

AISGW

The Association of Independent
Schools of Greater Washington



SERVING & ACCREDITING
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS



Tennessee Association of Independent Schools

AISGW/SAIS/TAIS
Staying Within the Guardrails

What kinds of boundary issues make you nervous? (one word)



Introduction

- Amy McNamer (AISGW), Sarah Wilson (TAIS), Debra Wilson (SAIS)
- Bear in Mind...
 - How do school staff maintain healthy boundaries within the classroom, among parents, and other parts of the community?
 - Why are healthy boundaries important?
 - What are standard practices in independent schools?
- Key takeaways to bring back to your colleagues

Healthy Professional Boundaries - - Students (part one)

- You have an advisory group of eight students. One junior, Matt, is a serious student and athlete. He also serves on the student honor council, takes four AP classes, teaches chess at a local elementary school, and was recently chosen to star in the school's production of "Fiddler on the Roof." When you are meeting with him to talk through his mid-term grades, he shares with you that his parents are separating. You have noticed, too, that you have not seen him with his longtime girlfriend, Leslie, for a while. You ask him how he is holding in there.
- Do you also ask him about Leslie? Why or why not?

Healthy Professional Boundaries - - Students (part one)

- A few weeks go by, and Matt's AP Physics teacher has sent you a notice that Matt is uncharacteristically struggling in Physics. He has not come by for extra help, although she has suggested he should.
- You flag Matt down during lunch and ask him how he is doing and ask him about Physics. He says it has been difficult, but he has got it under control. You think he might have teared up a little bit when he was talking to you, but he breaks off the conversation to get away fast.
- What do you do?

Kids who are struggling



How much air do kids have in their systems?



What is the difference between supporting their academics and helping them problem solve, and something bigger?



Where do you go in the school for support in supporting Matt?



What are the overall systems of the school here?

Research on Affluent Children

- **Impact on identity exploration**

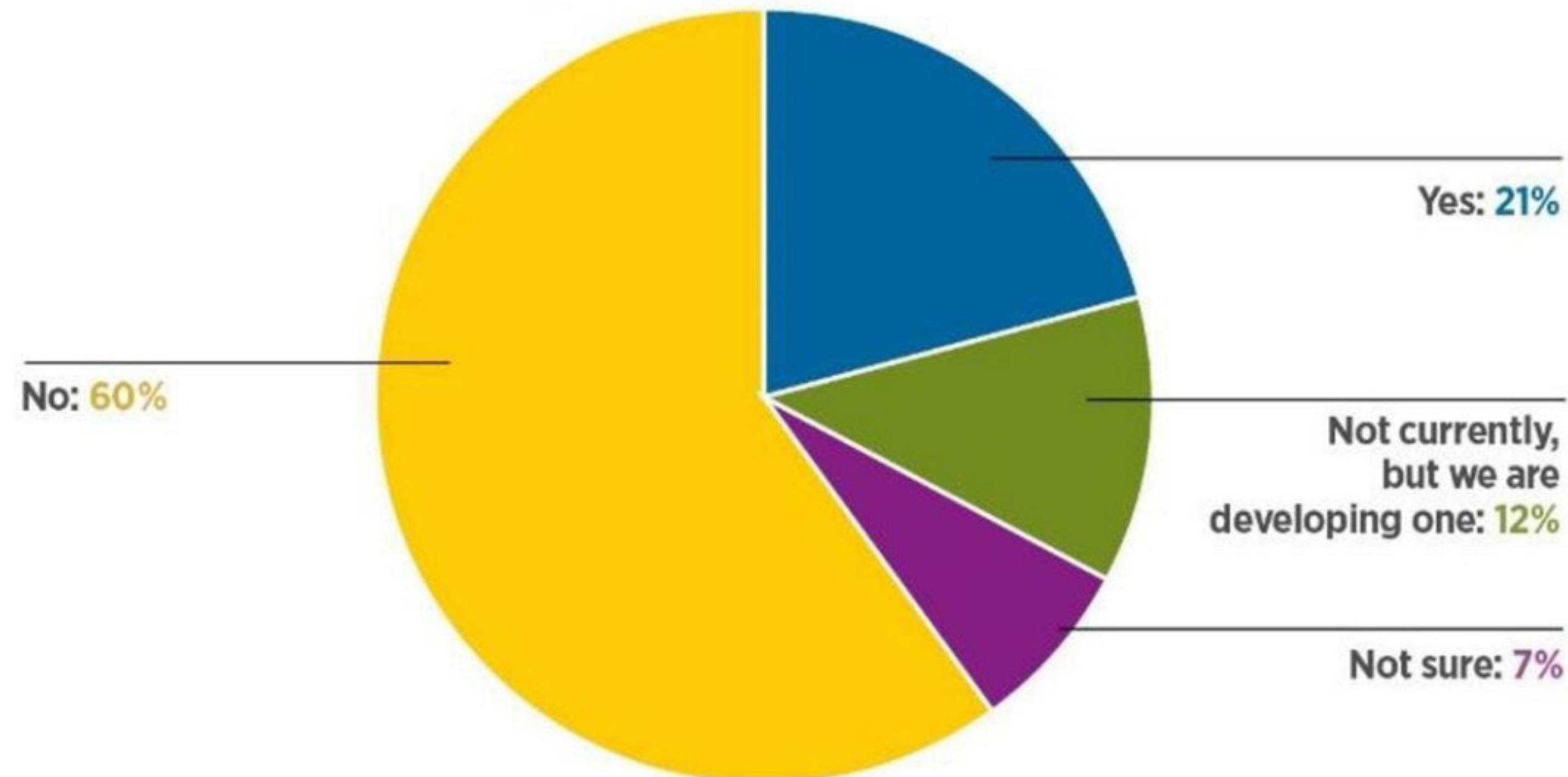
“With the capacity for abstract thinking, youths around 13 begin identity exploration, grappling with the critical question of ‘Who am I?’ In hypercompetitive, upper-middle-class communities, this broad question narrowly morphs into, ‘What will I amount to? Will I get into a top-ranked college? How do I get there?’”

