

Helix Charter High School Staff/Student Interaction Policy

I. PURPOSE

While incidences of sexual misconduct committed by teachers and school staff throughout the country are very low, every incident results in consequences so tragic that the incident is perceived by almost everyone as inconceivable. It is the purpose of this policy to provide additional specificity to the standards of conduct embodied in current Helix Charter High School ethics-related rules and regulations so that the staff of this school will better understand the prohibitions and behavior boundaries incumbent upon them.

The rules of conduct set forth in this policy are not intended to serve as an exhaustive treatment of requirements, limitations, or prohibitions on staff conduct and activities established by this school. Rather, they are intended to:

- (1) Alert staff to 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 that is contrary to accepted norms of behavior and in conflict with duties and responsibilities of staff, and
- (3) Provide staff with clear guidance in conducting themselves in a manner that reflects high standards of professionalism.

It is important for Helix to maintain a school-wide culture in which students and staff understand their responsibility 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 support them when they report possible misconduct.

II. INTRODUCTION

Actions by staff that are inconsistent or in conflict with the values established by Helix Charter High School negatively affect the reputation of the school, the community and its employees. Such actions and inactions thereby detract from the school's ability to effectively educate students. They also diminish the school's ability to act as a strong asset to the community, conduct other essential business and endangers maintenance of the charter. Therefore, it is the policy of this school that all employees conduct themselves at all times in a manner that reflects the ethical standards consistent with the rules contained in this policy and otherwise disseminated by this school.

This policy is intended to guide all Helix 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.

The administration of this school is committed to ensuring that its employees are considered innocent until proven guilty and that any investigation of an incident will be of high quality. False allegations of misconduct can be devastating to a staff member and the entire school. As such, it is vital that school administrators equip staff with a policy that clarifies acceptable and unacceptable behavior with students. It is also crucial that staff study this policy thoroughly so they behave in ways that avoid even the appearance of misconduct.

While all boundaries and/or situations cannot be addressed in a single policy, the issues discussed here are among those that are known to have been troubling for staff and are among the most sensitive in terms of

DRAFT

their impact on schools and the community. Employees should seek guidance available through 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. One viable standard that can be quickly applied is to ask yourself, "Would I be doing this if my family or colleagues were standing next to me?"

III. BOUNDARIES

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 Behavior

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. 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, sexual misconduct.

Staff 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 employees 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/staff interaction has boundaries regarding the activities, locations and intentions.

Duty to Report

When any employee becomes aware of another staff member having crossed the boundaries specified in this policy, he or she must speak to the concerned co-worker if the violation appears minor, or report the matter to school administrators. If the observed behavior appears significant, it is the duty of every staff member to immediately report it to an administrator. All reports shall be confidential. It is the duty of the administrator to investigate and thoroughly report the situation. Employees must also report to the administration any awareness or concern of student behavior that cross boundaries or where a student appears to be at risk for sexual abuse.

Unacceptable Behaviors (Violations of 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
7. Seeking emotional involvement with a student for your benefit

DRAFT

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

Acceptable with Caution (These behaviors should only be exercised when a reasonable and prudent person, acting as an educator, is prevented from using a better practice or behavior. Staff members should inform their supervisor of the circumstance and occurrence)

1. Giving students a ride to/from school or school activities without parent permission
2. Being alone in a room with a student at school with the door closed
3. Allowing students in your home without signed parent permission
4. Remarks about the physical attributes or development of anyone
5. Excessive attention toward a particular student
6. Sending emails, text messages or letters to students if the content is not about school activities

Acceptable and Recommended Behaviors

1. Getting parents' written consent for any after-school activity
2. Obtaining formal approval to take students off school property for activities such as field trips or competitions.
3. E-mails, text, phone and instant messages to students have to be very professional and pertaining to school activities or classes (Communication should be limited to school technology)
4. Keeping the door open when alone with a student
5. Keeping reasonable space between you and your students
6. Stopping and correcting students if they cross your own personal boundaries
7. Keeping parents informed when a significant issue develops about a student
8. Keeping after-class discussions with a student professional and brief
9. Asking for advice from fellow staff or administrators if you find yourself in a difficult situation related to boundaries
10. Involving your supervisor if conflict arises with the student
11. Informing your principal about situations that have the potential to become more severe
12. Making detailed notes about an incident that could evolve into a more serious situation later
13. Recognizing the responsibility to stop unacceptable behavior of students or coworkers
14. Asking another staff member to be present if you will be alone with any type of special needs student

DRAFT

15. Asking another staff member to be present when you must be alone with a student after regular school hours
16. Giving students praise and recognition without touching them
17. Pats on the back, high fives and handshakes are acceptable
18. Keeping your professional conduct a high priority
19. Asking yourself if your actions are worth your job and career

References and Acknowledgments

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario, Ontario College of Teacher's Code of Ethics.

Women Against Sexual Harassment (WASH)

Psychology Department, University of Rhode Island

The International Association of Chiefs of Police, Model Policy on Code of Conduct

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

United States Department of Education