



Michigan Online School

Staff Ethics Policy

An effective educational program requires the services of men and women of integrity, high ideals and human understanding. To maintain and promote these essentials, the Board expects all professional staff members to maintain high standards in their working relationships and in the performance of their professional duties.

We encourage a close, warm, and respectful relationship between students and teachers/staff. Our teachers and staff serve as students' role models, guides and mentors. The purpose of these guidelines is to give clear direction regarding appropriate conduct and boundaries between staff and students. The expectations for conduct set forth in this document are not intended to serve as an exhaustive list of requirements, limitations, or prohibitions on staff conduct and activities established by the Michigan Online School. Rather, they are intended to:

- Alert staff to some of the more sensitive and often problematic matters involved in faculty/staff-student relationships;
- Provide staff with clear guidance in conducting themselves in a manner that reflects high standards of professionalism; and
- Specify boundaries related to situations and conduct bearing potential sexual overtones, implications, or consequences that are contrary to accepted norms of behavior and in conflict with duties and responsibilities of staff.

It is also important for Michigan Online School to maintain an schoolwide culture in which students and staff members understand their responsibility to report misconduct without fearing retaliation. In order to prevent abuse and/or exploitation, students and staff must know that the Administration will support them when they report possible misconduct.

Each staff member is obligated to avoid situations that could prompt suspicion by parents, students, colleagues, or Michigan Online School leaders.

Boundaries

For the purpose of this policy, the term “boundaries” is defined as acceptable professional behavior by staff members while interacting with students. Trespassing the boundaries of a student/teacher relationship is deemed an abuse of power and a betrayal of public trust.

Definitions of Acceptable and Unacceptable Behavior

Some activities may seem innocent from a staff member’s perspective but can be perceived as flirtation or sexual insinuation from a student or parent point of view. The objective of the following lists of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors is not to restrain positive relationships between staff and students, but to prevent relationships that could lead to, or may be perceived as, sexual misconduct.

Staff members must understand their own responsibility for ensuring that they do not cross the boundaries as written in this policy, whether they agree with the policy as worded or not. Thus, it is crucial that all employees learn this policy thoroughly and thoughtfully apply the lists of acceptable and unacceptable behavior to their daily activities. Although good-natured, heartfelt interaction with students certainly fosters learning, student/staff interactions must always be guided by appropriate boundaries regarding locations, behaviors, and intentions.

Unacceptable Behaviors

In the context of the previous paragraphs, the following partial list of behaviors shall be considered violation of this policy:

- Giving gifts to an individual student that are of a personal or intimate nature;
- Unnecessary physical contact with a student in either a public or private situation;
- Intentionally being alone with a student on campus or away from Michigan Online School without explicit permission and knowledge of one’s supervisor and/or the student’s parents;
- Making or participating in sexually inappropriate comments;
- Sexual jokes, stories, or jokes/comments with sexual innuendo;
- Seeking emotional involvement with a student for an employee’s benefit;
- Discussing an employee’s own personal troubles or intimate issues with a student;
- Becoming involved with a student so that a reasonable person may suspect inappropriate behavior;
- Being alone in a car with one child;

- Inappropriate use of social media with or about students;
- Excessive attention toward a particular student;
- Sending communications to students of a personal nature if the content is not about Michigan Online School activities;
- Failing to keep the appropriate Administrator informed when a significant issue develops involving a student's welfare;
- Using inappropriate language/profanity in the presence of students.

Behaviors that are Unacceptable Without Parental Permission

- Giving students a ride to/from Michigan Online School or Michigan Online School activities;
- Being alone in a room with a student at Michigan Online School with the door and window blinds closed;
- Allowing students in your home;
- Communicating with students other than by using Michigan Online School provided technology (i.e. communicating via personal email, cell phone, or social media) other than during a field trip or other Michigan Online School activity after receiving parent permission;
- Communicating with students outside of regular Michigan Online School hours on matters other than appropriate and relevant school business; or
- Sending emails, text messages, or letters to students if the content is not about Michigan Online School matters.

Duty to Report

If an employee finds him/herself in a difficult situation related to boundaries, the employee should ask for advice from a supervisor or Administrator. When any employee becomes aware of another employee crossing appropriate boundaries with a student, the employee must report the matter to his or her supervisor. In some circumstances, employees will also have the duty to report such conduct in accordance with the mandated reporter requirements.