- Suniya S. Luthar, “The Problem With Rich Kids,” *Psychology Today* (Nov. 3, 2013)

Growing rates of depression and anxiety

- 12.5% of young people (12-17) have experienced at least **one major depressive episode** in the past year (higher than in the previous 10 years). U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, *National Survey on Drug Use and Health* (2015)
- 25.1% of teens (13-18) have an **anxiety disorder** of some kind. National Institute of Mental Health, *Lifetime Prevalence of Mental Disorders in U.S. Adolescents*
- 50.7% of college freshman rated their **emotional health** above average (lowest level ever reported). Higher Education Research Institute, *The American Freshman: National Norms Fall 2014*

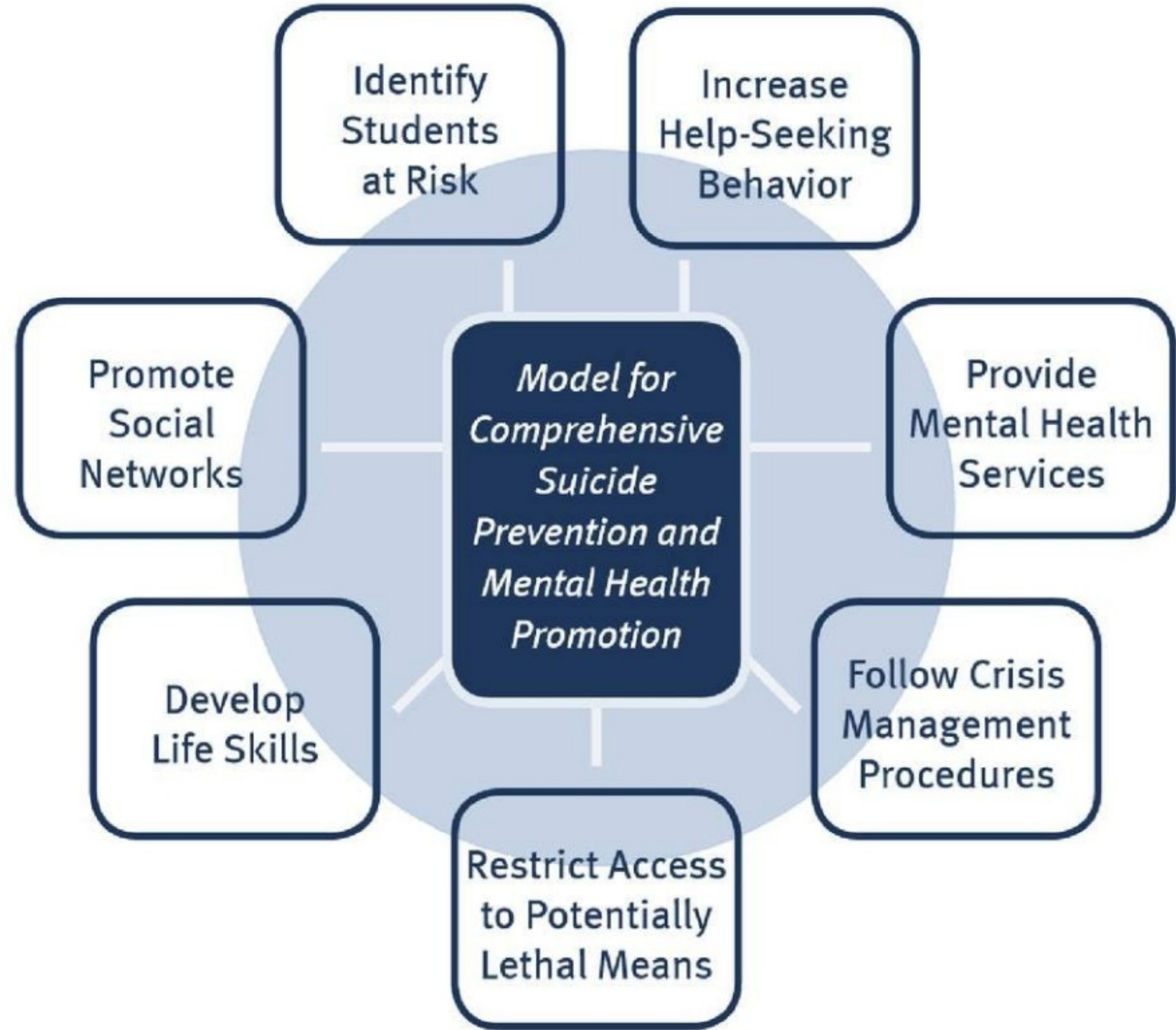
Schools With Health/Well-being Policies Distinct From Medical Services, Physical Education, or Science Education Policies



