

Staff - Student Relations 4040/7310

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Purpose:

The Eastern North Carolina School for the Deaf (ENCSD) is committed to maintaining a safe, respectful, and professional environment for all students. Employees are expected to establish and maintain appropriate, ethical relationships with students at all times, both on and off campus and during or outside of work hours. This policy sets clear expectations to prevent any form of inappropriate behavior or boundary violations between staff and students and ensures compliance with all federal and state laws.

Definitions:

- **Employee/Staff:** Any person employed by ENCSD in any capacity, including full-time, part-time, temporary, substitute, contractors, or volunteers who have direct contact with students.
- **Student:** Any individual enrolled in ENCSD programs or activities, regardless of age.
- **Inappropriate Relationship:** Any interaction between staff and students that violates professional boundaries or ethical standards, including romantic, sexual, or exploitative behavior.
- **Grooming Behavior:** Actions by an employee intended to establish an inappropriate emotional or physical connection with a student, including excessive attention, favoritism, or gift-giving that could be used to manipulate or exploit the student.
- **Professional Boundaries:** The ethical and appropriate limits that govern interactions between staff and students to ensure a safe and respectful educational environment.
- **Mandated Reporter:** An employee required by law to report suspected child abuse, neglect, or misconduct to appropriate authorities in accordance with

N.C. General Statute § 7B-301 and related statutes.

School-Approved Communication Channels: Official platforms and tools designated by ENCSD for communication with students, such as school email, educational software, or supervised social media groups.

I. Prohibited Conduct

Employees are strictly prohibited from engaging in the following:

1. Romantic or Sexual Relationships:
 - Any romantic or sexual interaction, solicitation, or relationship between a school employee and a student is strictly prohibited, regardless of the student's age or the legality of the conduct under criminal or civil law. Such conduct constitutes misconduct and grounds for dismissal.
2. Inappropriate Communication:
 - Sending, receiving, or soliciting sexually explicit, suggestive, or otherwise inappropriate written, visual, or electronic communications, including texts, emails, videos, or social media messages.<
3. Favoritism or Grooming Behavior:
 - Excessive attention, gift-giving, special treatment, or physical contact that could be interpreted as grooming behavior.
4. Private Meetings or Contact Without Educational Justification:
 - Meeting a student in private settings, transporting a student without prior administrative and parental approval, or initiating contact outside school hours for non-school-related matters.
5. Use of Personal Technology for Non-Educational Communication:
 - Using personal phones, social media, or messaging platforms to communicate with students for reasons not directly related to schoolwork or official ENCSD activities, unless expressly authorized by administration.

II. Expectations for Professional Boundaries

All staff are expected to:

1. Maintain Professionalism:

- Interact with students in ways that are respectful, appropriate, and clearly related to the student's educational development.
- 2. Use School-Approved Channels of Communication:
 - When communicating with students, use school-issued email accounts or approved educational platforms and maintain transparency by copying supervisors and/or parents/guardians as appropriate.
- 3. Report Suspected Violations:
 - In accordance with N.C. Gen. Stat. § 7B-301, 115C-325 to 115C-337, OSHR regulations, and DPI policy, staff are mandated reporters and must immediately report any suspected abuse, neglect, or misconduct involving students, including inappropriate staff-student interactions, to the ENCSD Social Worker.
 - The ENCSD Social Worker must notify the ENCSD Superintendent.
 - Cooperate fully and truthfully in any internal or external investigation related to suspected staff-student misconduct.
- 4. Training and Compliance:
 - ENCSD will provide annual training on professional boundaries, mandated reporting, and electronic communications with students.
 - Training will be provided in accessible formats, including sign language interpreters or captions as needed.
 - All employees are required to participate in and complete such training as a condition of continued employment or service.

III. Investigations and Discipline

1. Reporting Process:

Reports of suspected violations shall be made to the School Social Worker who will follow the procedures set forth in Student Protection and Mandated Reporter policy (Policy 4240/7312).
2. Investigation:

ENCSD will promptly investigate all reports fairly and confidentially, following OSHR disciplinary processes and the requirements of Title IX, if applicable. Interpreters will be provided for all participants who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing during investigative interviews.
3. Disciplinary Action:

Violation of this policy may lead to corrective action ranging from reprimand to termination of employment consistent with OSHR disciplinary procedures and

applicable state and federal law.

4. Notification of Authorities:

Serious violations involving potential criminal conduct will be referred immediately to law enforcement and child protective services as required by law.

IV. Additional Provisions

1. Protection from Retaliation:

ENCSD prohibits retaliation against anyone who reports misconduct in good faith or participates in investigations. Any act of retaliation will result in disciplinary action.

2. Annual Acknowledgment:

All employees must sign an annual acknowledgment confirming their understanding and compliance with this policy, OSHR Code of Ethics, and DPI rules on staff conduct.<

3. Accommodations for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Stakeholders:

ENCSD will provide reasonable accommodations, including sign language interpreters and accessible communication, for all students, employees, and families involved in the reporting, investigation, or training process.

V. Accessibility Statement

ENCSD is committed to ensuring that all students, staff, and families—regardless of hearing status—have equal access to information, reporting mechanisms, investigations, and training. Accommodations, including sign language interpreters and accessible communication, will be provided as needed throughout all processes described in this policy.

Legal and Regulatory References

- N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 7B-301 (Duty to Report Child Abuse, Neglect, Dependency, or Death)
- N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 14-27.32 (Sexual Activity with a Student)
- N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 115C-325 to 115C-337 (School Personnel)
- N.C. Gen. Stat. §§ 126-16 et seq. (OSHR Personnel Act)
- NC OSHR Policy 5A.0100 (Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct)
- NC OSHR Policy 5B.0300 (Prohibited Personnel Practices)

- NC DPI Policy 4040/7310 and 4240/7312 (Employee Conduct and Child Abuse Reporting)
- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (20 U.S.C. §1681 et seq.)

Book traversal links for Policies

- [◀ Section 4000 Students](#)
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- [Student Protection and Mandatory Reporting Policy 4240/7312 ▶](#)