

# **Policy GBEBB Employee Conduct with Students**

Issued 9/22

**Purpose:** The purpose of this policy is to provide all staff, students, volunteers, and community members with information to increase their awareness of their role in protecting children from inappropriate conduct and failure to maintain appropriate boundaries by adults. All adults are expected to maintain professional, moral, and ethical relationships with students that are conducive to an effective, safe learning environment.

This policy addresses a range of behaviors that include not only obviously unlawful or improper interactions with students, but also boundary-blurring and grooming behaviors that undermine the professional adult-student relationship and can lead to misconduct or the appearance of impropriety. The behaviors addressed herein include in-person interactions, text messages, and communication through social media sites, including but not limited to, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and WhatsApp.

## **General Standards**

The primary focus of interactions between employees of James Island Charter High School and students is the furtherance of academic achievement and support of the educational mission of the school. All employees have the responsibility to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning. All students and staff members will treat each other with respect, and an understanding of the appropriate boundaries between adults and students in and outside of the educational setting.

All employees are required to obey applicable state and federal laws and board policies in their interactions with students. Employees are also expected to exercise sound judgment and to maintain professional boundaries when interacting with students at all times and in all places. The governing board expects employees to maintain the highest professional, moral, and ethical standards in their interaction with students. Employees are required to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning, through consistently and appropriately applied discipline, as well as establishing and maintaining professional boundaries. When working with students after school hours or outside of school, employees should inform parents/legal guardians of the situation and obtain parental approval.

Employees will not intrude on a student's physical and emotional boundaries unless the intrusion is necessary to serve a legitimate educational purpose. Violations of emotional boundaries include, but are not limited to: an employee showing favoritism toward a student; mismanaging feelings of frustration toward a student; failing to recognize that an employee is not a peer, parent, therapist, or friend to a student; and inquiring about overly sensitive or personal topics without a legitimate educational purpose for doing so.

For purposes of this policy, the term "legitimate educational purpose" includes matters or communications related to teaching, counseling, athletics, extracurricular activities, treatment of a student's injury or other medical needs, school administration, or other purposes within the scope of the adult's employment duties.

## **Appearances of Impropriety**

Employees are expected to be aware of the appearance of impropriety in their own conduct and the conduct of other adults when interacting with students.

Even though the intent of the employee may be professional and there is a legitimate

education purpose for the conduct, the following activities can create the appearance of impropriety:

1. Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others;
2. Inviting or allowing individual students to visit the employee's home;
3. Remaining on campus with student(s) after the last administrator leaves the school site; and/or
4. Visiting a student's home unless home visits are a required and expected duty of the adult.

Employees should avoid these situations. If unavoidable, these activities should be pre-approved by the appropriate administrator. If not pre-approved, the employee must report the occurrence to the appropriate administrator within 48 hours. The employee shall be prepared to articulate the reason for any deviation from the requirements of this policy and must demonstrate that s/he has maintained an appropriate relationship with the student.

Any of these activities may result in discipline up to and including immediate dismissal.

### **Electronic Communications**

As with other forms of communication, when communicating electronically, employees shall maintain professional boundaries with students. Electronic and other communications with students shall be for legitimate educational purposes only. Employees shall not follow or accept requests from current students or non-adult former students to be friends or connections on personal social networking sites and shall not create or participate in any networking site for communication with students other than those provided by JCHS for this purpose, without the prior written approval of the school principal.

Interacting with currently enrolled students on social media sites—such as but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat—is prohibited as is one on one texting with a student. Employees shall utilize school-wide and school-approved communication systems to communicate with students. In the event, that immediate communication is necessary such as the cancellation or rescheduling of an event or practice, such communication including texting must include at least one additional adult and, if possible, be to the group. Communications concerning an individual student's medical or academic privacy matters in the communication will be copied to the school principal as the additional adult. Employees are reminded that electronic and other communications with students may often be perceived in an unintended light. Therefore, staff members must ensure that such communications are age-appropriate and consistent with a professional staff/student relationship. Staff members are advised that communicating with students as if they are peers could be disruptive to the educational environment and may result in disciplinary action up to and including immediate dismissal.

Every employee must be prudent about maintaining his or her role as an adult outside of school as well and must avoid intimate or overly friendly relationships with students. Demonstrating adult behavior includes appropriately managing feelings expressed by students, such as crushes or undue interest in an employee's personal life.

## **Boundary Violations**

A boundary violation by an employee is an act or omission that does not have a legitimate educational purpose and has the potential to abuse the employee-student relationship. Examples of employee conduct that violate professional adult-student boundaries include but are not limited to the following:

1. Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the professional staff-student relationship.
2. For non-guidance/counseling staff, encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships.