Increase in programs and support

- **As in higher education, schools are feeling the need to provide more support.**
- “There has been a notable increase in demand for counseling and general well-being in higher education.... [A]n increasing number of independent schools are implementing wellness initiatives that either supplement their health curricula and medical services or provide an overarching structure for their programs.”
Debra P. Wilson, “The Wellness Outlook,” *NAIS Trendbook 2017-2018*

Jed Foundation: Mental Health Promotion / Suicide Prevention



Key Takeaways: boundaries and best practices

- Understand the context of student life
- Check for an overall student support / students of concern safety net
- Advisory Programs
 - Students thrive in and out of the classroom when their relationships with mentoring adults are authentic, mutually engaged, and framed by appropriate adult-child boundaries
 - Healthy relationships foster well-being in students
 - Four dimensions for kids: ask about school, home/family, friends, and other interests/activities
- Structuring Support for Advisors
- Building Resilience in Advisees/Students
 - Creating a support network
 - Understanding and making use of resources in and out of school

Healthy Professional Boundaries - - Students (part two)

- You're running late from a parent conference to your next AP class; this section of juniors is behind the others, and there's a test coming up. You've got a lot of content to get through today and have your lesson plan timed down to the minute. You get to the room, and one student, Nora, is in tears and several others are arguing with raised voices.
- The gist of the issue seems to be that Nora (whom you know has been involved in a social media campaign to protest the new abortion laws in Texas) is arguing with two other students who are planning to attend the annual Right to Life march in DC. You know all of the students are pretty good friends, and you also know that if you don't start the class right away, this section will be even farther behind. As you get to the front of the room, Nora storms out of the class.

What is the most important thing to do first?



Healthy professional boundaries - Students (part two)

- Poll!
- How do you start the class period?
 - Do you follow Nora?
 - Do you start teaching? If so, do you address the conflict that several of them have been involved in just prior?
 - What do you do once class is over?

