

STAFF CONDUCT

Maintaining Staff/Student Boundaries And Social Media and Digital Communication

All school division employees hold positions of public trust. They are responsible for the education and safety of students and also serve as examples and role models to students. Each employee is responsible for both the integrity and the consequences of his or her own actions. Each employee must exhibit the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and fairness when engaging in any activity concerning the school system, particularly in relationships with vendors, suppliers, students, parents, the public, and other employees. Employee conduct should be such as to protect the person's integrity and/or reputation and that of the school system. An unswerving commitment to honorable behavior by each and every employee is expected. Integrity can accommodate the inadvertent error and the honest difference of opinion; it cannot accommodate deceit or subordination of principle.

Employees shall perform their jobs in a competent and ethical manner without violating the public trust or applicable law, policies, and regulations. It is not practical or possible to enumerate all of the situations that might fall under the guidelines of employee conduct. In addition to other policies, regulations, and approved practices that have been established covering specific areas of activity (such as purchasing), the absence of a law, policy, or regulation covering a particular situation does not relieve an employee from the responsibility to exercise the highest ethical standards at all times.

Staff Conduct: General

School Board employees shall adhere to the following standards. Employees shall strive to:

1. Make the well-being of students the fundamental value of all decision making and actions;
2. Support the civil and human rights of all individuals;
3. Maintain personal and professional behaviors that demonstrate positive role-modeling for students, parents, colleagues and the education profession;
4. Refrain from discourse and actions that undermine the integrity of self or other employees and compromise the professional standards of the school division;
5. Fulfill job responsibilities with honesty and integrity;
6. Maintain the standards of the school division and seek to improve effectiveness through continuous professional development;
7. Avoid using their position for personal gain through political, social, religious, economic or other influence and;
8. Honor all contracts/employment notifications with honesty and integrity until fulfillment or release.

Maintaining Staff/Student Boundaries

Staunton City Schools provides its students with a safe and supportive learning environment and protects its students from sexual misconduct and abuse. The responsibility to protect students from sexual misconduct and abuse is shared by the Staunton City School Board ("School Board"), Superintendent, administrators, teachers, other School Board employees, volunteers, parents, state agencies and law enforcement.

Although Staunton City Schools has dedicated, professional and support staff members, it is important to be certain that proper boundaries between staff members and students are maintained at all times in order to ensure respect for the ethical and legal duties in the staff/student relationship and the essential duty of a staff member to serve as a role model to the student. In doing so, staff members will demonstrate a focus on job duties, a commitment to promote educational purposes, and an unconditional dedication to professionalism in conduct and interactions with students.

For the purposes of this regulation, a "staff member" is defined to include all School Board employees, including but not limited to all administrators, counselors, teachers, nurses, student support specialists, support staff, coaches, employees of virtual school programs (to include but not be limited to distance learning, online programs) and vendors providing instructional services to students, as well as all student teachers, interns, practicum students, volunteers and community members. In addition, the term "immediately" is defined as reporting a situation that may constitute a violation of this regulation, including without limitation an appearance of impropriety, within 72 hours of the first suspicion of the violation.

All staff members are to maintain a professional, moral, and ethical relationship in their conduct with students and shall serve as role models for students at all times, whether on or off school property, both during and outside of school hours. Staunton City Schools encourages healthy relationships between students and staff members that promote student achievement and success. At the same time, clear and reasonable boundaries for interactions between students and staff members are necessary to protect students from inappropriate behavior including but not limited to sexual misconduct and abuse and to protect staff members from misunderstandings and false accusations.

All staff members have a responsibility to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning through consistent and fairly applied discipline and the maintenance of professional physical and emotional boundaries with students. These boundaries shall be maintained regardless of the student's age, the perceived consensual nature of the relationship or activity, the location of the activity, and whether the staff member directly supervises the student. For staff members whose children are students of Staunton City Schools, this policy is not intended to violate or otherwise intrude upon the usual parent/child relationship, (already addressed under Reporting Violations).

Personal contact between students and staff members must always be professional, non-sexual, appropriate to the circumstances, and unambiguous in meaning. A boundary invasion is an act, omission, or pattern of behavior by a staff member that does not have an educational purpose and either abuses or compromises the staff/student professional relationship or has the potential to abuse or compromise the staff/student professional relationship.

