



AVOIDING PROFESSIONAL PITFALLS





The purpose of this presentation is to provide an overview of the professional expectations that align with Pasco County Schools (PCS) Board Policy. The information presented is meant to raise the level of awareness about responsible, professional behavior on and off the job for all PCS employees. All PCS employees, regardless of job title, are bound to comply with Board Policy as a condition of continued employment.





How To Avoid Professional Pitfalls

Each year, School Board employees find themselves in situations that can result in discipline. These situations are easily avoided and often preventable.

- ▶ In addition to school board policies, The School Board of Pasco County expects ALL school personnel to adhere to the Code of Ethics and the Principles of Professional Conduct of the Education Profession (District School Board of Pasco County Policy 4210 & 3210).
 - ▶ All School Board of Pasco County Bylaws and Policies can be found on the District's website at <http://www.neola.com/pasco-fl/>
 - ▶ The Code of Ethics and the Principles of Professional Conduct of the Education Profession can be located on the Florida Department of Education website. <http://www.fldoe.org/teaching/professional-practices/code-of-ethics-principles-of-professio.shtml>



Key Areas of Concern

- ▶ *Interactions with Students*
- ▶ *Maintaining a Safe Educational Environment*
- ▶ *Misuse of District Computers and/or District E-mail*
- ▶ *Social Media Guidelines*
- ▶ *Financial Transactions*
- ▶ *Conflict of Interest*
- ▶ *Attendance*
- ▶ *Incivility*



Student Interaction

One on One Situations – Always maintain a professional barrier between you and the students.

- ▶ *If possible, avoid being alone with a student, especially outside of the educational setting.*
 - ▶ *Tutoring in public locations or in the presence of the student's parent/guardian is suggested.*
- ▶ *Keep classroom doors open when meeting with a student before or after school.*
- ▶ *Avoid putting yourself in a situation where it becomes your word against another person's word.*



Student Interaction

Verbal Communication- Employees can find themselves in trouble when discussing personal and/or inappropriate information with students.

- ▶ *Communication with students must remain appropriate to the given situation at all times. Employees should avoid sharing personal beliefs or opinions on topics, such as politics and/or religion.*
- ▶ *Do not discuss your personal matters or issues with students.*
- ▶ *Use common sense and good judgement. Think before you speak, and ask yourself if your comments could be taken out of context or misinterpreted.*
- ▶ *All communication must reflect the inclusive, respectful philosophy of the District regardless of personal beliefs.*



Student Interaction

Notes or Jokes – Personal notes should never be written to a student unless the note deals solely with an educational matter. What you think is an innocent message can be considered offensive to someone else. This includes sending personal text messages to students.

Dramatic Displays of Frustration – Staff should never engage in:

- Grabbing materials from students
- Slamming materials on desk tops
- Kicking chairs, garbage cans or other classroom items



Student Interaction

Touching Students – Anytime an employee places their hands on a student they are putting themselves and the district at risk.

Common issues are:

- ▶ *Grabbing a student with the purpose to gain their attention and/ or correct a negative behavior*
- ▶ *Aggressive behavior towards a student as a result of your frustration*
- ▶ *Improperly restraining or transporting ESE students*

***Ask yourself, regardless of what actually happened,
could it be misperceived?***



Student Interaction

It is important to note all staff members have a responsibility to promote and maintain a safe educational environment.

- ▶ *Should it become necessary for a teacher to use reasonable force to maintain classroom/school order, the teacher shall follow the guidelines as provided in the Code of Student Conduct.*
- ▶ Expectations and guidelines for reasonable force can be found in the Instructional Master Contract under Article VII Section U and in the School Related Personnel Master Contract under Article VII Section N (5). Florida Statutes 1006.11 and 1012.75 outlines the appropriate use of force that may be used by school personnel in maintaining a safe a secure learning environment.



Protect Your Professional Image

Although your intentions may not be to harm any student, your interactions may be perceived differently by the student and/or a potential witness such as, other students, staff members, parents, administration, or District personnel.



Be Proactive

Communicating any incident accurately will allow administration to take a proactive approach to engage necessary parties in resolving the situation.

