

UPPAC NEWS

A BI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER FROM THE UTAH PROFESSIONAL
PRACTICES ADVISORY COMMISSION

The Role of Teachers in Suicide Prevention

Teen suicide is an increasing issue in Utah. According to statistics from the Utah Department of Health, Utah experienced a 141.3% increase in suicides among Utah youths ages 10-17 from 2011-2015. The National Alliance of Mental Illness found that suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth 15-24 years old.

Given the escalating problem of youth suicide in Utah, educators need to know what to do if they find out that a student is suicidal. Under Utah law, an educator must notify the student's guardian of the student's suicide threat. Utah Code § 53G-9-604. A teacher must also notify a parent or guardian if the educator, "believes that a situation exists which presents a serious threat to the well-being of a student." Utah Code § 53E-9-203(6)(b).

If a teacher believes a student is at risk of suicide, the teacher may ask the student follow-up questions about their "suicidal thoughts, physically self-harming behavior, or thoughts of harming others, for the purposes of referring the student to appropriate prevention services and informing the student's parent or legal guardian." Utah Code § 53E-9-203(7)(a). These questions should be for the purpose of referral to parents and prevention services only.

After the student's guardian and appropriate referral services have been notified, educators should be careful not to counsel a student or create an inappropriate relationship with the student based on their knowledge of the student's situation. UPPAC has disciplined educators whose initial concern for a student's safety became the jumping-off point for the teacher to engage in various inappropriate boundary violations with the student, including one-on-one texting, late night phone calls, and in person meetings outside of school or school hours. Remember, your role is to refer students to their parents and other appropriate treatment providers, not try to treat the student yourself.

In addition to our state's laws regarding parent notification, all public secondary schools are required to adopt a suicide prevention program and policy. There are different prevention programs used throughout the state, including Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR), Hope for Tomorrow, and Hope Squads. Be aware of your charter school or district's suicide prevention program and policies and direct any questions you may have about them to your school's administration.

One of the most important roles you can play as an educator in helping prevent suicide is to foster an environment of connection in the classroom. A

Thanks and Welcome to UPPAC Members

UPPAC would like to thank out-going members Cal Beck and Jo Jolley of Canyons School District for six years of exemplary service on the Commission. UPPAC would also like to welcome Travis Cook of Provo School District and April Johnson of Murray School District to new terms on the commission, as well as community member Corey Fairholm and Cindy Phillips from the Weilenmann School of Discovery for agreeing to serve a second term.

recently published article from the Suicide Prevention Resource Center defined school connectedness as “the belief by students that adults and peers in the school care about them as individuals as well as about their learning.” (“Preventing Suicide: The Role of High School

Teachers,” found at: www.sprc.org). This feeling of connectedness can be created by teachers that “interac[t] with students in positive ways and help them engage with peers and other adults in the school community during the school day and extracurricular activities.” Id.

UPPAC EDUCATOR DISCIPLINE

A Summary of Utah State Board Licensing Actions from January-June 2019

Revocation

UPPAC Case no. 18-1504

An educator pled guilty to two counts of Enticing a Minor, a second-degree felony and a third-degree felony. The educator’s license was permanently revoked.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1520

An educator entered a no-contest plea to Unlawful Sexual Conduct with a 16- or 17-year-old, a class A misdemeanor. The educator’s license was permanently revoked.

Surrender

UPPAC Case no. 17-1456

An educator engaged in activities that led DCFS to make a finding of lewdness against him and he pled guilty to Child Abuse, a class B misdemeanor. The educator permanently surrendered his license before UPPAC concluded its investigation.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1516

An educator engaged in inappropriate text message conversations with a 16-year-old female student. The messages were sexual in nature and extremely graphic. The educator entered a guilty plea to Enticing a Minor, a class A misdemeanor. The educator permanently surrendered his license before UPPAC concluded its investigation.

Suspension

UPPAC Case no. 18-1486

An educator placed the signatures of multiple parents, teachers, and administrators on IEPs and other forms.

