

# THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS\*

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## Abstract

The goal of our lesson in this module is for you to become acquainted with the importance of establishing and maintaining a shared vision of positive professional interpersonal relationship practices among all stakeholders on your campus. This module introduces the use of administrative tools designed to help you document and measure progress toward the shared vision of establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships on your campus.



NOTE: This module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and sanctioned by the National Council of the Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a scholarly contribution to the knowledge base in educational administration.

## Introduction

As an instructional leader, you realize how vital the interpersonal relationships between students and teachers, teachers and other teachers, teachers and administrators, school staff personnel, parents, and community members can be for creating a positive successful learning environment for all students. You also realize how detrimental negativity can sometimes be to positive student progress. Our duty as school administrators is to identify, encourage, and maintain behaviors that are associated with the modeling and nurturing of interpersonal relationships that encourage student success. We also have the obligation to identify, address, and change negative behaviors that inhibit positive student progress. Your ability as a campus leader to weaken and eliminate negativity while nurturing and feeding the positive aspects of interpersonal relationships requires that you have the knowledge and ability to plan for and implement the intentional expectation of accentuating the positive for the good of all students.

### What the Professionals Are Saying About Interpersonal Relationships at the Campus Level

Literature points to a strong link between positive nurturing interpersonal relationships between teachers and students as an important ingredient in the recipe for student success. Socially supportive relationships can have powerful and lasting effects on the lives of children (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Richman, Rosenfeld,

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& Bowen, 1998). Pianta (1999) found that emotionally warm relationships between teachers and students provide students with a sense of security within school settings. It is believed that this sense of wellness promotes exploration and comfort, as well as social, emotional, and academic competence among students. Similarly, Birch and Ladd (1997) found that students who had closer relationships with teachers were better adjusted academically than students with conflicted teacher-student relationships. Ryan and Grolnick (1986) found that students who perceived their teachers as personally positive and supportive were more likely to feel a greater sense of competence and to be more intrinsically motivated.

It is important to note that personality clashes between teachers and students can and do exist. Ridicule, favoritism, exclusion, and deliberately demeaning behaviors exhibited by teachers toward certain students can be a reality in some situations. It is in these types of situations that a savvy administrator must evaluate the situation, devise a plan and make a change for the better when working closely with the student and teacher, or other stakeholder involved.

Why is it Important to Develop a Plan for Establishing and Maintaining Positive Interpersonal Relationship Practices on your Campus?

Successful educational leaders are successful planners. They have developed the ability to collaborate with their leadership team, teaching staff, students, and parents including all stake holders associated with the operation of a successful school. The planning process allows participants to become involved in the implementation and completion of the plan and to have a voice in the decision making process thereby empowering those who will be effected by the plan itself.

An effective campus principal is constantly involved in establishing and maintaining a professional environment that includes the modeling of positive interpersonal relationship techniques. It becomes essential for the effective instructional leader/principal to lead in establishing a vision for what positive interpersonal relationships should look like and sound like whether the relationship is between teachers and students, teachers and other teachers, teachers and parents, teachers and administrators. This includes all school personnel and the community surrounding the campus.

An effective interpersonal communications plan may include measurable goals designed to meet the expectations set forth in the vision that have been established collaboratively by campus personnel. For instance, a vision statement may include the phrase similar to the following; "It is essential that we establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships with all of the students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders we work with everyday while on this campus". We will do so by using the following types of words and actions when working with each other. . . . Under this statement, the teachers and other stakeholders will come to a consensus on what types of words and actions they agree will help to establish and maintain a positive professional working environment. This (agreed upon by consensus) document can become a written contract among the school personnel that all can sign in agreement. The contract can be posted throughout the building and used as a reminder and tool for future situations that might call for encouragement toward meeting the goals set forth in the vision for establishing and maintaining positive interpersonal relationships.

Another evaluation tool administrators can use for measuring positive interaction between teachers and students involves an administrative document used for tallying verbal and behavioral interactions teachers have while communicating with students during a brief classroom walkthrough observation. The tally document allows the administrator to document positive and negative teacher remarks and actions observed during the walkthrough process. A post-observation meeting can become a useful tool for administrators as they give feedback to teachers concerning the observed verbal and behavioral message they may be giving to students and whether or not the teacher is aware of the connotations of the message they are projecting to the students in their classroom.

A third useful informational feedback tool that can be used to measure interpersonal relationships involves the distribution of surveys to students, teachers, and all stakeholders. The items on the survey can be written in terms used to collect data pertaining to overall participant feelings toward their interpersonal relationships at work. The survey respondents can remain anonymous in the hope of raising the level of honesty when responding to the survey items answer choices.

Policies Concerning the Interpersonal Aspect of Professional Relationships at Work

All public school districts are required by law to have an employee handbook. The employee handbook should contain federal, state and local policy regarding behavior toward students, peers and supervisors. As a campus principal, you will be responsible for monitoring and enforcing the written policies. The documentation tools mentioned above can be used to verify your leadership in establishing a vision for establishing and maintaining a positive productive learning environment for all students. (You may choose to have your students bring in an example of an employee handbook from a school district from which they are employed and compare the contents and discuss the reasoning for included the contents).

#### Policy Examples

Policy DH (Example taken from a working 2006-2007 Employee Handbook of a Texas public school district)

All employees are expected to work together in a cooperative spirit to serve the best interests of the district and to be courteous to students, one another, and the public. Employees are expected to observe the following standards of conduct:

- Recognize and respect the rights of students, parents, other employees, and members of the community.
  - Maintain confidentiality in all matters relating to students and coworkers.
  - Report to work according to the assigned schedule.
  - Notify their immediate supervisor in advance or as early as possible in the event that they must be absent or late. Unauthorized absences, chronic absenteeism, tardiness, and failure to follow procedures for reporting an absence may be cause for disciplinary action.
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- Know and comply with department and district policies and procedures.
  - Express concerns, complaints, or criticism through appropriate channels.
  - Observe all safety rules and regulations and report injuries or unsafe conditions to a supervisor immediately.
  - Use district time, funds, and property for authorized district business and activities only.

