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## **STAFF/STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS**

### **PURPOSE:**

The Lincoln Public School District ("District") is committed to protecting the safety and well-being of students and employees, creating and maintaining a safe, supportive, and positive learning environment and workplace. The District affirms the responsibility of employees and District partners to abide by the standards of professional conduct, to act as role models, and to promote the dignity, health and safety of students while maintaining professional relationships with students at all times.

### **POLICY STATEMENT:**

This policy covers conduct that takes place both on and off District property, and both during and outside of the school day. The policy also pertains to all forms of communication that may occur between employees and students, at any time. This policy applies to all individuals registered and enrolled as a student in the District, regardless of age, as well as District employees and coaches who work with or have contact with students.

The relationship between the District's staff and students must be one of cooperation, understanding and mutual respect. It must be of a professional nature at all times. Staff members have a responsibility to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning and to motivate each student to perform to his/her capacity. They should recognize students' unique abilities, talents, and challenges; and treat all students with dignity and respect in all interactions.

Staff members should strive to secure individual and group discipline and should be treated with respect by students at all times. By the same token, staff members should extend to students the same respect and courtesy that they, as staff members, have a right to demand.

Although it is desired that staff members have a sincere interest in students as individuals, partiality and the appearance of impropriety must be avoided. Excessive informal and/or social involvement with individual students is prohibited. Such conduct is not compatible with professional ethics and, as such, will not be tolerated.

Staff members are expected to use good judgment in their relationships with students

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both inside and outside of the school context including, but not limited to, the following guidelines. Any questions regarding any of the following can be addressed to the building principal or Superintendent.

1. Staff members shall not make deprecatory comments to students regarding the school and/or its staff.
2. The exchange of purchased gifts between staff members and students is discouraged.
3. Staff members shall not communicate directly with students for any reason via telephone calls, text messages, email to a non-District email address, social media, or direct messages through social media platforms.
  - a. Staff members may only communicate with students in person, using District issued email addresses, District sanctioned social media accounts formed for educational, school-related purposes, or via third-party District-sanctioned applications that are also accessible by District faculty, administrators, and parents.
  - b. Under exigent circumstances related to the immediate health and safety of a student, a school or district administrator may contact a student directly.
  - c. For certain field trips or non-school sponsored activities, a District employee may engage in direct communication with students with prior, express written consent from a parent or guardian.
4. Staff members are prohibited from providing drugs or alcohol to students or consuming drugs or alcohol in the presence of students on school property, during a school or District-sponsored event, or otherwise in their capacity as a District employee.
5. Staff members shall not discuss sexual matters outside of an appropriate educational context, including the use of sexual jokes, slang, or innuendo.
6. Staff members shall refrain from commenting on a student's physical appearance or body that can have the effect of objectifying the student and/or compromising the student's social and emotional well-being.

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7. Staff members shall not touch students punitively or in such a way that could be construed as romantic or for the purpose of sexual gratification—including but not limited to—intimate touching, brushing up against another’s body, pinching, fondling, or massaging. Staff members are prohibited from displays of inappropriate or unwanted physical affection.
  
8. Staff members shall not meet alone with a student in an area that is secluded or that is not openly accessible/visible to others, such as a room without windows or without visibility through a door.
  - a. Athletic coaches may not be alone with a student in an area that is secluded or that is not openly accessible/visible to others, such as a room without windows or without visibility through a door. If a coach wants to meet or speak with a student one-on-one, that meeting must be observable. This includes at away games or practice fields, off school premises.
  
9. Dating between staff members and students is prohibited. This includes—but is not limited to—a social interaction, preplanned or not, in which the purpose is to initiate or continue a relationship outside the scope of the normal school-related encounter that is romantic and/or sexual in nature. Parental consent does not create an exception.
  
10. Staff members shall not engage in romantic relationships with students. This includes—but is not limited to—relationships in which a staff member dates, exchanges personal affection, engages in intimate or sexually suggestive communication, and/or engages in any form of sexual or physical intimacy with a student. Staff members shall not make romantic or sexually suggestive comments to or about students.
  
11. Staff members shall use positive and encouraging statements to enforce compliance with requirements or expectations.
  
12. Staff members shall maintain a reasonable standard of care for the supervision, control and protection of students commensurate with their assigned duties and responsibilities
  
13. Staff members shall not send students on personal errands.
  
14. Staff members shall, pursuant to law and board policy, immediately report any suspected signs of child abuse or neglect.

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15. Staff members, unless it is specifically part of their job description, shall not attempt to counsel, assess, diagnose or treat a student's personal problem relating to sexual behavior, substance abuse, mental or physical health and/or family relationships but, instead, should refer the student to the appropriate individual or agency for assistance.
16. Except in the role of their job responsibility, staff members shall not disclose any information concerning a student to any person not authorized to receive such information. This includes, but is not limited to, information concerning assessments, ability scores, grades, behavior, mental or physical health and/or family background that has been acquired as a result of their employment with the District.
17. Parent permission shall be obtained before students are transported by staff.

### **Reporting Prohibited Conduct with Students**

Students or their families who wish to report a violation of this Policy may do so by notifying a District faculty or staff member, including a teacher or principal. Students may communicate a complaint to any District employee with whom they feel comfortable. Students and families are encouraged to document all reports in writing. Faculty and staff in receipt of a report of Prohibited Conduct must document all communications and maintain all evidence relevant to the initial report and subsequent actions and communications.

While addressing complaints under this policy, the District will attempt to maintain confidentiality to the extent practicable and appropriate under the circumstances. The District will not tolerate any attempt at retaliation against any person who in good faith makes or assists in making a complaint under this policy, or provides truthful information or cooperates in an investigation of a complaint. Retaliation is a serious violation of this policy. Concerns about attempted retaliation should be raised and will be handled in the same manner as any other concern under this policy.

Knowingly lodging a false complaint may result in disciplinary and/or legal action against the complainant.

Any District employee who has direct or indirect knowledge of Prohibited Conduct outlined in this Policy must immediately report the conduct to the Human Resources

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office. The Human Resources office will document all reports, and determine whether to pursue further action in accordance with Policy #1215 Title IX. If the incident does not warrant a Title IX investigation, Human Resources will provide said documentation to

the superintendent who shall designate an investigator and determine if there has been a violation of this Policy.

In addition, all District employees are required to follow the mandatory reporting requirements required under state law for reporting suspected child abuse/neglect. District administrators may report instances of Prohibited Conduct to the police department, and seek advice from legal counsel regarding further law enforcement involvement as appropriate.

Reports to the Superintendent and to the School Committee: The Superintendent of Schools shall provide the School Committee with data on an annual basis that includes the incidents of violations of this policy that have taken place. Such data will include a statement describing what remedial action has been taken to address such violations.

#### Supportive Measures

Members of school support staff shall be available to support and guide Students affected by Prohibited Conduct. Supportive measures may include, but are not limited to:

- a. Counseling;
- b. Extensions of deadlines or other course-related adjustments;
- c. Modifications of work or class schedules;
- d. Supervision at arrival, dismissal, lunch and/or recess;
- e. Mutual restrictions on contact between the parties; and/or
- f. Increased security and monitoring of certain areas of the school grounds.

Consequences for violations of this policy may range from a written reprimand to termination of the employee.

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***TOWN OF LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE, Lincoln, Rhode Island***