

## **Sarasota Christian School Standards of Ethical Conduct**

(Adapted from the Code of Ethics of the Education Profession in Florida and Principles of Professional Conduct for the Education Profession in Florida and the Florida Ethics in Education Act)

1. Our School values the worth and dignity of every person, the pursuit of truth, devotion to excellence, acquisition of knowledge, and the nurture of democratic citizenship. Essential to the achievement of these standards are the freedom to learn and to teach and the guarantee of equal opportunity for all.
2. Our primary professional concern will always be for the student and the development of the student's potential. Employees will therefore strive for professional growth and will seek to exercise the best professional judgment and integrity.
3. Our instructional personnel shall comply with the below principles. Violation of any of these principles shall subject the employee to discipline, up to and including termination. Additionally, violation shall subject the employee to revocation or suspension of the individual educator's certificate, or the other penalties as provided by law.

Concern for the student requires that our instructional personnel and other personnel that have contact with our students:

- a. Shall make reasonable effort to protect the student from conditions harmful to learning and/or to the student's mental and/or physical health and/or safety.
- b. Shall not unreasonably restrain a student from independent action in pursuit of learning.
- c. Shall not unreasonably deny a student access to diverse points of view.
- d. Shall not intentionally suppress or distort subject matter relevant to a student's academic program.
- e. Shall not intentionally expose a student to unnecessary embarrassment or disparagement.
- f. Shall not intentionally violate or deny a student's legal rights.
- g. Shall not harass or discriminate against any student on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national or ethnic origin, political beliefs, marital status, handicapping condition, or social and family background and shall make

reasonable effort to assure that each student is protected from harassment or discrimination.

- h. Shall not exploit a relationship with a student for personal gain or advantage.
- i. Shall keep in confidence personally identifiable information obtained in the course of professional service, unless disclosure serves professional purposes or is required by law.

Obligation to the public requires that our instructional and administrative personnel:

- a. Shall not intentionally distort or misrepresent facts concerning an educational matter in direct or indirect public expression.
  - b. Shall not use School privileges for personal gain or advantage.
  - c. Shall accept no gratuity, gift, or favor that might influence professional judgment.
  - d. Shall offer no gratuity, gift, or favor to obtain special advantages.
  - e. Shall not use coercive means or promise special treatment to influence professional judgments of colleagues.
  - f. Shall not misrepresent one's own professional qualifications.
  - g. Shall report to appropriate authorities any known allegation of a violation of the Florida School Code or State Board of Education Rules as defined in Section 1012.795(1), F.S.
4. Aware of the importance of maintaining the respect and confidence of colleagues, of students, of parents, and of the community, employees of our School must strive to achieve and sustain the highest degree of ethical conduct. We support and endorse a strict policy of respect toward students and expect employees to abide by a professional, moral, and ethical standard of conduct and model good citizenship for students, parents, and the community. This commitment requires that our employees:
- a. Shall maintain honesty in all professional dealings.
  - b. Shall not on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, age, national or ethnic origin, political beliefs, marital status, handicapping condition if otherwise qualified, or social and family background deny to a colleague professional benefits or advantages or participation in any professional organization.

c. Shall not interfere with a colleague's exercise of political or civil rights and responsibilities.

d. Shall not engage in harassment or discriminatory conduct which unreasonably interferes with an individual's performance of professional or work responsibilities or with the orderly processes of education or which creates a hostile, intimidating, abusive, offensive, or oppressive environment; and, further, shall make reasonable effort to assure that each individual is protected from such harassment or discrimination.

e. Shall not make malicious or intentionally false statements about a colleague.

f. Shall ensure that their interactions with students, on and off School property and during or outside of school hours, are based on mutual respect and trust and upon an understanding of the appropriate boundaries between adults and students. We do not intend to restrain appropriate and positive relationships between our employees and students, but to prevent relationships that could lead to, or be perceived as inappropriate. Thus, employees should be wise and thoughtful in all of their interactions with students, avoiding any communication or activity that could create the appearance of being too friendly, too close, or have too frequent personal conversation or meetings with a student. All communications (whether oral or written) with students must be professional and related to an appropriate purpose. Ensure that you do not engage in any interaction or communication that may reflect even the appearance of impropriety or make students feel uncomfortable in your presence. Examples of boundary crossing behavior include, but are not limited to:

- Touching students or their clothing in non-professional ways or inappropriate places, or touching a student with aggression, in frustration, or when you are highly emotional;
- Making too personal comments to students (about their clothing, hair, nail polish, personal habits, etc.);
- Invading personal space; standing or sitting too close; maintaining intense or lingering eye contact;
- Giving or exchanging gifts, cards, or letters with an individual student or students;
- Visiting, socializing, or spending time with students in their home or other location when the parents are not present outside of class or School-sponsored events;
- Fostering, encouraging, or participating in inappropriate emotionally or socially intimate relationships with students in which the relationship is outside the bounds of the reasonable employee-student relationship and in

which the relationship could reasonably cause a student to view the employee as more than a teacher, administrator, advisor, etc.;

- Disclosing personal, sexual, family, employment concerns, or other private matters to students;
- Providing alcohol or drugs – either prescription or illegal (except for medications provided in accordance with School policy on medication administration) -- to students; and
- Engaging in any romantic or sexual relationships with students, including asking on a date, dating, flirting, sexual contact, kissing, inappropriate physical displays of affection, speaking with innuendo, banter, or allusions to suggest a relationship or sexual subjects, or sexually suggestive comments between employees and students, regardless of whether employee or student initiates the behavior, whether the relationship is consensual, or whether the student has parental permission.

