

Code of Conduct

SLS Teach (SLS) is committed to an organizational culture that furthers the core values of learning, relationships, respect, excellence, and equity. All employees must make every effort to create and maintain safe and healthy environments. As such, employees are expected to interact with all colleagues, students, parents/ guardians, and the community with the utmost integrity and professionalism.

This *Code of Conduct* provides a general overview of the legitimate expectations and standards of conduct that SLS and the broader community expect staff to follow in carrying out their important part of the organization's mission. In addition, this *Code of Conduct* summarizes the disciplinary procedures that SLS uses to address situations where employees fall short of expectations and standards of conduct.

The *Code of Conduct* applies to all SLS employees, full- and part-time, as well as contractors and others employed in a temporary or seasonal capacity.

Expectations for Employee Conduct

SLS expects all employees to perform their work with the requisite skill and knowledge; maintain the highest standards of responsible and ethical conduct; and obey all applicable laws, policies, and regulations. Under no circumstances may any employee engage in any of the following activities or behavior: immorality, misconduct in office (which includes knowingly failing to report suspected child abuse or neglect), insubordination, incompetence, or willful neglect of duty.

Whenever employees face a matter that requires an ethical decision concerning their behavior, SLS expects them to consider whether it might violate a law, policy, regulation, or professional standard of responsible and ethical conduct. Equally important, employees should refrain from the following action or conduct that—

- threatens the safety of students, fellow employees, or the broader community.
- undermines the employee's professional integrity
- makes them unfit to perform their assigned duties.

Following are specific examples of the standards of behavior that SLS expects from all employees, as well as inappropriate or disruptive behavior that warrants correction or discipline. An employee's failure to perform expected behaviors, as well as an employee's performance of inappropriate behaviors (including, but not limited to, the inappropriate conduct listed on the following pages), may subject the employee to disciplinary action, up to and including suspension or termination. Employees should understand that not all inappropriate, improper, or unethical conduct may be expressly

referenced in this *Code of Conduct*. Rather, the examples are illustrative and non-exhaustive. Conduct that is not expressly listed nonetheless may warrant disciplinary action. For example, the examples do not contain every standard of employee behavior grounded in common sense or commonly understood sound practices. Please note that the standards for employee conduct set forth in this *Code of Conduct* also apply to e-mail, social media, text messages, messaging apps, and other electronic communications.

Ethical Conduct in the Work Environment

Employees are expected to behave honestly; diligently fulfill their job responsibilities; adhere to all laws, SLS rules, and ethical standards governing their work; and comply with laws and SLS rules outside of work where failure to do so affects their fitness to perform their job.

Following are examples of expected conduct:

- Complete work assignments in an appropriate, satisfactory, and timely manner and follow SLS procedures and guidelines, as well as the instructions, directions, and orders of supervisors and administrators.
- Report to work on time and work as scheduled, follow leave procedures, and use work time for performance of SLS responsibilities.
- Dress for work in a professionally appropriate manner.
- Follow legal requirements and SLS rules on ethical behavior and avoid conflicts of interest.
- Maintain the confidentiality of information you obtain through your work, including employee and student records.
- Exercise due care and prudence when incurring expenses on behalf of SLS and comply with all requirements for submitting any requests for reimbursement of travel and related expenses directly related to official SLS business.
- Complete all required reports on a timely basis and follow program and financial reporting guidelines.
- Report known or suspected instances of fraud, false claims, false statements, bribery, theft, or embezzlement of SLS funds or property.
- Exercise fiscal responsibility with and properly account for SLS funds, safeguard SLS property, and respect other people's property.
- Follow legal requirements and SLS rules concerning school safety and security.
- Utilize appropriate channels for raising workplace concerns.
- Follow legal requirements and SLS rules regarding appropriate use of SLS websites, e-mail, and other communications technology, as well as test security and data reporting requirements.
- Respond honestly to a work-related inquiry by SLS, law enforcement, or other authorized investigative officials.