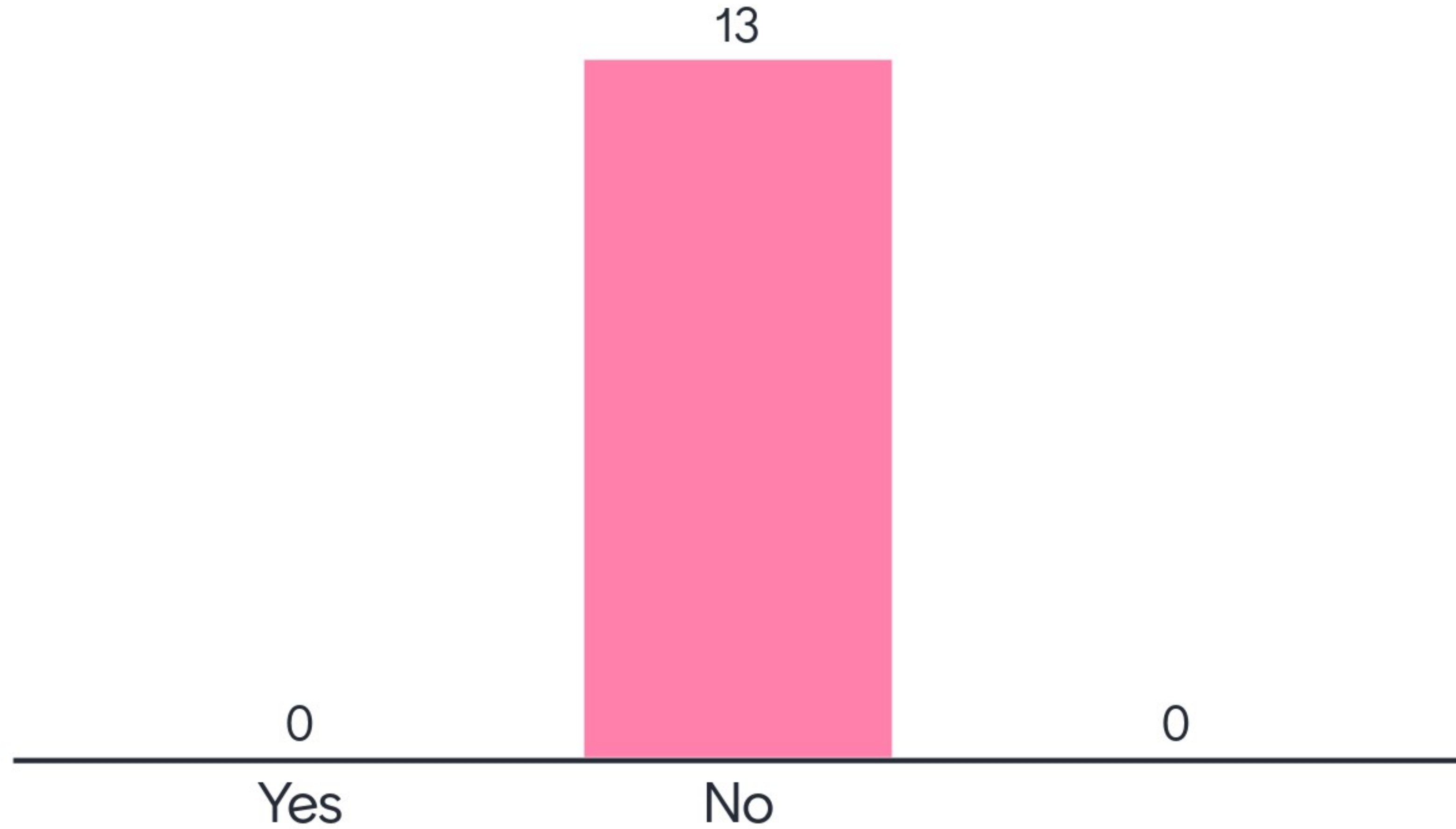
Key Takeaways: boundaries and best practices

- Relationships with mentoring adults
- Great teachers know their audience and their context
- Student Support Protocols
- The tension is real: content vs. meeting students where they are

Lightning Rods: politics on campus (part one)

- It is the fall term at school in the midst of a highly contentious national election. You are the head of school at your school and live on campus with your family. You and your family have *very strong* feeling about the current candidates and the future of the country should one or the other be elected. Your teenage daughter in particular is following the election closely and is volunteering with a campaign. She brings home a yard sign one day for her candidate and puts in your yard. Do you leave it there?
- She also puts a bumper sticker in support of her candidate on the family car, which is parked in the driveway. What do you do?

Do you leave the political sign in the yard?



Lightning Rods - politics on campus (part two)


Your daughter is planning to attend the Women's March with several of her friends, which is occurring the day after the Inauguration of a new President. She asks you to join her. The Women's March has been organized by groups who very much oppose the election of the now-President. You would like to go, but you also know that you are likely to run into school families at the event. Do you go?

Lightning Rods: politics on campus (part three)

As it turns out, there is a situation at school requiring immediate attention, so you don't attend the March. Your daughter does, however, and is fully energized by the experience. At the March, she runs into her English teacher, who is a current employee of the school. Ms. Hart is wearing a school sweatshirt. Your daughter snaps a photo of them together and posts it on Instagram. What do you do?

