

Board Policy #:

Adopted/Ratified: October 20, 2020

Revision Date: January 27, 2026



Professional Boundaries Policy: Adult/Student Interactions

This policy applies to all The Cottonwood School (“TCS” or “School”) employees, volunteers, contractors, and Board of Directors (“Board”) members (collectively referred to as “adults” herein).

TCS 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. This policy is available on TCS’s website at <https://cottonwoodk12.org/accountability>.

Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment shall not be used as a disciplinary measure against any student. Corporal punishment includes the willful infliction of, or willfully causing the infliction of, physical pain on a student.

For purposes of this policy, corporal punishment d individual, 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 employees, volunteers, contractors, and Board members:

- A. Examples of permitted actions (i.e., 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 a student on 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 (i.e., 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.

Acceptable and Unacceptable Adult/Student Behavior

This policy is intended to guide all adults in conducting themselves in a way that reflects the high standards of behavior and professionalism required of them and to specify the boundaries between adults and students.

Although this policy gives specific, clear direction, it is each adult's obligation to avoid situations that could prompt suspicion by parents/guardians, 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?"

Boundaries Defined

For the purposes of this policy the term "boundaries" is defined as acceptable professional behavior by an adult while interacting with a student, whether during school hours or outside of school hours, including through social media platforms, text messaging, and other forms of communication that do not otherwise include a student's parent/guardian. Trespassing beyond the boundaries of a student/adult relationship is deemed an abuse of power and a betrayal of public trust.

Professional boundaries apply not only between students and staff, volunteers, and contractors, and Board members, but also among and between students, and among and between adults employed, volunteering, or under contract with the School. All members of the School community are expected to maintain professional conduct that models appropriate behavior and fosters a safe and respectful learning environment. Additionally, all facilities/areas under School control shall be effectively supervised to promote a safe environment for students and individuals performing services on behalf of the School.

Some activities may seem innocent from an adult's perspective but can be perceived as flirtation or sexual insinuation from a student or parent/guardian point of view. The objective of the following lists of unacceptable and acceptable behaviors is not to restrain innocent, positive relationships between adults and students, but to prevent relationships that could lead to, or may be perceived as sexual misconduct.

Adults must understand their own responsibility for ensuring that they do not cross the boundaries as written in this policy. Disagreeing with the wording or intent of the established boundaries will be considered irrelevant for disciplinary purposes. Thus, it is crucial that all adults learn this policy thoroughly and apply the lists of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors to their daily activities. Although sincere, competent interaction with students certainly fosters learning, student/adult interactions must have boundaries surrounding potential activities, locations, and intentions.

Examples of Specific Unacceptable Behaviors

These lists, and any subsequent lists, are not meant to be all-inclusive, but rather illustrative of the types of behavior addressed by this policy.

- Giving gifts to an individual student that are of a personal and intimate nature
- Kissing of any kind
- Any type of unnecessary physical contact with a student in a private situation
- Intentionally being alone with a student away from the School

- Making, or participating in, sexually inappropriate comments
- Sexual jokes, or jokes/comments with sexual overtones or double-entendres
- Seeking emotional involvement (which can include intimate attachment) with a student fit or beyond the normative care and concern required of an educator
- Listening to or telling stories that are sexually oriented
- Discussing inappropriate personal troubles or intimate issues with a student.
- Becoming involved with a student so that a reasonable person may suspect inappropriate behavior
- Communication with students via an employee's personal accounts such as email and/or social media.
- Giving students a ride to/from School or School activities without parental permission
- Being alone with a student in a room at School with the door closed. Allowing students in your home without signed parental and supervisory permission for a pre-planned and pre-communicated educational activity, which must include another educator, parent/guardian, or other responsible adult
- Remarks about the physical attributes or development of anyone
- Excessive attention toward a particular student
- Sending emails, text messages, or letters to students if the content is not about School activities.
- Communicating with a student outside of school hours unless it relates directly to specific classroom assignments or student club activity responsibilities.

Acceptable and Recommended Behaviors

- Obtaining parent/guardian's written consent for any after-school activity
- Obtaining formal approval (site administration and parent/guardian) to take students off School property for activities such as field trips or competitions
- Emails, text messages, phone conversations, and other instant messages to and with students, must be professional and pertain to School activities or classes (Communication should be limited to School-based technology and equipment)
- Keeping the door open when alone with a student
- Keeping reasonable space between you and your students
- Stopping and correcting students if they cross your own personal boundaries
- Keeping parents/guardians informed when a significant issue develops about a student
- Keeping after-class discussions with a student professional and brief
- Immediately asking for advice from senior-staff or administration if you find yourself in a difficult situation related to boundaries.
- Informing the Executive Director about situations that have the potential to become a conflict or 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)
- Making detailed notes about an incident that could evolve into a more serious situation later
- Recognizing the responsibility to stop unacceptable behavior of students or co-workers
- Asking another staff member to be present when you must be alone with a student after regular school hours
- Asking another staff member to be present if you must be alone with a student who has special needs.
- Prioritizing professional behavior during all moments of student contact

- Giving students praise and recognition without touching them.
- High fives, fist bumps, and handshakes are acceptable.
- Asking yourself if your actions, which are contrary to these provisions, are worth your job and career

Duty to Report Suspected Misconduct

When any staff member reasonably suspects or believes that another staff member, volunteer, guest or vendor having crossed the boundaries specified in this policy, or has a reasonable suspicion of misconduct, he or she must report the suspicion to their immediate supervisor, Principal or the Executive Director promptly. Reasonable suspicion means it is based on facts which would lead a reasonable person to believe the conduct occurred. Prompt reporting is essential to protect students, the suspected staff member, any witnesses, and the School as a whole. Employees must also report to the administration any awareness of, or concern about, student behavior that crosses boundaries, or any situation in which a student appears to be at risk for sexual abuse, child abuse, or neglect.

Investigating

The School will promptly investigate and document the investigation of any allegation of sexual misconduct or inappropriate behavior, using such support staff or outside assistance, as it deems necessary and appropriate under the circumstances. Throughout this fact-finding process, the investigating administrator, and all others who are privy to the investigation, shall protect the privacy interests of any affected student(s) and/or adult including any potential witnesses, as much as possible.

Consequences

Staff members who have violated this policy will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination, and where appropriate, will be reported to authorities for potential legal action. Other adults will be reported to authorities for potential legal action.

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