Unacceptable Conduct

The following non-exhaustive list provides examples of unacceptable conduct that are or may be perceived as boundary invasions and may be in violation of this regulation if committed by a staff member toward a student:

- Any type of inappropriate physical contact with a student or any other conduct that might be considered harassment under Policies GBA/JFHA Prohibition Against Harassment and Retaliation.
- Showing inappropriate images to a student, including pornography;

- Dating a student, or discussing or planning a future romantic or sexual relationship with a student;
- Making sexual advances toward a student;
- A flirtatious, romantic or sexual relationship with a student;
- Unnecessarily invading a student's personal privacy;
- Singling out a particular student or students for personal attention and friendship beyond the professional staff/student relationship;
- Socializing where students are consuming alcohol, drugs or tobacco;
- Providing or offering to provide alcohol, drugs or tobacco to students;
- For non-guidance/counseling staff, excessively encouraging students to confide their personal or family problems and/or relationships. If a student initiates such discussions, staff members are expected to use their professional judgment and refer the student to appropriate guidance/counseling staff when appropriate;
- Sending students on personal errands unrelated to any educational, non-curricular or extracurricular purpose;
- Banter, allusions, jokes or innuendoes of a sexual nature with students;
- Asking a student to keep a secret;
- Disclosing inappropriate personal, sexual, family, employment concerns, or other inappropriate private matters to one or more students;
- Addressing students with personalized terms of endearment or pet names that would suggest the staff member feels love or affection for the student. As a staff member, permitting students to address you by your first name, nickname, with personalized terms of endearment, pet names, or otherwise in an overly familiar manner;
- Maintaining personal contact with a student outside of school by telephone, text message, email, Instant Messenger, Internet chat rooms, social networking websites or letters (beyond homework or other legitimate school business) without the prior express permission of the student's parent/guardian;
- Exchanging gifts cards or letters that are personal or expensive/costly/lavish extravagant in nature with a student (beyond customary student-teacher gifts);
- Socializing or spending time with students (including but not limited to activities such as going out for beverages, meals or movies, shopping, traveling and recreational activities) outside of school-sponsored events or organized community activities; and/or
- Giving a student a ride alone in a vehicle in a non-emergency situation.

Appearances of Impropriety

The following non-exhaustive examples of activities are boundary invasions and may create the appearance of impropriety or lead to an actual impropriety which could result in violation of this regulation. If an occasion arises which may be perceived as an impropriety, the employee should report the occurrence to the appropriate administrator.

- Conducting ongoing, private conversations with individual students that do not have an educational purpose, are unrelated to school activities or the well-being of the student, and that take place in locations inaccessible to others;
- Being alone with an individual student out of the view of others or in an inaccessible location, except for in the context of school counselors providing professional counseling support services, teachers working with students in an afterschool setting or during testing, or a school nurse providing medical services to a student;

- Driving students home or to other locations without the prior knowledge and express permission of the parent/guardian;
- Inviting or allowing individual students to visit the staff member's home without the prior knowledge and express permission of the parent/guardian;
- Inviting students for social contact off school grounds without the prior knowledge and express permission of the parent/guardian;
- Visiting a student's home in the absence of the student's parent/guardian or without the prior knowledge and express permission of the parent/guardian and/or;
- Social networking with students and parents for non-educational purposes.

Staff members are expected to be sensitive to the appearance of impropriety in their conduct with students. Staff members are encouraged to discuss issues with the appropriate administrator whenever they are unsure whether particular conduct may constitute a violation of this regulation.

Social Media and Digital Communication

Effective communication with colleagues, students and families is vital for a thriving school environment where all stakeholders feel heard and engaged. Social media and digital communication devices and methods offer a means by which staff can quickly communicate with others, share information and exchange ideas.

Examples:

- Social network - a dedicated website or other application that enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc.
- Microblog – an online space where authors create communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content.
- Listserv, newsgroup – An email exchange where messages are broadcast to every member of a group at once.
- Forum – a web-based place where users post their comments or opinions on topics. Users may comment on or respond to previous posts. Readers can read and/or respond to all prior posts.
- Chatroom – An internet space where groups of people meet for live conversations via typed messages.
- Text message – an exchange, usually one-to-one, of communication typically typed into a smartphone or handheld device.

Staunton City Schools understands the value of social media and the benefits offered by digital communication devices for providing quick and easy interaction among peers, students and families. These regulations are intended to support staff by ensuring that all staff members clearly understand the many factors and possible ramifications to consider and use communication tools in a division-approved manner within division-approved platforms or spaces. These regulations are in addition to, and complement, existing and future Staunton City School Board policies.

Your online behavior must reflect the same standards of professionalism, respect and integrity as your face-to-face communications. When using personal social media sites, if you identify yourself as an employee of Staunton City Schools, you must remember that you have associated yourself with the division, your colleagues and your school community; therefore,

you must ensure that any associated content is consistent with the mission and work of the division. Staff who have identified themselves as associated with the division should use the following disclaimer on personal social media sites, including blogs, “The views on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the views, opinions, vision or strategies of Staunton City Schools.” However, even with this disclaimer, posting inappropriate comments does not absolve staff from being subject to disciplinary actions if found in violation of this regulation. Even when using the most stringent privacy settings, when posting online comments that are related to school, students, families or the division, even in a personal capacity, staff should act as if all comments/postings are in the public domain.

