Student & Staff Interaction Policy

Sierra Expeditionary Learning School (SELS) recognizes its responsibility to make and enforce all rules and regulations governing student and employee behavior to bring about the safest learning environment possible. SELS believes that the interaction between its employees and students is very important, and believes an awareness of the school’s policies is beneficial to all.

At SELS, we encourage personal, warm, and respectful relationships between students and staff. In addition to educating, our staff serve as students’ role models, guides, and mentors, and we believe this role is essential to students’ overall learning and growth.

Professional Boundaries
This policy is intended to guide all SELS employees in conducting themselves in ways that reflect the high standards of behavior and professionalism required of employees who interact with students and to specify the boundaries between students and staff. Trespassing the boundaries of a student/staff relationship is deemed an abuse of power and a betrayal of public trust.

Although this policy gives specific, clear direction, it is each employee’s obligation to avoid situations that could prompt suspicion by parents, students, colleagues, or school leaders. One viable standard that can be quickly applied, when you are unsure if certain conduct is acceptable, is to ask yourself: “Would I be engaged in this conduct if my family or colleagues were standing next to me?” Some activities may seem innocent from an employee’s perspective, but can be perceived as inappropriate from a student or parent point of view. The objective of providing the examples of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors listed below is not to restrain innocent, positive relationships between employees and students, but to prevent relationships that could lead to, or may be perceived as, sexual or other inappropriate interactions. Employees 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.

Examples of Unacceptable Behaviors (Violations of This Policy) Absent Acceptable Circumstances (e.g., a familial relationship)

- Giving gifts that are of a personal and intimate nature to an individual student.
- Kissing of any kind.
- Any type of unnecessary physical contact with a student in a private situation.
- Intentionally being alone with a student away from the school, unless with parent permission.
- Cursing or making or participating in inappropriate comments related to sex, sexual orientation, race, or other characteristics protected by law.
- Failing to intervene when students curse or make inappropriate comments related to sex, sexual orientation, race, or other characteristics protected by law.
- Seeking emotional involvement with a student for your benefit, including involving students in adult issues.
- Listening to or telling stories that are sexually oriented.
- Discussing inappropriate personal troubles or intimate issues with students in an attempt to gain their support and understanding.
- Becoming involved with a student so that a reasonable person might suspect inappropriate behavior.
- Allowing students in your home without parent permission.
- Sending emails, text messages, posts, or letters to students if the content is not about school activities.
- Giving students a ride to/from school or school activities without parent permission.
• Being alone in a room with a student at school with the door closed, barring educational or disciplinary or counseling circumstances.
• Hurtful remarks about the physical attributes or development of anyone.
• Excessive attention toward a particular student.

Examples of Acceptable and Recommended Behaviors

• Getting school and parental written consent for any after-school activity.
• Obtaining formal approval (using SELS forms and procedures) to take students off school property for activities such as field trips or competitions.
• E-mails, text, phone, and instant messages to students must be very professional and pertaining to school activities or classes (communication should be limited to school technology).
• Keeping the door open when alone with a student, except in testing or disciplinary or counseling circumstances.
• Keeping reasonable space between you and your students.
• Stopping and correcting students if they cross your own personal boundaries.
• Keeping parents informed when a significant issue develops about a student.
• Keeping after-class discussions with a student professional and brief.
• Asking for advice from fellow staff or administrators if you find yourself in a difficult situation related to boundaries.
• Involving your supervisor if conflict arises with the student.
• Informing your principal about situations that have the potential to become more severe.
• Making detailed notes about an incident that could evolve into a more serious situation later.
• Recognizing the responsibility to stop unacceptable behavior of students or coworkers.
• Asking another staff member to be present when you must be alone with a student.
• Giving students praise and recognition without touching them.
• Pats on the back, high fives and handshakes are acceptable, as are hugs when initiated by students.
• Keeping your professional conduct a high priority.

Duty to Report Suspected Misconduct
When any employee reasonably suspects or believes that another staff member may have crossed the boundaries specified in this policy, he or she must immediately report the matter to the school administrator. All reports shall be as confidential as possible under the circumstances. It is the duty of the administrator to investigate and report thoroughly the situation. Employees must also report to the administration any awareness or concern of student behavior that crosses boundaries or where a student appears to be at risk for sexual abuse. If issue involves Principal, reporting should go to the Board President.

Use of Electronic Media by Staff to Communicate with Students
Any participation by any SELS employee with students, including through the use of electronic media or technology, should always be limited to school business. Participation by SELS employees with students in social media (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Instagram, video games), or other similar means, is highly discouraged and can lead to violations of this policy.

Specifically, SELS employees are highly discouraged from inviting students to join social networks and insofar as such behavior occurs, employees will be responsible for any exposure/access by students to inappropriate or unprofessional content, including words or pictures.

Questions
If you have questions about the content of this policy, or about the broader implications of AB500 Employee Codes of Conduct, please consult a SELS administrator.