Even if a student participates willingly in an activity, boundary crossing interactions between employees and students (regardless of the student's age) are a violation of School policy and must be reported.

If an employee has information that raises the possibility that an individual has engaged in inappropriate behavior or misconduct, the employee must notify the principal or Head of School. If an employee is unsure whether a particular action or comment is inappropriate, the employee should err on the side of caution and report the concern.

- g. Shall take reasonable precautions to distinguish between personal views and those of our School or other organization with which the individual is affiliated.
- h. Shall not submit fraudulent information or fail to disclose any material fact on any document in connection with application for employment, professional activities, or otherwise.

**Training Requirement** All employees are required as a condition of employment to complete training on these standards of ethical conduct.

**Disqualification from Employment** All employees are subject to the criminal background process. The School will perform criminal background checks (including fingerprinting checks) on all new employees at the time of hire. For existing employees, the School will periodically update the criminal background check. The School will determine, in its discretion, whether the employee's background makes him/her fit for employment or continued employment. All employees must report any arrests or changes to their criminal background to the Head of School's office within 24 hours of the

occurrence so that the School can determine whether the employee's status should change. Failure to do so may result in termination of employment.

**Reporting Misconduct by Instructional Personnel and Administrators** All employees and administrators have an obligation to report misconduct by instructional personnel and school administrators which affects the health, safety, or welfare of a student. Examples of misconduct include obscene language, drug and alcohol use, disparaging comments, prejudice or bigotry, sexual innuendo, cheating or testing violations, physical aggression, and accepting or offering favors. Reports of misconduct of employees should be made to the Head of School. Reports of misconduct committed by administrators should be made to the Head of School or the Chair of the Board.

Legally sufficient allegations of misconduct by Florida certified educators will be reported to the Office of Professional Practices Services. Policies and procedures for reporting misconduct by instructional personnel or school administrators which affects the health, safety, or welfare of a student are posted in the Employee Handbook and on our Web site at [www.sarasotachristian.org](http://www.sarasotachristian.org).

**Reporting Child Abuse, Abandonment or Neglect** All employees and agents have an affirmative duty to report all actual or suspected cases of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Juvenile (or child-on-child) sexual abuse must also be reported. See the School's Child Abuse Reporting Policy for additional detail. Call 1-800-96-ABUSE or report online at: <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/abuse/report/>.

**Signs of Physical Abuse:** The child may have unexplained bruises, welts, cuts, or other injuries; broken bones; or burns. A child experiencing physical abuse may seem withdrawn or depressed, seem afraid to go home or may run away, shy away from physical contact, be aggressive, or wear inappropriate clothing to hide injuries.

**Signs of Sexual Abuse:** The child may have torn, stained or bloody underwear, trouble walking or sitting, pain or itching in genital area, or a sexually transmitted disease. A child experiencing sexual abuse may have unusual knowledge of sex or act seductively, fear a particular person, seem withdrawn or depressed, gain or lose weight suddenly, shy away from physical contact, or run away from home.

**Signs of Neglect:** The child may have unattended medical needs, little or no supervision at home, poor hygiene, or appear underweight. A child experiencing neglect may be frequently tired or hungry, steal food, or appear overly needy for adult attention.

**Patterns of Abuse:** Serious abuse usually involves a combination of factors. While a single sign may not be significant, a pattern of physical or behavioral signs is a serious indicator and should be reported.

Signs of juvenile (or child-on-child) sexual abuse: any sexual behavior by a child toward another child which occurs without consent, without equality (lacking the same level of power in the relationship), or as a result of coercion, including making obscene phone calls, the showing or taking of lewd photographs, or varying degrees of direct sexual contact, such as fondling, digital penetration, rape, and various other sexually aggressive acts.

**Reference Requests:** All requests for information about current or former employees must be directed to the Head of School for handling. Any employee who responds to a reference request without first obtaining permission from the Head of School will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. Any person authorized to respond to such references who does so at the request of a prospective employer, or the current or former employee will be immune from liability pursuant to Fla. Stat. 768.095, as long as such response is truthful and not intended to violate the current or former employee's civil rights.

**Liability Protections** Any person, official, or institution participating in good faith in any act authorized or required by law or reporting in good faith any instance of child abuse, abandonment, or neglect to the department or any law enforcement agency, shall be immune from any civil or criminal liability which might otherwise result by reason of such action. (F.S. 39.203)

An employer who discloses information about a former or current employee to a prospective employer of the former or current employee upon request of the prospective employer or of the former or current employee is immune from civil liability for such disclosure or its consequences unless it is shown by clear and convincing evidence that the information disclosed by the former or current employer was knowingly false or violated any civil right of the former or current employee protected under F.S. Chapter 760. (F.S. 768.095)