Lightning Rods: politics on campus (part four)

- She also runs into Ms. Jones, who is the Assistant Head of School. Ms. Jones is also wearing a school sweatshirt. Your daughter snaps a photo of Ms. Jones and Ms. Hart together and posts that photo as well. What do you do?
- The school's communications director sees the Instagram post and reposts to the school's account. What do you do?



Key Takeaways: Boundaries and best practices

- Schools can lose their 501 (c)(3) status by participating in any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office.
- Individual employees do not lose their right to participate in campaigns simply because of their relationship with the school. However, they must be sure not to claim to be acting on behalf of the school.
- Schools should adopt an explicit policy applicable to all employees as a condition of their employment that the school explicitly disavows any such actual or apparent authorization.

Rules for Nonprofits & Advocacy/Political Activity

	501(c)(3)	501(c)(4)	501(c)(5)	501(c)(6)	527
Receive tax-deductible charitable contributions	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO
Receive contributions or fees deductible as a business expense	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO
Substantially related income exempt from federal income tax	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Investment income exempt from federal income tax	LTD*	YES	YES	YES	NO
Engage in legislative advocacy	LTD	YES	YES	YES	LTD
Engage in candidate election advocacy	NO	LTD	LTD	LTD	YES
Engage in public advocacy not related to legislation or election of candidates	YES	YES	YES	YES	LTD

Rules for Nonprofits and Elections

- Schools may not be seen as endorsing a candidate in a political campaign
- Debates are okay, as long as both/all sides are invited to the debate.
- Educational opportunities to provide students with an overview of the issues are also okay, again provided that both sides are invited and, ideally, represented
- May not use school resources for:
 - Campaigning, including letterhead, supplies, mailing lists, email lists, etc.
 - Displaying signs on campus unless part of a student body election / education driven event.

Teachers and Elections

- Employees have the voice of the school
- Particularly true for heads of school and other higher profile employees
- Teachers also count. Make clear that on campus / education activities should not involve teachers' express personal election or political leanings
 - Any letters, sign-ons, op-eds, social media, etc. should be clear that the individual is speaking for themselves and not the school
- Off campus / non work time activity regulation should be handled with care as some states do not allow employers to regulate such activity

Considerations Around Advocacy

- Be aware of the political culture around your school and within the community
- Letters / Advocacy of the school
 - Topics within your mission
 - Not using substantial resources
 - NAIS Action Center
- **Student Activity?**
 - Mission / Educational Purpose
 - Safety
 - Student agency (is it really a walk-out if...)

Lightning rods: politics on campus (part five)

- The next week, Ms. Hart tells you that she would like to make a change to the second semester curriculum for her sophomore class. She is proposing to substitute *Enrique's Journey* by Sonia Nazario for *Great Expectations*. The novel is the story of a 17-year-old Honduran boy's harrowing journey to the United States in search of his mother. The current President has run on a platform of immigration reform and has already moved forward with his agenda on this issue. What happens?

Key takeaways: boundaries and best practices

- On Enrique's Journey:
 - Good teaching means opening students to many views as opposed to sharing your own
 - Good teaching requires relationships and knowing your students
 - Understand the culture of your school
 - Welcome differing viewpoints from your students when you discuss politics or any charged issue

Lightning Rods: politics in the classroom (part one)

- You're an Upper School director and get a call from a family from whom you rarely hear complaints and know to be happy advocates (to anyone who will listen) of what they call your school's "quest to grow students who value intellectual growth." They have praised teachers whom they knew to be both conservative and liberal in their personal lives.
- But today they're upset about their son Noah's experience yesterday in US History class during which Mr. Elliott asked students to debate vaccination mandates. Each student was assigned to represent either a Republican or Democratic senator and to choose their position in the debate based on party lines. Noah's parents insist that vaccination is not political and are frustrated that Mr. Elliott would suggest otherwise. Further, they are wondering whether Mr. Elliott should be incorporating current events into his class at all.

Lightning Rods: politics in the classroom (part one)

- How do you respond to Noah's parents?
- How do you follow up with Mr. Elliott?

