Student-Teacher Boundary Issues

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ASBA Law Conference 2015
The teacher/student relationship is a central component in learning. A teacher must be able to demonstrate that he or she “cares” about students. Must do so without crossing professional boundaries. How?
Professional Boundaries

- Professional teacher/student boundaries are not easily defined but are a “hot topic.”
- Not established firmly in teaching profession.
- Policies can be vague.
- Overly strict rules may be difficult to enforce.
District Policy GBEA
“Staff Ethics”

- Maintain standards of exemplary conduct.
- Make the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making and actions.
- Maintain just, courteous and proper relationships with students.
Extreme Boundary Violation
Mandatory Report

- Any District employee who reasonably believes that a minor (under 18) has been the victim of
  - child abuse/nonaccidental physical injury, neglect, or a sex offense
  - shall immediately report to law enforcement or DCS, if perpetrator is parent or guardian.
1. Boundary Issues
2. Unprofessional Conduct
3. Mandatory Reports
Responsibility of Teacher and Administrators

- Teachers are responsible for recognizing whether they are “at risk” of crossing boundaries and, if they are, of addressing the issue.

- Teachers/administrators have a responsibility to address issue when they witness a colleague who may be crossing boundaries. A teacher who has crossed one boundary may have crossed others.
Curriculum Boundaries

- Should a teacher discuss emotionally charged issues with students?
- ASBA Policy IHAMB “Instruction in Sex Education”
- “Instruction in sex education may be offered in the District in conformity with the requirements of Arizona law.”
Curriculum Boundaries

- ASBA Policy IMB “Teaching About Controversial/Sensitive Issues.”
- “Personal views are not a part of the instructional program.”
- Teachers should place major emphasis upon "why" and "how" to think rather than "what" to think.
Technology Boundaries

“‘It doesn’t matter what I have on my personal social media. It’s private.’”

True or False?
Technology Boundaries

- Only use school-approved social media to communicate with students.
- Do not communicate with students using personal social media--email, text, Facebook, blogs, etc.
- Do not post sexy or revealing photos/pictures on personal social media.
Example

Student in biology class becomes angry with teacher and sits under one of the lab tables. Biology teacher asks student several times to get out from under the table, but student refuses. Teacher then pulls the student from under the table, dragging student 20 feet across carpet. Student sustains a significant rug burn on his back.

You are the AP. Is this a mandatory report?
Anger Management Boundaries

What should a teacher do if he or she becomes angry with a student?

Need to be able to mask and control emotions.

Avoid cursing in front of students.
Relationship Boundaries

- Is a teacher’s role that of a friend, confidant, or substitute parent?
- Is it OK to talk with a student about problems that adults would typically only discuss with adults (i.e. marital problems/problems at work)?
- Is it OK to tell student “secrets”?
Peer-Like Behavior

A teacher needs to develop “with-it-ness” but avoid the following with students:

- engaging in peer-like behavior.
- telling inappropriate jokes.
- sexual innuendo and banter.
- inappropriate and/or revealing dress.
Physical Boundaries

- Are hugs OK?
- Appropriate—high fives, hand shakes, fist bumps, open-handed pats on the back.
- Any touching should be done in public. Appropriate in front of principal or student’s parents.
Tools in Tool Box

- Teachers need tools in their “tool box.”

- Are concerns of high school teachers different from that of elementary school teachers?
You are a ninth grade teacher and Susie’s math teacher. Susie comes to your classroom at the end of the day crying because her boyfriend has just broken up with her. You are alone in your classroom. As Susie comes in the classroom, she shuts the door. What do you do?
Susie indicates on her 6th grade teacher’s personal Facebook page that she wants to be a “friend.” What should the teacher do?
Favoring Students

- Do teachers have favorite students? Do not let anyone know.
- Avoid allowing a particular student to violate a school rule or get away with inappropriate behavior.
Favoring Students

- Should teachers accept invitations to some students’ birthday parties but not others?
- Should teachers invite certain students (but not others) to hang out in the classroom after school to play games on the computer?
Financial Boundaries

- Teachers should be cautious about the extent to which they provide their own money for classroom activities.
- Giving gifts or loaning money to an individual student can be inappropriate.
- Is it OK to give a student lunch money?
AVOID

- Inviting a student to one’s home without other adult/parent chaperone.
- Going to a student’s home without other adult/parent chaperones.
Off Campus Conduct

AVOID

- Driving individual students to or from school, absent an emergency.
- Allowing a student to drive teacher’s personal vehicle.
- Taking a student on personal outings without other adult/parent, even with the parents’ permission.
Extreme Boundary Violation

- It is an extreme violation of the teacher/student relationship to engage in a romantic and/or sexual relationship with a current student.
- Sexual relationships between a teacher/student require a mandatory report to law enforcement.
Grooming

- Targets student who is needy.
- Engages in increasing boundary invasions.
- Sexualizes relationship. Maintains relationship with threats.
- Student often feels his or her fault.
Grooming

- Only a very small percentage of educators engage in sexual misconduct with students.
- Stopping inappropriate boundary invasions will prevent most molestations by educators.
March 15
5:08 pm - what's up missing you :”[[
  5:08 pm – I’m like holy crap bored.
5:12 pm – Lol I see that sucks I really missed seeing you on Friday =/
missing you
  5:13 pm – well that’s moms fault.
5:15 pm – but maybe she had a good reason? Grr well I hope you can visit missing you
March 20

7:32 pm - =lol finally home

7:35 pm – I get to babysit and hear the wiggles for who knows how long.

7:40 pm – oh wow damn that sucks

8:25 pm – are you ok? I'm worried about you damn it it must suck to be baby sitting

8:26 pm – Pfft. They only keep me up till midnight

8:31 pm – lol how many? You are such a good person I swear
April 1
4:03 pm – Hey whats up with you? :”[ fuck it all

4:04 pm – Whaddya mean?
4:05 pm – I mean whats up? Lol :”[ fuck it all

4:08 pm – Oh. Nothing.
4:08 pm – oh lol dude :”[ fuck it all
4:09 pm – I got super smash bros. Fun with 4 people.
4:12 pm – we are playing that right now and you would be having fun with us if your mom wasn’t such a bitch :”[ fuck it all
April 9,

11:17 am – I can’t believe I get to see you oh I bet your mom didn’t know huh?

11:20 am – Am I allowed to give you a ginormous hug? Or no?

11:24 am – You never answered bout the hug I guess that means no

11:25 am – Well I don’t know. Do you just pick up a phone during class and text?

11:29 am – and come on I promise it will be painless just one huge hug please

11:29 am – on kireen.

11:42 am – I love you
Role of Teacher

- Teachers are not parents, friends, counselors or social workers.
- Teachers should offer encouragement and listen to their students.
- Counselors have training to address serious issues and their expertise should be used.
Take Away Points

- Teachers should not be afraid to connect with their students.
- Teaching is a wonderful unique profession.
- Each teacher needs to find ways that allow him or her to connect with students in a professional manner.
Additional Resources

“Protecting Children from Sexual Misconduct by School Employees,” Donald Austin and Michael Patterson (Attorneys for District in Mary Kay Letourneau case), INQUIRY & ANALYSIS – May 2008


Connecting with Students While Maintaining Ethical Boundaries
http://www.cedu.niu.edu/~shumow/itt/doc/MaintainingEthicalBoundaries.pdf