

Professional Conduct and Boundaries for Alabama Schools

Discussion Guide

**IF YOU SEE
SOMETHING,
SAY SOMETHING.**

Module 1: Teacher & Student Personal Boundaries

Performance Task Scenarios:

Leader: Have staff divide into groups to read and be prepared to discuss the following scenarios and the questions that follow.

Scenario 1

Ms. G is a popular secondary school teacher. She runs the high school guitar club and organizes the annual talent show. Students like to hang out in Ms. G's class during their breaks and sometimes after school. She plays music and talks with them about school, friends, and their home life. A male student frequently looks for Ms. G when she is alone for casual conversation during and after school hours.

QUESTION: If YOU were Ms. G, how would you handle this situation to avoid the escalation of a boundary violation? Be specific with your actions.

Scenario 2

Ms. M is a veteran teacher who is well liked by her students. She often helps students after school, so it's not uncommon to see students visiting her classroom after their school day has ended. She has tutored one of her students, Barbie, for the last several months. During that time, Ms. M has emailed Barbie from her personal email address and texted her cell phone. The exchanges were very general, sometimes unrelated to schoolwork. Recently, Barbie has begun to text her teacher about more personal feelings.

QUESTION: If YOU were Ms. G, how would you handle this situation to avoid the escalation of a boundary violation? Be specific with your actions.

Reflection Activity:

Leader: Have staff reflect individually on the following questions.

QUESTION: How can teachers build professional relationships with students without finding themselves on the slippery slope of boundary violations?

QUESTION: On your campus, are the expectations for teacher-student relationships made clear? Is there any room for misunderstanding or confusion?

Module 2: Educator-Student Interaction and Social Media

Performance Task Scenarios:

Leader: Have staff divide into groups to read and be prepared to discuss the following scenarios and the questions that follow.

Scenario 1: The Invitation

Mr. C, an elementary teacher, sent a private Snapchat message to one of his fifth-grade students on the last day of school. He asked her to send him pictures of herself throughout the summer so he could keep up with her fun activities. He sent her two pictures of himself playing basketball with his friends. Within a week of the initial contact, Mr. C sent several more pictures to the student, as well as text messages to her cell phone to see how her summer was going. During the third week of summer, he sent the student a picture of himself wearing swim trunks and an invitation to meet him at his house for a swim. Mr. C's Snapchat message stated, "Come over anytime---I have a great pool."

QUESTION: What are the possible ethical issues of this situation?

QUESTION: Is the safety and well-being of anyone at stake?

QUESTION: What advice, strategy, or policy would you recommend to schools based on this scenario?

Scenario 2: Picture Portfolio

Ms. R, the school counselor, communicated frequently with a couple of male students from the high school where she worked via Facebook, text messages, Snapchat, and Instagram. She sent the students pictures from her modeling portfolio. Several of the pictures were sexually suggestive. She asked the students to comment on the pictures. The students forwarded several of the pictures to their friends via text messages. They also posted Ms. R's pictures to several social media sites. The pictures went viral. Colleagues, parents, board members, and community members viewed the inappropriate pictures.

QUESTION: What are the possible ethical issues of this situation?

QUESTION: Is the safety and well-being of anyone at stake?

QUESTION: What advice, strategy, or policy would you recommend to schools based on this scenario?

Scenario 3: At the Lake

Mr. B, a teacher, played a round of golf with his friends from his previous job at a local industry. When they finished the round of golf, the group decided to have a few drinks and grill burgers at the lake. After a few hours of being at the lake, some of the students from Mr. B's high school approached the group. It was evident that the students had been drinking since they had an ice chest of beer with them. The students joined Mr. B and his friends and continued to drink until late in the evening. Mr. B and the students engaged in a very friendly banter during the time they spent together at the lake.

QUESTION: What are your concerns in this scenario that demonstrate how quickly the lines can blur in the teacher-student relationship?

QUESTION: What are the potential consequences for the teacher, school, and the school's community?

QUESTION: What response or action would have been more appropriate on the part of the teacher?

Reflection Activity:

Leader: Have staff reflect individually on the following questions.

QUESTION: How can a teacher balance the use of social media for instruction without crossing personal and inappropriate boundaries with students?

QUESTION: Has your viewpoint changed regarding the influence teachers have on students outside of school?

QUESTION: What would you do if you began to receive text messages from one of your students that were showing signs of inappropriate connotations?

Module 3: Confronting and Reporting Borderline Behavior

Performance Task Scenarios:

Leader: Make copies of Appendix A as a handout to provide to your staff. Divide staff into groups and follow the directions provided. For Scenario Two, divide into groups and discuss the situation to determine if the matter was handled correctly.

Scenario 1: (Appendix A Handout) To Report or Not Report

(See Appendix A for handout to use for this activity.)

Scenario 2: Liable or Not?

Ms. J has strong suspicions that a student has been abused. In this case, the possible perpetrator is a colleague. Ms. J knows Alabama law requires reporting suspected cases of abuse. The administration has stated that the proper procedure in these situations is for teachers to notify the school counselor or principal and to let them determine the next steps of action or to make an official report. Ms. J notifies the school counselor about the possible abuse situation. The counselor tell Ms. J she will follow up and take matters from there. Ms J returns to her room and documents that she reported the situation to the counselor. Ms. J feels she has fulfilled the mandatory reporting obligation because she followed school procedures for this situation.

QUESTION: Did Ms. J's reporting the situation to the school counselor fulfill Alabama's mandatory reporting law?

Reflection Activity:

Leader: Have staff reflect individually on the following questions.

QUESTION: Why do you believe cases of educator misconduct go unreported?

QUESTION: From your perspective, has your campus made strides to support a safe and ethical climate? If yes, what strategy or strategies have fostered this? If no, what recommendation can you offer to create a safe and ethical climate?

Appendix A: Performance Task

Directions: Read each scenario and determine if the situation should be reported to school administration.

| Scenario | Report (R) | Do Not Report (DNR) | Justification |
|--|------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1. You're monitoring instruction. A student's phone is on her desk. A text from a teacher pops up that says, "Hey, what's up?" | | | |
| 2. You see two single colleagues out on a date. | | | |
| 3. You see a teacher change an answer on a state assessment. | | | |
| 4. You see a male teacher hug a female student and then rub her shoulders. | | | |
| 5. You walk into a teacher's classroom. He is giving each of his students a gift bag with a candy bar, a pencil, and a journal. | | | |
| 6. One evening at a local pub you see a fellow teacher who is heavily intoxicated. | | | |
| 7. You hear two students talking about a friend who frequently goes over to his teacher's house. The female teacher is single. | | | |
| 8. You see a fellow teacher shooting hoops with several of his students at the nearby park after school lets out. Another teacher arrives to shoot hoops as well. | | | |
| 9. You attend an evening meeting at the local university. On your way to your car, you see one of your colleagues sitting very closely on a bench with one of his high school students. | | | |
| 10. You walk by a colleague's classroom at the end of the day. You hear loud giggling. You peek through the window and observe the teacher holding a female student closely while practicing a self-defense technique. | | | |