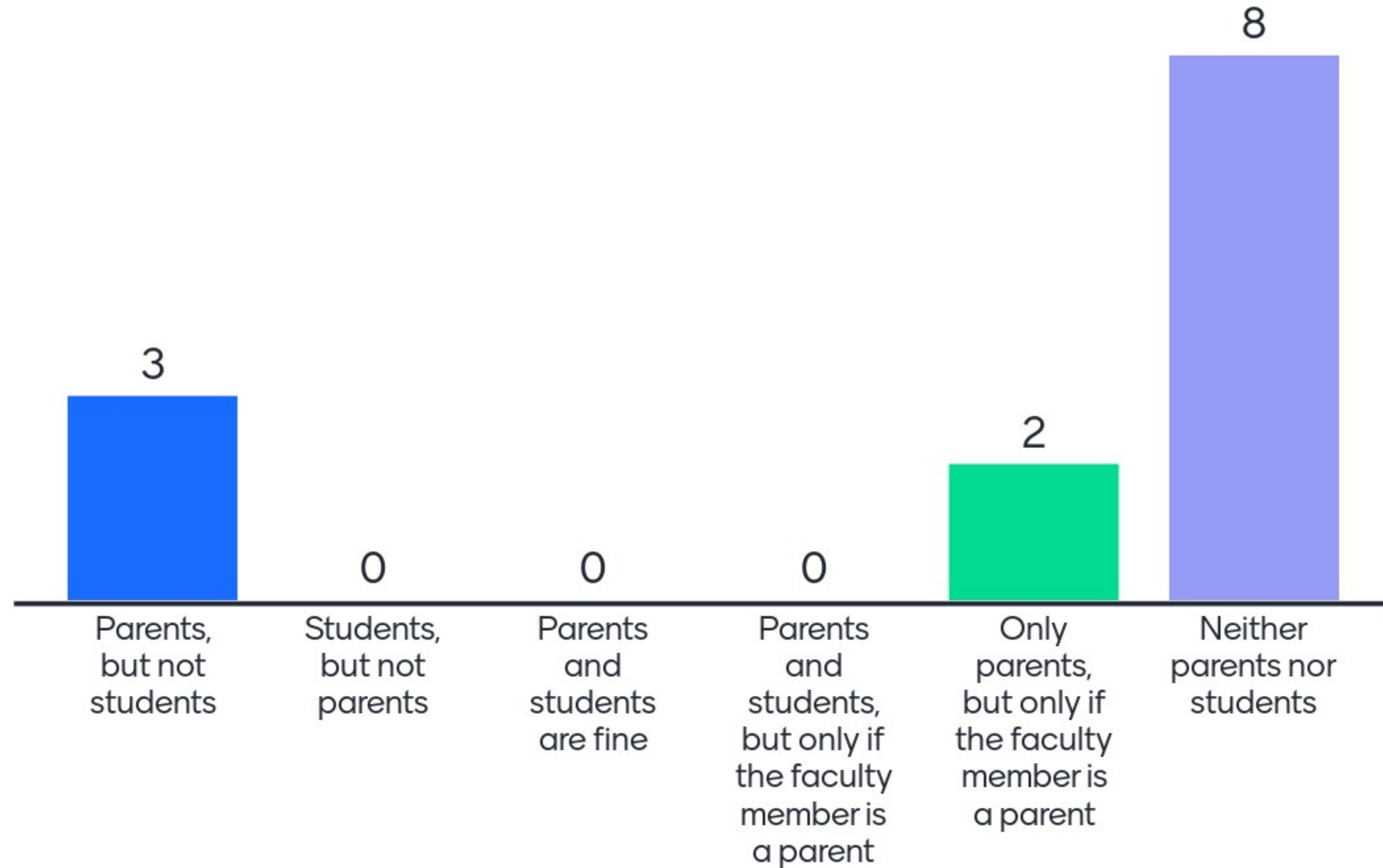
Key takeaways

- Teaching Current Events
 - Grow skills: perspective-taking, critical thinking
 - Enforce a point of view by thoroughly understanding its relationship to opposing viewpoints
 - Foster discourse
 - Strive for balance
- School guidelines (policies?) about communication between parents and faculty
- Communication About School Culture--to parents and faculty

