

**Boundaries, Common Sense, and Avoiding the Question:
“What were you thinking?”
plus a few essential reminders
2011 - 2012**

No matter how old they are, school-aged students are “kids.” Student teachers and all staff are “adults.” Boundaries between students (no matter what their age) and adults should be clear and maintained. Adults should speak like, dress like, and respond like adults. And, there are boundaries that should not be crossed.

- Don't date students or touch students. While we recognize that there are moments where you might appropriately touch/hug students, you need to know that every touch/hug runs the risk of being interpreted as “inappropriate” – thus the guidance not to touch students.
- Don't “IM” students, visit Facebook profiles of students, invite students to your personal networking spaces, “friend” students, get personal with students, or text message students. If you use social networking tools as part of your instruction, make sure to create an educational version that is different than your personal version. You should urge students to do the same so that their personal online lives are not open and available to you.
- When meeting with individual students before, during, or after school, do what you can to “remain in the public eye”. This means that you should keep your classroom door open, be visible to anyone walking by, or meet in public spaces such as the library, etc.
- Emails to students should be about homework and assignments and must be generated only from your school email address.
- Talk-back from a student? Don't escalate! Take a breath – walk away – and, think of 10 other things you can do but: Don't hit - push - “sit” - or physically “escort” students.
- Don't let students sleep in class. They may not be sleeping – and, if they are sleeping, it sends the message that you condone it.
- Make sure all students – every student – knows that it is “ok to tell” if something hurtful to self or others may occur. Students need to know that tattle-tales are hurtful but responsible telling is helpful and could save lives. And, adults need to know that, too! Don't be a bystander.
- Don't allow conversations about student alcohol use, drug use, partying, or inappropriate activities to continue in your presence. Silence is validation. “Knock it off” or “That's not appropriate talk for here” will work.
- Take every comment, note, essay, journal entry, or other indication of suicide ideation, drug use, illicit activity, hate language, or anger to the point of attack... seriously! Then immediately report it to an administrator. Do not wait – report it immediately! Don't be in a position to wish you had reported it after it is too late.

- Interrupt actions and comments that are racist, sexist, hate-filled or discriminatory in any way. Confront put-downs and bullying no matter how subtle or 'minor.' And – report it – it could be part of a pattern about which you are not aware.
- Know the procedures for the “bad things that can happen in schools” emergencies and the categories of responses (lockout, lockdown, evacuate, evacuate and relocate). Take drills seriously. Take attendance in emergency drills. And, “Who knows where the child in the wheel chair is when the alarm goes off?” Keep this in substitute teacher plans, too.
- You may think the kids understand sarcasm, but whether intended or not, it can create an unsettled feeling like public humiliation. They may laugh, but that’s only on the outside. And, never humiliate a student publically or privately, tell the class to “shut up,” or yell at kids.
- No weapons on premises (that includes parking lots) – kids and adults (except police)!
- No alcohol on school premises. Period. That includes gifts from one adult to another.
- Don’t lock (or tape) a student in any room, place or space – literally or figuratively.
- Don’t leave bad news or details on voice mail and/or home answering machines (“Your son/daughter got in trouble today.” “Sorry, you didn’t get the part in the play.”)
- Classrooms are captive audiences. Adults should not use the classroom as a soap box. Let students figure things out on their own and come up with their own opinions. And, some topics are adult topics and adult language is adult language no matter how adult the students are or think they are.
- Confront strangers even if they look like parents or a vendor in the building for a meeting. Ask if you can help. Direct them to the office. Help them find it (don’t let them wander alone). Just because someone is in a coat and tie or has a uniform does not mean they checked in the office and are not inside to do bad things.
- Movies and video clips are to be educational - time is limited enough - we don’t need to entertain or ‘buy time’ before vacations or the end of the year with movies. “Show the movie” is not a sub plan. The last days of the school year are still school days.
- The school’s internet is for school work. Use common sense. You should have no expectation of privacy, especially if you are crossing ethical, moral, and professional lines. Know what is in the Acceptable Use Policy.
- Don’t make assumptions that could be “ouches.” An “ouch?” A stinging statement like: “Are you sure *you* are supposed to be in this honors class?” “Did you take your medication today?” “Are those your notes?” (to the student proudly turning in her polished Final Project in the best spiral notebook she could afford).
- Every one is a “first responder” for well-being and a legal mandatory reporter for issues of abuse and neglect. Immediately notify your principal or supervisor if you witness or suspect a child is being abused or neglected.

- Don't give students aspirin, medicines, or any drug or herbal remedy.
- Field Trips or leaving the building? All details must be reviewed and agreed upon with your principal. Parents must know them, too.
- Don't drive kids anywhere. Only when you have permission from your Principal with appropriate forms signed or when you are the parent should you drive students. If it's an emergency and you must, the student rides in the back seat – with a seatbelt.
- Listen. Listen some more. Then listen again... with empathy.
- Respect “need to know” limits on information. Not everyone in a building needs to know the details of a discipline case or a situation. Outside of those who “need to know” it is gossip or potentially a violation of privacy.
- Please don't “cc” everyone on emails – and don't “respond to all” except when necessary – especially when student information is included. Again – “need to know” and how much information an individual needs varies.

Please, please note: I know being addressed so bluntly on such outrageous situations may offend some readers. While these concepts could be shared with positive, professional, glass-half-full language, this approach insures specificity and little to no grey area. There's just no nice way to say “Don't date students.” Sadly there are a few educators across the country who probably wished they had read such a blunt statement and not had to answer the question: “What were you thinking?” Sorry. Thank you.

My signature below verifies that I have read the "2011-2012 Boundaries List"

Name

School or Department

Position

Date

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