

REVERE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
PHYSICAL CONTACT BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND STUDENTS AT SCHOOL AND
DURING SCHOOL-SPONSORED FUNCTIONS

Introduction:

The purpose of this policy statement is to provide all employees with guidance and direction with respect to physical contact between employees and students at school and during school-sponsored functions. It is an area of educational policy, judgment, and law which is fraught with uncertainties and changing standards. What constitutes appropriate physical contact in one circumstance may be totally inappropriate in another. At the outset, the decision of whether or not to touch a student must be made by the employee involved. Once it occurs, its appropriateness will depend on a variety of factors, not the least of which will be the student's reaction and responses of other adults. The School Committee believes that its employees individually and collectively possess the wisdom and expertise necessary to conduct themselves in a manner which is educationally sound and acceptable both within the professional community and the community at large.

General Principles:

1. All physical contact between employees and students should have a valid educational purpose and objective, meeting the student's (not the staff member's) needs.
2. The use of physical contact or force in order to impose the staff member's will upon a student, except in an emergency situation, is strictly prohibited.
3. Employees who observe physical contact between students and employees which they deem to be inappropriate are expected to report said observations to the building principal and/or the superintendent of schools as soon as possible. If the contact is perceived to be immediately harmful by the observer, prompt intervention to prevent further harm is expected.
4. Questions of the appropriateness of physical contact are to be determined by the context of the contact on a case-by-case basis. Issues such as intent, content, location, circumstances, age, and sex are all considerations which may be relevant. Examples: Having a first grade child sit on one's lap during a group picture taking session may be perfectly appropriate, while having fifth-grade students of either sex sit on one's lap during a movie is not appropriate. Holding or comforting a first-grader who has fallen and is crying may be appropriate, whereas placing a hand on a child's head to redirect his attention to the front of the room is not.
5. Touching students under clothing, in the genital areas, or on the buttocks or breasts, except in an emergency situation, is prohibited.
6. Whether or not an emergency situation exists depends upon an objective rather than a subjective standard.
7. Instances of inappropriate physical contact initiated, encouraged, practiced and/or tolerated by employees, in even a single instance, may result in disciplinary action which may include dismissal.

Summary:

Given the complexity of this issue, the School Committee recognizes that some employees may deal with it by implementing a practice of never touching students. That is not the School Committee's intent or objective. It is expected that any physical contact between an employee and a student will have a legitimate purpose consistent with the schools' role as educator and caretaker of minor children.