Maintaining Professional Relationships with Students
Coaching Guide

Module Summary

In this module, teachers will:
- Describe the importance of maintaining professional relationships with students.
- Identify five guiding principles for maintaining professional relationships with students.

Module activities:
Teachers will explore dos and don'ts associated with five guiding principles for maintaining professional relationships with students.

* This module is part of a group focused on professionalism that includes “Teacher Professionalism in the Age of Social Media” and “Working with Colleagues”.

Key Takeaways

Essential knowledge:
- A professional relationship includes the ethical conduct, appropriate communication, and proper boundaries that should be maintained between teachers and their students (Hurst & Redding, 2000; Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005; Sockett, 1993).

Essential skill:
The five guiding principles that can help teachers maintain professional relationships with students are:
- **Build relationships, but maintain boundaries**: Share information about yourself and learn about students in order to build a rapport. However, maintain your role as the student’s teacher not his/her best friend.
- **Present yourself professionally**: Professional presentation includes clothing choices, grooming, the topics that one discusses, and even the language one uses.
- **Maintain a safe environment**: Teachers must make sure that they and their students speak and act in ways that are inclusive, respectful, and affirming.
- **Uphold confidentiality**: Teachers are obligated to protect confidential information about students and any breach could have grave consequences for the student’s social, physical, and mental well-being (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2015).
- **Seek professional support**: Teachers must recognize the limits of their role and seek professional support at the school and district when necessary.

Essential mindset:
- Teachers should build strong relationships with their students but never in a manner that compromises on their role and duties as teacher.
- Part of being a teacher is dressing, communicating, and acting professionally at all times.
- Teachers are often presented with situations or information about students that falls outside of their expertise and training. In these times, it is essential to seek the guidance and support of trained school personnel who can help both the teacher and student.
**The Skill in Action**

- The language the teacher uses demonstrates care and respect for students. The topics that are discussed are related to content and are appropriate for the school setting. It is evident that the teacher has a strong, positive rapport with the students.
- The teacher wears clothing that is clean, appropriate for their teaching setting, and is in good condition.
- The teacher maintains a physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe environment and quickly addresses any breach in that safety.
- Confidential, personal information about students is kept protected and only discussed in private with school personnel or family members with a “legitimate educational interest” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, FERPA general guidance for students).
- The teacher seeks guidance from other educational professionals in the district in instances that fall outside of their formal training and expertise.

**Questions for Discussion**

The following is a list of suggested questions for engaging in a reflective dialogue with the teacher, either before or after he or she attempts to implement the skill.

- What were your key takeaways from the module?
- Which of the principles described in this module do you think you could apply immediately?
- How do you believe the knowledge and skills highlighted in this module will benefit your growth as a teacher?
- What questions do you have about professionalism?
- Have you ever encountered a situation where you were unsure of the appropriate course of action?
- Are there any questions you have for me?

**Standards**

InTASC:

3(n) The teacher is committed to working with learners, colleagues, families, and communities to establish positive and supportive learning environments.

9(o) The teacher understands the expectations of the profession including codes of ethics, professional standards of practice, and relevant law and policy.