THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 39 (VANCOUVER)
Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Students
Statement of Purpose

The VSB is committed to creating a safe and respectful learning environment for students. The purpose of these Guidelines is to clarify and affirm the VSB's expectations of all adults in interactions with students of the VSB. For the purpose of this document, "adult" refers to any person working, volunteering or otherwise interacting with students on school grounds or at school activities.

It is expressly recognized that all employee groups are subject to collective agreements, terms and conditions of employment, professional and/or union codes as well as legislation. For example, teachers are regulated by the *School Act,* their Collective Agreement, the BC College of Teachers' Professional Standards and the BC Teachers' Federation Code of Ethics. These Guidelines do not supersede nor replace such codes/documents and statutory requirements, but rather provide a set of common expectations for adult-student interactions applicable to all employee groups and other adults (i.e. parents and volunteers) who interact and engage with VSB students.

This document does not address every possible situation or provide an exhaustive review of acceptable and unacceptable conduct. It provides a framework within which the VSB expects adults to exercise common sense and good judgment when interacting with students. It endeavours to find a balance between encouraging positive and appropriate interactions between adults and students and discouraging inappropriate and harmful interactions. Awareness and understanding of these Guidelines will strengthen a working culture in the VSB which is already deeply committed to student safety, security and wellbeing.

Rationale

Students have the right to a safe, caring, orderly school environment, free from discrimination and harm. Students also have the right to a learning environment in which clear expectations of acceptable adult behaviour are held and met.

The "Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Students" seek to establish an environment where anyone in the school community feels safe to come forward with concerns of adult misconduct towards students. Strong well-publicized Guidelines will discourage the formation of a code of silence that can become entrenched in school culture, and inform adults, volunteers, parents and students of the behavioural expectations for all adults within the VSB.

The Adult's Position of Trust and Authority

An adult is not a peer of the students. Adults are in a position of trust and authority in relationship to students and therefore their interactions with students must focus on meeting the needs of the student.

In working with students, adults must take great care that their actions and motivations will not be misinterpreted. The burden of responsibility and accountability rests with the adult. The onus is on the adult to remove him/herself from any physical or verbal contact with students that could lead to the initiation or perception of any form of abuse or harassment.

Personal and Professional Boundaries

Adults must respect each student's right to personal boundaries in all interactions. Some students may be able to tell the adult if they are uncomfortable with the comments or conduct of the adult. Other students may be reluctant to communicate their discomfort due to the adult's position of authority over them. It is the responsibility of the adult to be sensitive to, and respectful of, the personal boundaries of all students whether or not the student communicates discomfort with the interaction.

When interacting with a student, an adult is advised to consider the appropriateness of her/his conduct in relation to such factors as the student's age, developmental level, cultural and educational background.

If a student's behaviour toward an adult is, or appears to be, of a sexual nature, the adult must let the student know the behaviour is inappropriate and not allow it to continue. If an adult has an interaction with a student which is cause for concern he/she should discuss the situation immediately with an administrator, his/her supervisor or associate superintendent. Adults are expected to refer matters beyond their expertise or role to the appropriate district or community resource person.

Acceptable and Unacceptable Behaviour

Adults are expected to behave in a manner that maintains and enhances public trust in the school district and models appropriate behaviours to students. The following examples are not exhaustive but illustrative.

Examples of Acceptable Behaviour are:

- **Respectful language, tone and attitude towards students;**
- **Respect for students' personal/physical boundaries; Age-appropriate forms of touching such as comforting a hurt or upset child with a side by side hug or pats on the shoulder or back as positive reinforcement; School-related communication with students through the use of VSB email with a copy to the student's parent/guardian, or by telephone through the student's family phone; Supporting diversity within the school population (e.g. ethnic groups, gay and lesbian students/families)**

Examples of Unacceptable Behaviour are:

- **Humiliation of students (e.g. demeaning comments, intimidation);**
- **Inappropriate touching of students (e.g. massaging, stroking, caressing);**

- **Physical or corporal discipline of students (e.g. shoving, hitting);**
- **Discrimination or harassment prohibited under the B.C.** *Human Rights Code* **including that based on race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, family status, socio-economic status, physical or mental disability, sex or sexual orientation;**
- **Being under the influence of recreational drugs and alcohol while supervising or interacting with students;**
- **Disrespectful language towards students;**
- **Sharing or soliciting overly personal/private information;**
- **Texting or online communication with students on the adult's personal email, or being "friends "on a social networking site;**
- **Engaging in any sexual behaviour with a student, with or without consent;**
- **Exposing students to, or involving students in, any activities involving staff, volunteer or student nudity; Inappropriately disclosing confidential student-related information (beyond a "need-to-know" basis);**
- **Asking students to keep secrets.**

Off-Campus Supervision

An adult must inform an administrator or supervisor of any off-campus outing with an individual or group of students. Volunteers shall be advised of expectations for their roles as supervisors and should understand the regulations outlined in VSB policy.

An adult must be particularly aware of maintaining professional boundaries with students when in more informal settings, such as on field trips. Social activities with students should be confined to school-related activities.

Considerations when Working with Very Young or Special Needs Students

Students with disabilities and very young students are particularly dependent on adults for their safety and well-being. Where possible, an adult should inform a staff member when he/she is going to be alone with a student.

In the course of their work with students who are dependently disabled or physically challenged, adults may be involved in lifting, toileting, assisting in physiotherapy programs, and taking care of students' personal hygiene needs. These activities should be carried out with the utmost respect for the dignity of the student.

Concerns

The "Guidelines for Adults Interacting with Students" are intended to support students, staff, parents and volunteers to safely inform supervisory staff if they have concerns about the safety or security of students and/or witness adult behaviour contrary to these Guidelines. Where there is concern about adult behaviour or conduct that is inconsistent with these Guidelines, this should be reported to an administrator or associate superintendent. Such reports shall be treated in a confidential manner (with information restricted to a need-to-know basis).

Every adult has a legal responsibility to report suspected or disclosed cases of sexual, physical, emotional abuse or neglect of a student following the VSB Protocols and Procedures.