When using social media or digital communication devices to communicate with students and/or families, staff should always comply with all Staunton City School Board policies including, but not limited to, policies related to:

- Student Records – School Board Policy JO
- Acceptable Computer System Use – School Board Policy and Administrative Regulations: GAB, GAB-AR, IIBEA-AR
- Child Abuse & Neglect Reporting – School Board Policies: GAE, JHG
- Equal Employment Opportunity/Nondiscrimination – School Board Policy GB
- Prohibition Against Harassment & Retaliation – School Board Policies: GBA, JFHA
- Distribution of Information/Materials – School Board Policy and Administrative Regulation: KF, KF-AR
- Reproduction of Copyrighted Materials – School Board Policy and Administrative Regulation: EGGA, EGGA-AR
- Access to Employee Social Media Accounts – School Board Policy GAD

Electronic Communication with Students

Digital technology and social networking provide multiple means for staff members to communicate appropriately with students and personalize learning. Electronic and online communications between staff members and students must be transparent, contemporaneously accessible to supervisors and parents/guardians, and professional in content and tone. Such communication must be professional, non-sexual, appropriate to the circumstances, and unambiguous in meaning. Staff members must restrict one-on-one electronic communications with individual students to accounts, systems, and platforms that are provided by and accessible to Staunton City Schools or with the prior express permission of the principal or supervisor and the parent/guardian.

As with in-person communications, staff members shall avoid appearances of impropriety and refrain from inappropriate electronic communications with students. Factors that may be considered in determining whether an electronic communication is inappropriate include, but are not limited to:

- The subject, content, purpose, authorization, timing and frequency of the communication;
- Whether there was an attempt to conceal, shield or misportray the communication from supervisors and/or parents/guardians;
- Whether the communication could be reasonably interpreted as soliciting sexual contact or a romantic relationship and;
- Whether the communication contained sexual innuendo, such as for purposes of grooming the student.

Parents are encouraged to have access to their children's social networking and digital communications and to supervise their children's use of these methods of communication. Employees should use caution when posting any comment and/or images to the Internet that may reflect negatively on your professional image. Be advised that failure to adhere to these guidelines may result in disciplinary action.

Division-Sanctioned vs. Personal Media

These regulations should serve as a reference tool for staff to inform decisions regarding their selection and use of social media resources and digital communication devices. Communication resources and devices, while of unquestionable value, are not without risk both personally and professionally, if used in the absence of the appropriate level of discretion and intent.

Staunton City Schools does not take a position on an employee's decision to participate in blogs, wikis, social media pages, etc. for personal use on personal time. If, however, staff members choose to do so, staff members should not communicate with students and families regarding topics pertaining to your work with Staunton City Schools.

In General:

- Follow all rules established by social media provider (i.e. age requirements, profile restrictions).
- Be aware that even with the most stringent privacy settings, photo tagging and other tools may make personal information regarding students and their families publicly available. Staff should be prepared to address these issues and remind families of this potential.
- Do not “friend”, “follow” or otherwise interact with students from your personal social media accounts.
- When using social media sites/products for school or Staunton City Schools-related purposes including but not limited to classblogs, web-page sites and teams pages, use division-sanctioned and/or division-created platforms (e.g. Staunton City Schools Facebook page).
- Communicate with families and students through district-provided devices on district systems.
 - Staff should avoid communicating with families regarding school or Staunton City Schools-related matters through personal social media accounts, blogs, etc.
 - Staff should avoid communicating with students and families through personal communication devices such as cell phones, tablets, etc. for any school or Staunton City Schools-related matters. Staff members who choose to communicate with students and families through text messages should do so using a district provided device or district-sanctioned technology. If a district provided device or district-sanctioned technology is not available to the employee, then staff members who choose to communicate (i.e. text message) with students and families through personal communication devices should do so with prior administrative approval and, if communication is with a student, with prior approval of the parent/guardian. Staff should avoid giving students and families personal phone numbers, especially cell phone numbers.
 - Staff must avoid posting student information, pictures, work product exemplars on personal social media sites, blogs, etc. Current parental consents apply only to district-sanctioned media.

Social Media in the Classroom

Communicate clearly and meaningfully with families and students before using social media within the classroom so that families understand what, if any, information regarding their children may be available on the internet.

