

STAFF – STUDENT RELATIONS

Section 1. Expectations Regarding Communications with Students

Section 1.1 Staff members of Hawthorn Leadership School for Girls are expected to maintain courteous and professional relationships with students at all times. For purposes of this policy, “staff member” means any individual employed by Hawthorn, including part-time and substitute employees, and student teachers. All staff members have a responsibility to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning through consistently and fairly applied discipline and the maintenance of physical and emotional boundaries with students. These boundaries must be maintained regardless of the student's age, the location of the activity, whether the student allegedly consents to the relationship or whether the staff member directly supervises the student. Maintaining these boundaries is an essential requirement for employment at Hawthorn.

Section 1.2 Staff member communication with students shall be appropriate and consistent with Board policy and the Hawthorn mission. This requirement applies to both personal and professional communication regardless of when, where, in what form (verbal or non-verbal) or through what medium (in person or electronic) the communication occurs.

Section 1.3 Communication shall be deemed to be inappropriate if such communication is sexually suggestive; suggests romantic activity with student or students; or is otherwise inconsistent with Board policy or the Hawthorn mission.

Section 1.4 Although this policy applies to the communications and relationships between staff members and Hawthorn students, staff members who inappropriately interact with any child may be disciplined or terminated when Hawthorn determines such action is necessary to protect students.

Section 2. Goal and Scope of this Policy

Section 2.1 The goal of this policy is to protect students from harm and staff members from allegations of misconduct by requiring staff members to maintain professional boundaries with students. Hawthorn does not intend to interfere with or impede appropriate interactions between staff members and students. This policy does not apply to staff members’ communications with their children, stepchildren or other persons living within the staff member’s home who happen to be students of Hawthorn.

Section 3. Absolute Prohibitions

Section 3.1 There are some interactions between staff members and students that are never acceptable and are absolutely prohibited. Examples of such behavior include, but are not limited to:

1. Dating a student or discussing or planning a future romantic or sexual relationship with a student
2. Making sexual advances toward a student, engaging in a sexual relationship with a student, or touching a student in a sexual manner

3. Engaging in any conduct that constitutes illegal harassment or discrimination as defined by law or in Board Policy, or that could constitute a violation of that policy if pervasive.
4. Engaging in any conduct that violates Board policies and procedures, or that constitutes criminal behavior

Section 3.2 Any staff member who engages in any of these behaviors will be disciplined up to and including termination of employment.

Section 4. Electronic Communication

Section 4.1 Staff members are encouraged to communicate with students and parents/guardians for educational purposes using a variety of effective methods, including electronic communication. As with other forms of communication, staff members must maintain professional boundaries with students while using electronic communication regardless of whether the communication methods are provided by Hawthorn or the staff member uses his or her own personal electronic communication devices, accounts, web pages or other forms of electronic communication.

Section 4.2 Staff members may use electronic communication with students only as frequently as necessary to accomplish an educational purpose. Communication for an educational purpose would include communications related to a staff member's position, including but not limited to teaching, counseling, athletics, extracurricular activities, treatment of a student's physical injury, or other purposes related to a staff member's job duties.

Section 4.3 When communicating electronically with students for educational purposes, staff members are encouraged to use Hawthorn provided devices, accounts and forms of communication (such as computers, phones, telephone numbers, email addresses and Hawthorn sponsored web pages or social networking sites), when available. Staff members must maintain professional boundaries with students while communicating electronically, regardless of whether the communication methods are provided by Hawthorn or the staff member uses his or her own electronic communication devices, accounts, web pages or other forms of electronic communication. Staff members' electronic communications may be monitored. With the Head of School's permission, staff members may establish websites or other accounts on behalf of Hawthorn that enable communications between staff members and students or parents/guardians. Any such website or account is considered Hawthorn-sponsored and must be professional and conform to all Hawthorn policies and procedures.

Section 4.4 Staff use of any electronic communication is subject to Hawthorn's policies and procedures including, but not limited to, policies, procedures and legal requirements governing the confidentiality and release of information about identifiable students. Staff members who obtain pictures or other information about identifiable students through their connections with Hawthorn are prohibited from posting such pictures or information on personal websites or personal social networking websites without permission from the Head of School or designee and the student's parent or legal guardian.

Section 4.5 Hawthorn discourages staff members from communicating with students electronically for reasons other than educational purposes. However, an emergency situation or

the temporary unavailability of Hawthorn's communication systems might justify deviation from the policy's restrictions on electronic communications. Likewise, staff members might be related to students or have contact with students through participation in civic, religious or other organizations. These contacts might justify deviation from this policy as well. If concerns are raised, the staff member must be prepared to demonstrate that the communications are appropriate. Hawthorn encourages staff members to consult with their supervisors prior to engaging in behaviors or activities that might violate any of the restrictions set forth in this policy. As stated above, this policy does not limit staff members from communicating with their own children, stepchildren or other persons living within the staff member's home who happen to be students at Hawthorn.

Section 5 Consequences for Violation

Section 5.1 Staff members who violate this policy may be disciplined, up to and including termination of employment. Depending on the circumstances, Hawthorn may report staff members to law enforcement and the Children's Division (CD) of the Department of Social Services for further investigation, and Hawthorn may seek revocation of a staff member's license(s) with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Section 6 Reporting

Section 6.1 Any person, including a student, who has concerns about or is uncomfortable with a relationship or activities between a staff member and a student, should bring this concern immediately to the attention of a teacher, counselor, or administrator. If illegal discrimination or harassment is suspected, Hawthorn policies related to discrimination and harassment will be followed.

Section 6.2 Any staff member who possesses knowledge or evidence of possible violations of this policy must immediately make a report to a Hawthorn administrator. All staff members who know or have reasonable cause to suspect child abuse shall immediately report the suspected abuse in accordance with Hawthorn policy and state law. Staff members must also immediately report a violation or perceived violation of Hawthorn's discrimination and harassment policy to Hawthorn's nondiscrimination compliance officer. Staff members may be disciplined for failing to make such reports.

Section 6.3 Hawthorn will not discipline, terminate or otherwise discriminate or retaliate against any student or staff member for reporting in good faith any action that may be a violation of this policy.

Section 7. Training

Section 7.1 Hawthorn will provide training to staff members that includes current and reliable information on identifying signs of sexual abuse of children and potentially abusive relationships between children and adults. The training will emphasize legal reporting requirements and cover how to establish an atmosphere where students feel comfortable discussing matters related to abuse.

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