Following are examples of inappropriate conduct:

- Engaging in conduct that endangers the safety of students, employees, parents/guardians, or the public.
- Abandoning your job.
- Submitting incorrect or fraudulent requests for reimbursement, expenses, or pay.
- Submitting incorrect or fraudulent information to SLS or on behalf of SLS.

Ethical Conduct with Colleagues, Parents/Guardians, and the Community

Employees are expected to treat parents/guardians, other employees, and members of the community professionally and respectfully and comply with all nondiscrimination laws and policies in their relationships with other adults. It is equally critical that all employees have an awareness, understanding, and tolerance of others' interests, viewpoints, cultures, and backgrounds.

Following are examples of expected conduct:

- Be respectful of diverse opinions and beliefs of other employees, parents/guardians, and others in the community
- Provide appropriate supervision of visitors, volunteers, and contractors during SLS-sponsored events.
- Provide and receive feedback constructively and respectfully
- Practice civility in all interactions and seek and respect the opinions of others.
- Create a welcoming environment for parents/guardians and the school community.
- Communicate openly and respectfully.
- Use collaborative and interest-based strategies rather than positional or adversarial approaches.

Following are examples of inappropriate conduct:

- Do not engage in conduct that is rude or disrespectful to others.
- Do not discriminate against parents/guardians, coworkers, supervisors, or other citizens based on race, ethnicity, color, ancestry, national origin, religion, immigration status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, family/parental status, marital status, age, physical or mental disability, poverty and socioeconomic status, language, or other legally or constitutionally protected attributes or affiliations.
- Do not bully, harass, or intimidate SLS employees or other adults.
- Do not retaliate against an employee or another person for taking any action or for reporting any facts or information related to real or perceived improper acts

Ethical Conduct with Students

It is expected that all employees will build positive relationships with students to support learning while adhering to standards of professional practice. This section of the *Code of Conduct* seeks to give clear direction regarding appropriate conduct and boundaries between employees and students. The expectations for conduct are not intended to serve as an exhaustive list of requirements, limitations, or prohibitions on staff conduct and activities established by the SLS. Rather, they are intended to –

- provide employees with clear guidance in conducting themselves in a manner that reflects high standards of professionalism;
- alert employees to some of the more sensitive and often problematic matters involved in faculty/staff-student relationships; and
- specify boundaries related to the employee/student relationship and conduct in conflict with duties and responsibilities of SLS employees.

Following are examples of expected conduct:

- Treat all students fairly, equitably, and with respect, regardless of their race, ethnicity, color, ancestry, national origin, religion, immigration status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, family/parental status, marital status, age, physical or mental disability, poverty and socioeconomic status, language, or other legally or constitutionally protected attributes or affiliations.
- Maintain high expectations for all students that are reasonable, clear, and age-appropriate.
- Use positive behavior intervention strategies and support to guide student behavior and appropriate responsive strategies to maintain a safe and secure learning environment.
- Respect students' personal space.
- Immediately report abuse or neglect of children or vulnerable adults when observed or suspected and do not interfere with the making of reports of abuse or neglect.
- Limit e-mail, social media, text messages, messaging apps, and other electronic communications with students to appropriate purposes directly related to instruction or your SLS work responsibilities.

Following are examples of inappropriate conduct:

- Do not discriminate against students based on race, ethnicity, color, ancestry, national origin, religion, immigration status, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, family/parental status, marital status, age, physical or mental disability, poverty and socioeconomic status, language, or other legally or constitutionally protected attributes or affiliations.
- Do not bully, harass, or intimidate students.

- Do not engage in abuse or neglect of any child or vulnerable adult, including grooming behaviors through which an adult or a person in a position of authority builds an emotional connection with a child with the intent of making the child more receptive to sexual conduct or to gain the child’s trust for the purposes of exploitation or other abuse.
- Do not show pornography to SLS students or involve children in or with pornography.
- Do not engage or attempt to engage in a romantic or sexual relationship with an SLS student, regardless of the age of the student, or engage in any conduct designed to promote a relationship. This includes oral, nonverbal, written or electronic communication, including the following—
 - a sexual or romantic invitation, including grooming;
 - dating or soliciting dates;
 - engaging in sexualized or romantic dialogue;
 - making sexually suggestive comments;
 - physical exposure, of a sexual, romantic or erotic nature; and
 - self-disclosure of a sexual, romantic, or erotic nature.