- When using social media within the classroom, staff should provide information to families regarding the purpose for the use of the selected media, an example of what the media project will look like and a description of the amount of student information and level of security. Unless detrimental to the overall objective of the project, staff should use password protected social media sites available only to families.
- Passive consent (consent that requires parents to actively opt-out rather than opting-in) is appropriate in most instances.
- Staff should work with their building principal or supervisor whenever they are considering a new use of social media or digital communication within the classroom.
- Always use common sense and professional judgment when contacting students through social media.
 - Communications must be age-appropriate and related directly to a student's education.
 - Division employees who work with students in extra-curricular activities, including but not limited to those involved in athletics and/or activities, should fully discuss with parents/guardians, prior to the start of the event or athletic season, their intent to communicate with participants using various forms of social media, including but not limited to texting, group messages, etc.

Reporting Violations

Students and their parents/guardians are strongly encouraged to notify the principal, an administrator, supervisor/director or division superintendent if they believe a staff member may be engaging in conduct that violates this regulation.

Staff members are required to immediately notify the principal, an administrator, supervisor/director, or the division Superintendent if they become aware of a situation that may constitute a violation of this regulation. This obligation is in addition to the statutory responsibility to report suspected abuse and neglect under Policy GAE/JHG - Child Abuse Neglect and Reporting.

Anonymous complaints involving inappropriate boundary invasions by staff members with students will be investigated as if a student, parent, or staff member reported the violation.

Investigation

Investigations of allegations concerning improper staff/student relations shall follow the procedures utilized for complaints under Policies GBA/JFHA - Prohibition Against Harassment and Retaliation and GBA-F/JFHA-F - Report of Harassment.

Disciplinary Action

A violation of this regulation by a staff member will follow School Board Policy GCPD/GCPF - Staff Conduct: Expectations and Discipline, and School Board Policies/Regulations: GBM - Professional Staff Grievances, GBM-AR - Procedures for Adjusting Grievances, GBMA - Support Staff Grievances, and GBMA-AR - Procedures for Adjusting Grievances.

In the case of termination of employment for sexual misconduct or abuse, Staunton City Schools will notify the State Superintendent of Instruction. Consistent with the Virginia Department of Education Guidelines, Staunton City Schools will disclose to school divisions seeking references any formal reprimands or dismissals for violating this Policy.

Retaliation

Retaliation against students or staff members who report an improper staff/student relationship or participate in any related proceedings, or a possible violation of appropriate use of social media and digital communication, is prohibited. Appropriate action will be taken against students or staff members who retaliate against any student or staff member who reports alleged harassment or participates in related proceedings.

Inappropriate Behavior Initiated by a Student

In the event that a student initiates inappropriate behavior toward a staff member, the staff member must document the incident and report it to the principal, an administrator, counselor, or supervisor. If appropriate, the principal, administrator, counselor, or supervisor will intervene and speak with the student and the student's parent/guardian about the alleged inappropriate behavior.

Training

Staunton City Schools will provide its employees and volunteers with training on appropriate staff/student boundaries, social media and digital communication, and harassment and retaliation, including providing them with this regulation. Contracts with virtual school programs and other vendors providing instructional services to students will include a requirement that those staff members will comply with this regulation.

Dissemination of Policy and Reporting Protocols

This regulation will be included on Staunton City Schools' website and in all employee and volunteer handbooks.

Adopted: APRIL 2016

Legal Reference: Va. Const. art. VIII § 7, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Code of Virginia §22.1-296.1, Code of Virginia § 22.1-291.3, Code of Virginia §22.1-296.2, Code of Virginia §22.1-296.4, Code of Virginia § 63.2-1509, Gebser v. Lago Vista Ind. Sch. Dist., 524 U.S. 274 (1998), Baynard v. Malone, 268 F.3d 228 (4th Cir. 2001), Rasnick v. Dickenson County Sch. Bd., 333 F.Supp.2d 560 (W.D. Va. 2004), Office of Civil Rights: Revised Sexual Harassment Guidance: Harassment of Students by School Employees, Other Students or Third Parties (2001), Virginia Board of Education: Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct and Abuse in Virginia Public Schools (2011)

Cross Reference:	AC	Nondiscrimination
	AD	Educational Philosophy
	GAB, IIBEA	Acceptable Computer System Use
	GAB-AR, IIBEA-AR	Acceptable Computer System Use
	GAD	Access to Employee Social Media Accounts
	GB/JB	Equal Employment and Educational Opportunity/Non- Discrimination
	GBA/JFHA	Prohibition Against Harassment and Retaliation
	GBA-F/JFHA-F	Harassment: Complaint Procedure
	JHG	Child Abuse Neglect and Reporting