All district employees should perform their duties in accordance with state and federal law, district policies and procedures, and ethical standards. Violation of policies, regulations, or guidelines may result in disciplinary action, including termination. Alleged incidents of certain misconduct by educators, including having a criminal record, must be reported to SBEC not later than the seventh day the superintendent first learns of the incident.

The Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators adopted by the State Board for Educator Certification, which all district employees must adhere to, is reprinted below:

#### Cole of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators Statement of Purpose

The Texas educator shall comply with standard practices and ethical conduct toward students, professional colleagues, school officials, parents, and members of the community and shall safeguard academic freedom. The Texas educator, in maintaining the dignity of the profession, shall respect and obey the law, demonstrate personal integrity, and exemplify honesty. The Texas educator, in exemplifying ethical relations with colleagues, shall extend just and equitable treatment to all members of the profession. The Texas educator, in accepting a position of public trust, shall measure success by the progress of each student toward realization of his or her potential as an effective citizen. The Texas educator, in fulfilling responsibilities in the community, shall cooperate with parents and others to improve the public schools of the community.

#### Professional Standards

##### 1. Professional Ethical Conduct, Practices, and Performance

Standard 1.1 The educator shall not knowingly engage in deceptive practices regarding official policies of the school district or educational institution.

Standard 1.2 The educator shall not knowingly misappropriate, divert, or use monies, personnel, property, or equipment committed to his or her charge for personal gain or advantage.

Standard 1.3 The educator shall not submit fraudulent requests for reimbursement, expenses, or pay.

Standard 1.4 The educator shall not use institutional or professional privileges for personal or partisan advantage.

Standard 1.5 The educator shall neither accept nor offer gratuities, gifts, or favors that impair professional judgment or to obtain special advantage. This standard shall not restrict the acceptance of gifts or tokens offered and accepted openly from students, parents, or other persons or organizations in recognition or appreciation of service.

Standard 1.6 The educator shall not falsify records, or direct or coerce others to do so.

Standard 1.7 The educator shall comply with state regulations, written local school board policies, and other applicable state and federal laws.

Standard 1.8 The educator shall apply for, accept, offer, or assign a position or a responsibility on the basis of professional qualifications.

## 2. Ethical Conduct toward Professional Colleagues

Standard 2.1 The educator shall not reveal confidential health or personnel information concerning colleagues unless disclosure serves lawful professional purposes or is required by law.

Standard 2.2 The educator shall not harm others by knowingly making false statements about a colleague or the school system.

Standard 2.3 The educator shall adhere to written local school board policies and state and federal laws regarding the hiring, evaluation, and dismissal of personnel.

Standard 2.4 The educator shall not interfere with a colleague's exercise of political, professional, or citizenship rights and responsibilities.

Standard 2.5 The educator shall not discriminate against or coerce a colleague on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, disability, or family status.

Standard 2.6 The educator shall not use coercive means or promise of special treatment in order to influence professional decisions or colleagues.

Standard 2.7 The educator shall not retaliate against any individual who has filed a complaint with the SBEC under this chapter.

## 3. Ethical Conduct toward Students

Standard 3.1 The educator shall not reveal confidential information concerning students unless disclosure serves lawful professional purposes or is required by law.

Standard 3.2 The educator shall not knowingly treat a student in a manner that adversely affects the student's learning, physical health, mental health, or safety.

Standard 3.3 The educator shall not deliberately or knowingly misrepresent facts regarding a student.

Standard 3.4 The educator shall not exclude a student from participation in a program, deny benefits to a student, or grant an advantage to a student on the basis of race, color, sex, disability, national origin, religion, or family status.

Standard 3.5 The educator shall not engage in physical mistreatment of a student.

Standard 3.6 The educator shall not solicit or engage in sexual conduct or a romantic relationship with a student.

Standard 3.7 The educator shall not furnish alcohol or illegal/unauthorized drugs to any student or knowingly allow any student to consume alcohol or illegal/unauthorized drugs in the presence of the educator.

## Conclusion

Think about the following:

1. Explain how your knowledge of interpersonal relationships can benefit the students on your campus as you plan to establish and maintain a positive learning environment for all students.
2. Explain how your knowledge of creating tools for collection of data pertaining to interpersonal relationships might be useful as you begin leading a school.
3. Would you ever use the written contract among the teaching staff and other personnel, the classroom tally documentation tool, and survey instruments to help establish and maintain a positive learning environment for all students? If so, what might these documents look like and how would you use the information generated from each?

4. Explain how your knowledge of the types of interpersonal relationships between students and teachers; teachers to teachers; teachers to parents; and all other campus stakeholders would change the way you lead.

Resources:

Birch, S. H., & Ladd, G. W. (1997). The teacher-child relationship and children's early school adjustment. *Journal of School Psychology, 35*, 61-79.

Cassidy, J. & Shaver, P.R. (1999). *Handbook of attachment: Theory, research, and clinical implications*. New York: Guilford.

Pianta, R. C. (1999). *Enhancing relationships between children and teachers*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Richman, J. M., Rosenfeld, L. B., & Bowen, G. L. (1998). Social support for adolescents at risk of school failure. *Social Work, 43*, 309-323.

Ryan, R. M., & Grolnick, W. S. (1986). Origin and pawns in the classroom: Self-report and projective assessments of individual differences in children's perceptions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 50*, 550-558.