If a student initiates such discussions, employees shall be attentive to the student's concerns but shall disclose to the student that they must immediately provide any information shared by the student to the appropriate guidance/counseling staff and notify the student that such guidance/counseling staff is in the best position to serve the student's concerns. In either case, employee involvement should be limited to a direct connection to the student's school performance.

3. Addressing students or permitting students to address staff members with personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner.
4. Maintaining personal contact with a student outside of school by phone, email, instant messenger or Internet chat rooms, social networking websites, such as Facebook, or letters beyond homework or other legitimate school business without including the parent/guardian.

This prohibition specifically includes "friending" or "following" students on social media unless the social media page is dedicated to legitimate school business. This also specifically includes the posting of student images or other personally identifiable information of students on an adult's personal website.

5. Exchanging personal gifts, cards, or letters with an individual student.
6. Touching students or initiating inappropriate physical contact without a legitimate educational purpose.

Legitimate purposes could include the following: (a) assisting an injured student; (b) assisting a student with special needs who requires assistance with toileting or other physical assistance; (c) appropriate coaching instruction; (d) appropriate music instruction; or (e) to protect the safety of students or staff.

7. Socializing or spending time with students (including but not limited to activities such as going out for beverages, meals, movies, shopping, traveling, recreational activities, or visiting the student's home) outside of school- sponsored events, except as participants in organized community activities.
8. Transporting student(s) in a personal vehicle in a non-emergency situation and without proper written authorization forms in advance.
9. Being alone with a student without a legitimate educational purpose.

## **Social and Other Interactions**

Employees are prohibited from engaging in social and other interactions with students which abuse the student/staff professional relationship.

Prohibited social and other interaction involving students includes, but is not limited to:

1. Sending or accompanying students on personal errands unrelated to any legitimate educational purpose;
2. Furnishing alcohol, drugs or tobacco to a student, or being present where any student is consuming these substances;
3. Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment, or other private matters and concerns to one or more students;
4. Sharing personal secrets with a student including asking a student to keep a secret;
5. Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy (e.g., walking in on the student in the bathroom);
6. Taking a student out of class without a legitimate educational purpose;
7. Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation without prior notification to and/or approval from the school principal as described above;
8. Engaging in harassing or discriminatory conduct prohibited by other JICHHS policies or by state or federal law and regulations; or
9. Unnecessarily invading a student's privacy.

An emergency situation or a legitimate educational purpose may justify deviation from professional boundaries set out in this policy. The employee shall be prepared to articulate the reason for any deviation from the requirements of this policy and must demonstrate that s/he has maintained an appropriate relationship with the student.

There may be circumstances where there is an appropriate pre-existing personal relationship between an employee and a student's family that exists independently of the employee's position with JICHHS (e.g., when their children are friends.) This policy is not intended to interfere with such relationships or to limit activities that are normally consistent with such relationships. Employees are strongly encouraged to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity.

It is understood that adults may be involved in other roles in the community through civic, religious, athletic, scouting, or other organizations and programs whose participants may include JICHHS students. This policy is not intended to interfere with or restrict an adult's ability to serve in those roles; however, adults are strongly encouraged to maintain professional boundaries appropriate to the nature of the activity with regard to all youth with whom they interact in the course of their community involvement.

## **Sexual Misconduct**

ANY BEHAVIOR of a sexual nature between a student and a staff member is strictly PROHIBITED. No employee may use his/her status as an employee to adversely influence a student of the school or district. No employee may date, make sexual

advances toward, or engage in any sexual relationship with a school or district student, regardless of the student's age, the perceived consensual nature of the relationship, where the advances are made, or whether the employee directly supervises the student. Further, no employee may discuss or plan a future romantic or sexual relationship with a student. Any such sexual misconduct behavior shall result in immediate dismissal and reporting to appropriate authorities.

## **Reporting**

An adult who observes or has knowledge of another adult's violation of this policy shall immediately report the information to the appropriate supervisor and/or Title IX Coordinator and, when required, in accordance with mandatory reporting duties. If the supervisor or Title IX Coordinator is the subject of the report, the adult shall report instead directly to the Principal. If the Principal is the subject of the report, the adult shall report directly to the Board Chair and to the Title IX Coordinator.

## **Discipline**

Conduct in violation of this policy will result in at least written documentation in the employee's file and may result in additional discipline up to and including immediate dismissal.

Adopted 9/ /2022

Legal references:

Federal Law:

Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, [42 U.S.C.A. Section 2000c-6](#) - Prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin by public elementary and secondary schools.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, [20 U.S.C.A. Sections 1681-88](#) - Prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex.

S.C. Code, 1976, as amended:

[Section 1-13-10](#), *et seq.* - Prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin, or disability.

[Section 16-3-655](#) - Criminal sexual conduct with a minor.

[Section 16-3-755](#) - Sexual battery with a student.

[Section 16-3-800](#), *et seq.* - Sexual performance by children.

**James Island Charter High School**