Guidelines for Maintaining Boundaries

Some activities may seem innocent from an employee's perspective, but can be perceived as flirtation or sexual insinuation from a student or parent point of view, therefore employees should not engage in any type of behavior that might have the appearance of impropriety if observed by others. Please note that certain behaviors may be appropriate circumstances, such as a pat on the back or shoulder, handshakes, high fives, or holding the hand of younger children to guide or escort them.

The objective of the following examples of appropriate boundaries is not to restrain positive relationships between employees and students, but to avoid situations that may be seen as inappropriate. Employees must understand their own responsibility for ensuring that they do not cross the boundaries of an employee/student relationship. Thus, it is crucial that all employees strictly follow this *Code of Conduct* and apply the lists of acceptable and unacceptable behavior to their daily activities.

Following are examples of inappropriate conduct:

- Do not meet with a student alone in a non-public space or inside a room with a closed door unless the space or room can be seen through a window.
- Do not have one-on-one interactions with SLS students through social media, e-mail, text messages, messaging apps, or other electronic communication about subjects not directly related to instruction or your SLS work responsibilities. Communication with students via temporary or anonymous messaging apps is prohibited.
- Do not give gifts to an individual student without SLS Management approval.

- Do not allow students to ride in an employee’s personal car without written permission from a parent/guardian and approval from SLS Management
- Do not visit a student’s home when a parent/guardian is not present, whether for a social gathering or otherwise.
- Do not have physical contact with a student, except that of an occasional supportive, congratulatory, or quick hug, arm squeeze, or a pat on the back, if welcome by the student.
- Do not utilize corporal punishment, or other inappropriate student disciplinary practices, such as shaking, slapping, shoving, pinching, ostracizing, or withholding food, light, or medical care.
- Do not engage in physical horseplay, roughhousing, or other inappropriate physical games with a student.
- Do not engage in inappropriate physical interactions with students, such as—
 - hitting, tickling, or kissing;
 - fondling any part of a student’s body;
 - any type of massage given by or to a child; and
 - sending offensive or sexually explicit pictures, notes, cartoons, or jokes.
- Do not discuss personal troubles or intimate issues with a student or seek emotional involvement with a student for the employee's benefit.
- Do not direct a student to keep secrets from or hide information from their parents or other SLS employees.
- Do not make or participate in sexually inappropriate comments and conversations, or make sexual jokes, stories, or comments with sexual innuendo or use sexual or inappropriate material as part of a class lesson, even as a joke.
- Do not provide alcohol or drugs to a student, nor permit a student to drink or use drugs in their presence.
- Do not contract or hire students to perform household tasks like babysitting, dog walking, lawn mowing, etc.
- Do not engage in inappropriate verbal interactions with students, such as name-calling, profanity, shaming, belittling, or derogatory remarks about a student, including negative comments about the student’s physique, body development, dress, or family.
- Do not engage in harsh language that may threaten, degrade, or humiliate students.

Overnight Trips and Sleepovers

In the event of a SLS-sponsored overnight trip or sleepover, employees are expected to exhibit behavior including, but not limited to the following:

- sleeping in a separate room from students
- not being alone with a student in the student's room or inside a student's room when the student is changing or sleeping.
- awakening students by loudly knocking on their doors or calling out to them without making physical contact with them.
- remaining fully clothed in front of a student and not walking around areas outside of their sleeping quarters unclothed or partially unclothed.

Corrective and Progressive Discipline

SLS is committed to fair and consistent treatment of employees in a disciplinary process that is both corrective and progressive.

