

Minnesota State Academies
General Standards and Boundaries for Teaching and Working with Students

Teachers and other employees in a school setting hold a position of authority and trust in relation to students. Students may be unaware of the need for these boundaries and may at times even initiate behavior or make requests that could constitute boundary violations. Employees are therefore responsible for knowing and managing standards and boundaries, and are held accountable should misconduct or violations occur.

The following standards and boundaries are intended to ensure that relationships with students are professional and that MSA employees are acting in a manner that protects the dignity of students.

Standards:

- Respect the dignity and well-being of students
- Exercise the standard of care of a reasonably careful and prudent parent in the circumstances.
- Work together. Our employees support each other in supporting our students. While we may often work independently, we must be mindful that we create a stronger and more responsible community when we work as a member of a team to share the care of students and to meet standards for professional propriety.
- Act on suspicion of boundary violations. If there is reasonable concern about a boundary violation by a colleague, employees are obligated to act on these concerns in the interest of the student and of the professional integrity of both the employee and the Academies. In acting on concerns, employees must refrain from gossip. Employees should make every effort to address issues directly with the colleague in question. If the employee thinks the resolution is unsatisfactory, they must discuss the matter with an Academies Administrator or the Human Resources office.
- Maintain known, visible, and supported interaction. Contact between employees and students must always be known to, supported by, and visible to others whenever possible.
- Maintain professionalism at all times. Employees continue to influence students beyond the school day and even the school year.
- Report reasonable suspicion or knowledge of unsafe, unhealthy, or prohibited student activities to the Directors. They are responsible for the investigation of major school rule violations. Under no circumstances should employees other than Directors conduct independent investigations or impose consequences outside of the Academies' disciplinary process.

Specific Boundaries Enforced by MSA:

The 'Touch' Boundary

Touching is human, especially as an expression of nurturing at the primary grades. However, inappropriate touching is or may be harmful to the integrity of the student. Never touch a student in a way that is unwanted or that might make the student feel uncomfortable; that you would not do in the presence of other employees; or that is not supportive of positive adult relationships with students. Know that students have different sensitivities, thresholds, and vulnerabilities, both cultural and psychological. Sexual touching or invitation to sexual touching is strictly prohibited. Minnesota Statute 626.556 mandates teachers to report any physical or sexual abuse, or neglect of a child to legal authorities.

The Personal Boundary

Although relationships with students are friendly, students and employees are not friends. The nature of employees' responsibilities creates and requires a professional distance that must always be maintained. Violations of this boundary include communications that invite an intimate relationship or disclosing personal or intimate information that undermines a professional relationship. Similarly, a professional distance must be maintained with parents.

The Secrecy Boundary

Secrecy in a relationship with a student is a boundary violation. For the purposes of this policy, secrecy is distinct from confidentiality, and is defined as a condition designed to conceal or hide a specific activity usually for an illicit or unauthorized purpose, often motivated by the fear of being discovered. Confidentiality, on the other hand, conceals information and bona fide activities due to professional and/or legal obligations and is motivated by respect for others. One-on-one interactions with students must be known to, supported by, and preferably visible to others, to protect the dignity of the student and to prevent the appearance of misconduct. Failure to report suspicion or knowledge of unsafe, unhealthy, or prohibited student activities to the Directors is a violation of the secrecy boundary.

The Influence Boundary

Employees must be cognizant of, and sensitive to, traditions and beliefs of others. Teachers and other employees should respect the pedagogical objective to maintain a learning environment free from partisan influence. To achieve this educational mission, teachers and employees should neither endorse nor denigrate religious or political views and discussion with students regarding religion or politics should be confined to academic and educational purposes. Teachers and other employees should not solicit or proselytize for religious or political causes.

The Socializing Boundary

Employees should not organize or attend out-of-school social events or meetings with a student or students unless sanctioned by the school in accordance with school policy and procedures.

The Gift Boundary

Employees may accept modest gifts from students and parents when given as a token of appreciation and gratitude. However, a gift should never be invited as a condition of service. Further, a gift should be refused if the intent of the giver is to gain personal favor or to subvert impartial and fair judgment, or if acceptance might reasonably give the appearance of such unethical conduct.