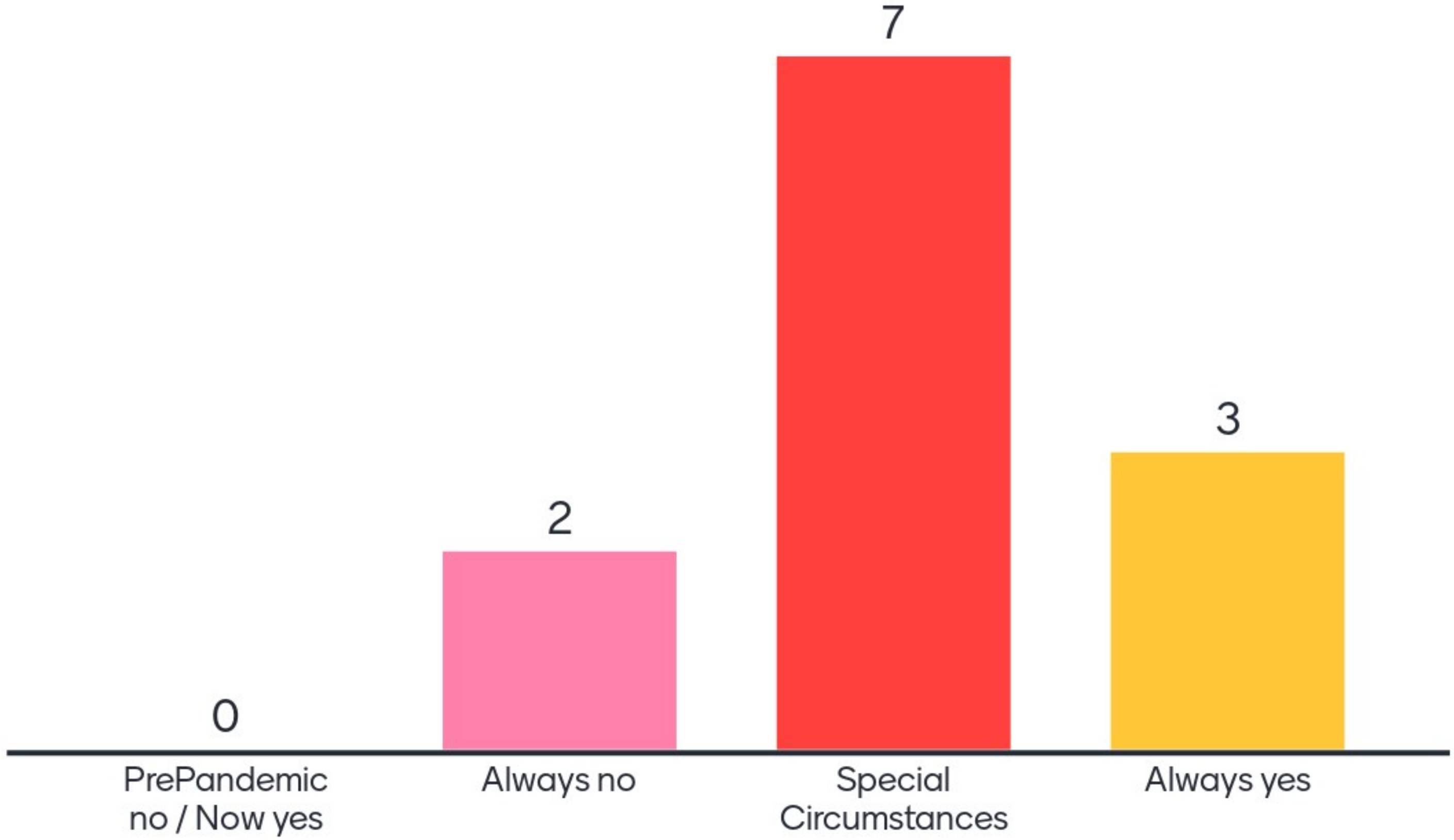
Healthy Professional Boundaries: social media

- You're a Fifth Grade advisor and have a one-on-one meeting with your advisee, Greg, who is new to your school this year. He says he enjoys school and feels he's starting to make friends. He says all of his classes are enjoyable, and he feels confident about his progress in all classes except English with Mr. Holcomb. You know he loves to read so are surprised to hear his concern.
- When you ask follow up questions, he explains, "at the start of every year my parents check to see if my teachers have social media accounts. They found Ms. Parrish's account, and she just posted pictures of her kids, so they didn't care about that. But Mr. Holcomb's account had a bunch of stuff about who he voted for for president and governor and mayor. My dad works for the governor--not the one Mr. Holcomb voted for--and we're worried he won't like me."

Do you allow teachers to be friends with the following on social media?



Do you allow teachers to give parents or kids personal cell phone numbers?



Healthy Professional Boundaries: social media

- What do you say to Greg?
- Do you talk to Mr. Holcomb?
- Or Ms. Parrish?
- Or anyone else at school?

