your home and/or in rooms within your home without signed parental permission for a pre-planned and pre-communicated educational activity which must include another educator, parent, or designated school volunteer.
- cc) Staff mirroring the immature behaviors of minors.
- dd) Giving a student your home address or telephone number.
- ee) Sending emails, text messages, social media responses, making phone calls, or sending notes or letters to students if the content is not about school activities. Communication via private social media accounts is not acceptable.

**This policy does not prevent:** 1) touching a student for the purpose of guiding them along a physical path; 2) helping them up after a fall; or 3) engaging in a rescue or the application of Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) or other emergency first-aid. Nor does it prohibit the use of reasonable force and touching in self-defense or in the defense of another. Restraining a child who is trying to engage in violent or inappropriate behavior is also allowed. Only such force as necessary to defend one's self, another person, or the child or to protect property is legally permitted. Excessive force is prohibited.

#### Acceptable Staff/Student Behaviors

- a) Pats on the shoulder or back.
- b) Handshakes.
- c) "High-fives" and hand slapping.
- d) Touch required under an IEP or 504 Plan.
- e) Reasonable restraint of a violent student to protect self, others, or property.
- f) Obtaining formal written pre-approval from Principal to take students off school property for activities such as field trips or competitions, including parent's written permission and waiver form for any sponsored after-school activity whether on or off campus.
- g) Emails, text messages, phone conversations, and other communications to and with students, if permitted, must be professional and pertain to school activities or classes (communication would be initiated via transparent (non-private) school based-technology and equipment).
- h) Keeping the door wide open when alone with a student.
- i) Keeping reasonable and appropriate space between you and your students.
- j) Stopping and correcting students if they cross your own personal boundaries, including touching legs, or buttocks, frontal hugs, kissing, or caressing.

- k) Keeping parents informed when a significant issue develops about a student, such as a change in demeanor or uncharacteristic behavior.
- l) Keeping after-class discussions with a student professional and brief.
- m) Immediately asking for advice from senior staff or administration if you find yourself in a difficult situation related to boundaries.
- n) Involving your direct supervisor if conflict arises with a student.
- o) Involving your direct supervisor in discussion about boundaries situations that have the potential to become more severe (including but not limited to grooming or other red flag behaviors observed in colleagues, written material that is disturbing, or a student's fixation on an adult).
- p) Making detailed notes about an incident that in your best judgment could evolve into a more serious situation later.
- q) Recognizing the responsibility to stop "Unacceptable Behaviors" of students and/or coworkers.
- r) Asking another staff member to be present, or within close supervisory distance, when you must be alone with any type of special needs student, or when you must be alone with a student after regular school hours.
- s) Giving students praise and recognition without touching them.
- t) Prioritizing professional behavior during all moments of student contact.
- u) Asking yourself if your actions, which could be contrary to these provisions, are worth sacrificing your job and career.

### **Boundaries Reporting**

When any staff member, parent, or student becomes aware of a staff member (or volunteer, guest, vendor, etc.) having cross the boundaries specified in this policy, or has a suspicion of "grooming behavior," he or she must report such information to the Principal promptly. Prompt reporting of any unacceptable behaviors is essential to protect students, staff, any witnesses, and the school as a whole. When observant staff members call attention to a boundaries violation(s), the likelihood of harm is greatly reduced. Staff members must also fulfill their mandated reporting obligations as applicable regarding known or suspected professional boundaries violations consistent with the School's Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting policy herein.

### **Consequences**

Staff members who violate this policy will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, and where appropriate, reported to authorities for potential legal action.