- ▶ *It is important to provide specific detailed information regarding any potential concerns.*
- ▶ *If a parent were to call regarding any negative interaction with a staff member, the administrator would be prepared to respond.*
- ▶ *In the event, interactions with a student were perceived as inappropriate or aggressive, an investigation with the Pasco Sheriff's Office, Child Protection Services, and/or the Office for Employee Relations could occur. The purpose of the investigation is ensure student safety, rule out any criminal wrong doing, and/or determine if any professional standards were violated.*



District Computer Use

District computers are for school-related work only

- ▶ *Almost any activity on district computers can be recovered even if it has been deleted from the hard drive, this includes every e-mail sent or received through your district e-mail address.*
- ▶ *School computers can and may be held to public scrutiny.*
 - ▶ *Employee are prohibited from viewing and/or downloading inappropriate content on district computers.*
 - ▶ *You should not be using your work email for personal, political, or editorial use.*
- ▶ *Schoolwide e-mails should be appropriate and should have educational purpose.*
 - ▶ *Avoid sending emails that solicit personal interests or discuss off site functions unrelated to work, i.e., sending an open invitation regarding happy hour on the last day of school.*



Social Media Guidelines and Expectations

Guidelines and Expectations have been developed to foster safe interactions between students and Pasco County School employees

- ▶ *Employees should not publicly discuss or disparage students on their personal social media page – this includes, but is not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, personal blogs sites.*
- ▶ *Employees should avoid sending private messages to students through personal social media accounts and are discouraged from accepting or initiating invitations to “friend” students.*
- ▶ *Posting information that libels a colleague or student may affect your employment.*
- ▶ *Use good judgment when posting personal information on social media sites. You can not guarantee who will see what you post.*
 - ▶ *Examples: Inappropriate photos, status posts, and/or comments posted on another social media site or page that may be considered offensive.*

Social Media Guidelines and Expectations

Maintaining School-Based Social Media Accounts - Employees who manage officially recognized social media accounts are expected to post important, relevant, and interesting material. Employees should strive to post only information that will be useful to and appreciated by their community/network. Administration should have sign-on information for all such accounts.

Examples of post-worthy materials include:

- ▶ Good news/what's happening at your school/site
- ▶ Picture of the Day/other school-related pictures (Verify students have media releases.)
- ▶ Short/Long form videos/People of Pasco (Verify students have media releases.)
- ▶ Weather emergencies/bus info
- ▶ Food service emergencies
- ▶ Other emergencies
- ▶ Event reminders
- ▶ Congratulations on big accomplishments
- ▶ Parent notification call scripts

For additional information regarding Pasco County Schools Guidelines for Social Media, please refer to the Communications Department at <http://www.pasco.k12.fl.us/comm/>

Financial Transactions

Employees should avoid handling district funds or collecting student monies unless they completely understand and follow the procedures established by the district and the employee's worksite.

- ▶ *Theft or misuse of public funds could lead to termination of employment and the forfeiture of the employee's FRS retirement benefits.*
- ▶ *This includes submitting fraudulent information for ABC support or free and reduced lunch.*



Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is a situation in which your primary responsibility is compromised by competing priorities.

- ▶ *Tutoring students on your roster and charging a fee*
- ▶ *Accepting gifts with a monetary value from students/parents*
- ▶ *Using District assigned e-mail to promote outside activities, events, services, and/or products that may result in personal profit*

Attendance

Regular attendance is an essential function of every Pasco County Schools position. Satisfactory performance is characterized by being at work a sufficient number of days to accomplish the essential tasks of the position without having to distribute to other employees or to delay those essential tasks.


- ▶ Satisfactory performance is generally characterized by not exceeding the combined number of sick or vacation days which are earned by an employee annually with the exception of approved FMLA or other district leaves.
 - ▶ Sick time and personal time are not separate accruals. Personal time is a portion of an employees' accrued sick time.
 - ▶ Employees are expected to work their contracted hours each day (with the exception of sick, personal, vacation) and must sign in and out of the time sheet daily with the correct hours of time worked. Inaccurately documenting time worked is considered fraud and may result in discipline.
 - ▶ Vacation must be approved by your administrator.



Respect and Civility

Pasco County Schools Respect and Civility policy promotes mutual respect, civility, and orderly conduct among all employees, students, parents, and the general public. It is intended to maintain, to the extent that is possible and reasonable, a safe, harassment-free workplace for students, families, and staff, that is free of disruptive, demeaning, intimidating, threatening, or aggressive behavior.

- ▶ All employees are expected to treat students, parents, fellow staff members, and members of the public with respect and will expect the same in return.
- ▶ Staff will not use obscenities or speak in a demanding, loud, insulting, or threatening manner.
- ▶ Volatile, hostile, or aggressive actions and words will not be tolerated, and individuals who engage in this behavior may face disciplinary action.



Additional information regarding professional expectations can be found in your school-based employee handbook or by contacting your administrator.