Key Takeaways:

- Social Media Accounts: school policies and professional/personal boundaries
- Power Dynamics: parent and student fears

Healthy Professional Boundaries -- Parents (part one)

- This pandemic has really worn you down. It's been a long 18 months and it is depressing to think about more time in masks. School starts next week. After you are done with your classroom prep, you meet a friend at a local restaurant for a drink and a bite at the bar.
- While there, you run into Chuck and Cheryl, parents of Phoebe, who has been in a few of your classes over the last couple of years. They give you huge hugs and buy you a drink as your friend departs.
- You get talking and they ask you how you feel about the school's mask and vaccine policies, so you tell them how tired you are of masks and just everything to do with the pandemic.
- Then, your colleague Smith walks in and also sits down. Smith teaches art and has also had Phoebe in class. He catches the tail end of your conversation and proceeds to list all of the difficulties of mitigation in the art room and how much he is dreading it. You all have a couple more drinks together and go home.

Healthy Professional Boundaries -- Parents (part two)

You wake up to see you have been tagged on Twitter and any number of other sites over 25 times.

Last night Cheryl posted repeatedly on her own accounts and those of the school about staff discontent over the draconian COVID policies. She has tagged you and Smith on FB, quoting you repeatedly from the conversation of the night before

What happened? What do you do? What could you have done differently?

Key Takeaways

- You need to have boundaries here
- Try not to friend parents on social media
- If you do, limit their feed from your channels
- Be aware of the casual conversation, body language, etc.
- What you say and do can be construed as the “inside scoop” for them
- Understand the dynamics in play and work to stay out of them
- Call in a line judge / referee if needed

Other places to be aware...

- Politics in the classroom
- Being a “family”
- Personal “help”
- Gifts
- Relationships
- Being aware of the 3% attention parents

Healthy Professional Boundaries -- Colleagues (part one)

You and Jill are both teachers in the math department. You both started the same year and have become friendly. You don't socialize outside of work, but occasionally Jill gives you a ride home and you cover the gamut of your personal lives. Jill's husband works for the "State Department" and is never home. They have two young children. You and Jill talk a lot about how hard it is to be a working parent. You know Jill has this extra burden of being on her own with the kids quite a lot.

After a few years, you are promoted to the head of the middle school. Jill now reports to you. Recently Jill has had to take several personal days to care for sick kids. You get a substitute on these occasions, but her absences are becoming disruptive to her teaching. The last few times, you couldn't find a qualified substitute and the students ended up watching a movie.

What do you do?

What do you do in this situation with Jill? (short answer)

Employee Assistance Program?

Honest conversation and talk to HR about assistance

Have an open honest conversation. Offer to help

Have an honest conversation about the school's needs and Jill's needs

What are defined employee paid leave benefits?

What are the concerns around FMLA? And if they have leave?

Some places have childcare benefits (e.g. Whitehouse Nannies).

Speak to her honestly and evaluate if she can or can't teach any longer

Have a short discussion with Jill concerning setting up a fall back for when kids are sick. Share with her you want to support her but must also support other faculty and students.

What do you do in this situation with Jill? (short answer)

FMLA

Have a tough, yet caring conversation to see how you can best support her.

Healthy Professional Boundaries -- Colleagues (part two)

- The next year, Jill hires an *au pair* and her absences become less frequent. She is a good teacher. The position as Chair of the math department opens and you are responsible for filling the role. Jill is one of two very strong candidates. The candidates are equally qualified. The other candidate is a young, single man. You know that the role will require extra hours beyond the usual teaching load, including some early morning and late afternoon meetings. It also comes with a salary increase. The young guy lives adjacent to campus. Jill has a 45-minute commute.
- On the morning you are doing a final review of the applications, Jill calls you to say that her *au pair* was homesick and just quit. Jill needs to stay home to deal with the kids and is now looking for childcare again. She may need a few days. You meet with your colleague in the afternoon to discuss who should get the role as chair. Your colleague does not know anything about Jill's personal life. Do you mention it when reviewing her application?
- Jill calls you right before the meeting to tell you her big news: She is pregnant! She asks you to keep the news to yourself for now.
- Now what?

Key Takeaways: boundaries and best practices

- Personal relationships with colleagues--upsides and downsides
- Personal relationships with colleagues when you are the supervisor
- Faculty and staff in crisis
- When all else is equal, and you have personal information about someone that you know is likely to affect their work, what do you do?
- Pregnancy protections in the workplace

What boundaries do you use to protect yourself while also allowing you to engage as a three-dimensional person?

Pause before action

I'm taking notes!!! I'm awful at this.

Never mention the school or last names when talking about the school outside of school.

Very little socialization with school people (colleagues or parents) in personal life. That's been hard, but it's necessary. It's too complicated, and people expect things that you can't deliver.

I would love some more guidance here too. It's tough in an independent school!

I have a list of things I should never do again...

area of growth.... :-)



Questions?