Non-disciplinary Corrective Actions

In some circumstances, a supervisor or manager may determine that an employee's conduct does not warrant formal disciplinary action but does warrant a clarification as to expectations regarding future conduct. In such cases, the supervisor or manager may provide written guidance as to expectations regarding future conduct. Such a document is not considered disciplinary in nature, but a confidential record will be maintained because it may provide context for future disciplinary action if the employee's conduct does not conform to the communicated expectations.

Disciplinary actions

Typical disciplinary actions include the following:

- Verbal or written warning
- Written reprimand
- Suspension without pay
- Demotion
- Removal from position
- Termination

SLS is not obligated to use any specific level of progressive discipline or to utilize the actions in the order listed above. Rather, the specific facts of each situation determine which of the listed disciplinary actions will be appropriate. When determining the appropriate level of disciplinary action in each case, consideration of mitigating factors (such as an employee's long history of good service with a clean record or an indication of less culpability on the part of the employee)

or aggravating factors (such as placing others at risk of serious injury, demonstrating intentional wrongdoing, or indifference to the effect of an action or the outcome on others) may be considered. Lack of awareness or knowledge of this Code of Conduct, or applicable policies or regulations, is not a defense to a charge of misconduct.

Except for serious infractions, including but not limited to the prohibited criminal conduct discussed on the following pages, the lowest appropriate level of disciplinary action should be applied initially to focus on ensuring that an employee understands expectations and does not repeat the inappropriate conduct. In general, discipline should progress to a more severe level after a lesser disciplinary action has been implemented and proven to be ineffective. Nevertheless, a more serious infraction may warrant suspension or termination, even for a first-time offense, or repeated offenses, depending on the circumstances. This may be the case even when the infraction violates a standard of conduct that is not specifically enumerated in writing but involves common-sense application of governing principles or criminal law.

Incidents involving suspected child abuse and other criminal activity

Incidents involving suspected child abuse or neglect by an SLS employee require immediate oral reporting to Child Protective Services (CPS) in the county where the suspected child abuse or other criminal activity involving a minor occurred. In cases of sexual abuse, reports should be made to the local law enforcement agency as well, as required by state law.

In every case of alleged abuse or neglect by an SLS employee, SLS will conduct an internal investigation consistent with all applicable SLS regulations and recommend appropriate discipline.

While any investigation by CPS or another external agency is pending, SLS may not interview witnesses, alleged victims, or alleged perpetrators without prior agreement from and subject to any limitations recommended by the investigating agencies. In addition, SLS must conduct all internal investigations in a manner that is fully cooperative with the external agencies that are investigating and that does not interfere with or jeopardize the external investigation.

Incidents involving other suspected misconduct

In other incidents, and consistent with applicable law and SLS rules, managers and supervisors should use professional judgment in reporting suspected misconduct. Managers and supervisors who feel that an employee's actions may warrant a reprimand, a suspension without pay, or termination from employment should refer the matter to SLS Management.

Prohibited Criminal Conduct

In addition to SLS disciplinary procedures, an employee may face criminal prosecution for certain misconduct. These criminal proceedings may have consequences for the employee's continued employment with SLS.

SLS also requires that all staff members must self-report if they are arrested or criminally charged for any offenses listed above. This self-reporting requirement reflects SLS's commitment to providing a safe and secure environment for all staff and students.

Duty to Report

All employees are responsible for enforcing this policy and must immediately report any suspected violations to SLS Management. In some circumstances, employees will also have the duty to report such conduct in accordance with mandated reporting requirements. SLS will not retaliate against any individual who makes a complaint or participates in an investigation pursuant to this policy and will take disciplinary action against anyone who retaliates against a person in violation of this policy.

Best Practices and Guidelines

To assist employees in adhering to expected behavior and excellence in their work, SLS provides required compliance training for all employees.

Questions and Further Information

If SLS employees have questions about the meaning or interpretation of this Code of Conduct or how it applies to specific situations, they should consult with their direct supervisor.