

Professional Boundaries: Staff/Student Interaction Policy

Board Policy #: 1400

Adopted/Ratified: May 5, 2009

Amended Date: March 18, 2022, February 28, 2024, June 26, 2024

The Board of Directors of Altus Schools Southern CA, Inc. hereby adopts this Staff/Student Interaction Policy to apply to Altus Schools East County, Altus Schools North County, Altus Schools South Bay, Audeo Charter School II, Audeo Valley Charter School, and Mirus Secondary School, hereafter collectively referred to as “Charter School.”

The Charter School 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.

I. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

It is the purpose of this policy to provide additional specificity to the standards of conduct embodied in the Charter School code of ethics-related rules and regulations so that staff members clearly understand the prohibitions and behavior boundaries which must govern their conduct towards students. (For purposes of this Policy, staff includes all school employees—certificated or classified; coaches or advisors; full-time or part-time, and independent contractors and volunteers).

The rules of conduct set forth in this Policy are not intended to serve as an exhaustive delineation of requirements, limitations, or prohibitions on staff conduct and activities established by this school. Rather, the components of this Policy serve to

- (1) Alert staff about some of the more sensitive and often problematic matters involved in faculty/staff student relationships.
- (2) Specify boundaries related to potentially sexual situations and conduct—the crossing of which is contrary to accepted norms of behavior and in conflict with the duties and responsibilities of staff.
- (3) Provide staff members with clear guidance in conducting themselves in a manner that reflects high standards of professionalism. (It is important for Charter School to maintain a school-wide culture in which students and staff understand their responsibilities to report sexual misconduct without fearing that school leaders will betray them if they do. In order to prevent sexual abuse and exploitation, students and staff must know that the administration will investigate reports about possible misconduct.)
- (4) Clarify that improper action will have significant consequences.
- (5) Provide an environment that empowers students to identify actions that appear to have crossed boundaries.
- (6) Define the process that Charter School will use for addressing potential improper conduct.
- (7) Preserve student and staff privacy rights during any pending investigation.

II. BACKGROUND AND GENERAL POLICY PROVISIONS

Actions by staff members that are inconsistent or in conflict with the values established by Charter School can harm students, staff members, and the school's operation; therefore, such actions are unacceptable. It is the policy of this school that all school staff conduct themselves at all times in a manner that reflects the ethical standards consistent with the rules contained in this Policy and otherwise proclaimed by this school.

The provisions herein are intended to guide all Charter School staff members toward conduct that reflects the high standards of behavior and professionalism required of school staff while defining interaction boundaries between students and staff members. Misconduct by a staff member disrupt the education of other students, sidetrack the instructional focus of the school, and harm the school's legitimacy—all of which threaten the school's future ability to recruit skilled professionals and maintain a credible operation in the eyes of the community. It is critical that staff members study this Policy thoroughly and behave in ways to avoid even the appearance of misconduct. While all boundaries and/or situations cannot be addressed in a single policy, the issues delineated herein are among those that can be most problematic for staff members and among those that can have the greatest potential for a negative impact on this school and its community. Staff members should seek guidance in their daily conduct from established policies, procedures, and directives as well as through the guidance and recommendations of school leadership. 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.

III. BOUNDARIES

A. 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 trust.

B. Acceptable and Unacceptable Behavior

Some activities may seem innocent from a staff member's perspective, but some of these can be perceived as flirtation or sexual insinuation from a student or parent point of view. The purpose 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.

Staff members must understand their own responsibilities 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 any required disciplinary purposes. Thus, it is critical that all staff study this Policy thoroughly and apply its spirit and intent in their daily activities. Although sincere, professional interaction with students fosters the charter mission of implementing “personalized, education programs to facilitate student achievement,” student/staff interaction has boundaries regarding the activities, locations, and intentions.

Unacceptable Staff/Student Behaviors (Violations of this Policy)

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

1. Giving gifts to an individual student that are of a personal and intimate nature.
2. Kissing of ANY kind.
3. Any type of unnecessary physical contact with a student in a private situation.
4. Intentionally being alone with a student away from the school.
5. Making, or participating in, sexually inappropriate comments.
6. Sexual jokes, or jokes/comments with sexual double-entendre.
7. Seeking emotional involvement (which can include intimate attachment) with a student beyond the normative care and concern required of an educator.
8. Listening to or telling stories that are sexually oriented.
9. Discussing inappropriate personal troubles or intimate issues with a student in an attempt to gain their support and understanding.
10. Becoming involved with a student so that a reasonable person may suspect inappropriate behavior.

Unacceptable Staff/Student Behaviors without Parent and Supervisor Permission

1. Giving students a ride to/from school or school activities without parent permission (only in “emergency” situations).
2. Being alone in a room with a student.
3. Allowing students in your home.

Cautionary Staff/Student Behaviors

1. Remarks about the physical attributes or physiological development of anyone.
2. Excessive attention toward a particular student.
3. Sending e-mails, text messages, social media responses, or letters to students if the content is not about school activities.

Acceptable and Recommended Staff/Student Behaviors

1. Getting parents' written consent for any after-school activity on or off campus (exclusive of tutorials).
2. Obtaining formal approval (site and parental) to take students off school property for activities such as field trips or competitions.
3. E-mails, text-messages, phone conversations, and other communications to and with students must be professional and pertain to school activities or classes. (Communication should be initiated via school-based technology and equipment.)
4. Keeping reasonable space between you and your students.
5. Stopping and correcting students if they cross your own personal boundaries.
6. Keeping parents informed when a significant issue develops about a student.
7. Keeping all discussions with students professional.
8. Asking for advice from senior staff or administrators if you find yourself in a difficult situation related to boundaries.
9. Involving your supervisor if conflict arises with a student.
10. Informing your supervisor and/or Support Team (coordinators and directors) about situations that have the potential to become more severe.
11. Making detailed notes about an incident that could evolve into a more serious situation later.
12. Recognizing the responsibility to stop unacceptable behavior of students and/or co-workers.
13. Asking another staff member to be present if you will be alone with any student who may have severe social or emotional challenges (and you are not the assigned case educator).
14. Asking another staff member to be present, or within close supervisory distance, when you must be alone with a student.
15. Giving students praise and recognition without touching them in questionable areas; giving appropriate pats on the back, high-five's, and handshakes are appropriate.
16. Keeping your professional conduct a high priority during all moments of student contact.
17. Asking yourself if any of your actions which go contrary to these provisions are worth sacrificing your job and career.

IV. 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.