The educator says she had permission each time she did this. However, in several instances, it was confirmed that the person did not attend an IEP meeting, did not sign the IEP form, and did not give the educator permission to sign his or her name on the form. The educator’s license was suspended for not less than three years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1536

An educator attended school while intoxicated. The educator submitted to a breath alcohol test twice, and blew a .292 and .264, respectively. The educator’s license was suspended for not less than one year.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1528

An educator had extensive email conversations with multiple female students using his school email account. In these emails, the educator asked the girls about their personal problems, including sensitive subjects relating to their personal life, eating disorders, depression, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, and anxiety. The educator told the students that he loved them. He sent a student hundreds of emails and encouraged her to vent and share her feelings with him, which she did. The educator’s license was suspended for not less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 19-1587

An educator stole money from a fundraiser that a school athletic team conducted to help raise money for charity. The educator’s license was suspended for not less than one year.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1427

An educator submitted a falsified invoice showing that the educator had incurred expenses at an out-of-state conference. The educator did not attend the conference or incur the expenses claimed. The educator pled guilty to Communications Fraud, a class B misdemeanor. The educator's license was suspended for not less than three years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1488

An educator failed to follow District policy when making purchases for the school drama program and misused school funds by making personal purchases with a school credit card. The educator's license was suspended for not less than three years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1497

An educator forged the signatures of five different educators on eight different evaluation forms without authorization over a period of about 20 months. The educator also violated district policies by failing to hold required meetings with the educators and by failing to give the educators copies of the evaluations. The educator's license was suspended for not less than one year.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1438

An educator engaged in extensive electronic communication with an eighth-grade student, mostly on a phone app called Remind. They discussed personal issues, such as body image issues, the student's problems with friends, and the fact that the educator wasn't married yet. The educator's license was suspended for not less than three years.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1421

An administrator instructed a first-grade student to take off his pants after his teacher brought him to the office for pulling down his pants and showing his penis to other students. The administrator expected the student to refuse, but the student took off his pants. The administrator's license was suspended for not less than one year.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1440

An educator engaged in severe boundary violations with a 15-year-old female student. The educator had the student live in her home, treated the student like a daughter and drank alcohol with the student. The educator also exchanged nude photos with a recently graduated 17-year-old male former student claiming to believe he was older. She was not criminally charged. The educator's license was suspended for not less than four years.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1458

An educator altered emails from her son's coach to make it appear as if the coach were bullying her son. She used the emails to attempt to have a transfer eligibility request to the UHSAA approved. The educator's license was suspended for not less than one year.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1471

An educator consumed alcohol during the school day, stole money from co-workers, and prescription medication from her neighbor. The educator's license was suspended for not less than three years.

Letter of Reprimand

UPPAC Case no. 18-1529

An educator engaged in an altercation with his former co-worker at a seminary building. The educator was charged with Burglary, class A misdemeanor; Assault, class B misdemeanor; and three counts of Threat of Violence, class B misdemeanors. The educator entered a plea in abeyance to the charges. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for not less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1512

An educator had a disagreement with her charter school director and involved the students in the disagreement. In February of 2018 she inappropriately threw a foam

ball and it hit a student. The educator had a previous UPPAC letter of admonishment. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for not less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1534

DCFS made a finding of physical abuse against an educator on two incidents with his son. The educator self-reported this finding to his principal. Since the finding, the educator has been committed to the DCFS safety plan and sought counseling for himself and his son, who has ADHD and sensory processing issues. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for not less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1573

In four separate incidents between March 2017 and December 2018, an educator contacted students via social media or text message. These messages were not sexual in nature and did not contain any solicitation or request to meet; they were mostly small talk. Nonetheless, the educator was warned by his district after each incident. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for not less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1492

An educator engaged in multiple unprofessional behaviors, including leaving her classroom unattended, asking fellow teachers for pain medication, and using her school credit card for a personal purchase after resigning from her school district. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for not less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1506

An educator smelled of alcohol during school hours. The educator submitted to an alcohol breath test and blew a .05 and .046. Other than the odor of alcohol, no other signs or symptoms of impairment were noted. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for no less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1525

An educator asked a few students to mow his lawn and feed his cat. Numerous students began coming to the educator's home when he was not there and hanging out without his knowledge. Later, in another school district, the educator engaged in inappropriate conversations with a student about his personal life, including his religious beliefs and sexual orientation. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for no less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1434

An educator engaged in several incidents of hugging and other inappropriate touching of students. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for not less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1451

An educator had one-on-one interactions with a student and spent more time with the student than is usual. He exchanged text messages with the student, which were not always related to school matters. The educator received a letter of reprimand, with a flag to remain on his CACTUS account until the educator completes a boundary training course.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1490

On two occasions over the course of two years, an educator took a student to a secluded area at school where he sat the student on his lap and rubbed her back. The educator denied that the student sat in his lap or that he rubbed her back. The educator direct messaged the student on Instagram. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for no less than three years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1501

An educator took one of her second-grade special education students to live with her temporarily with the student's mother's permission, but she did not make any legal arrangements, such as a power-of-attorney or guardianship of the child, nor did she notify her school.

The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on the educator's license for not less than two years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1517

A student received a letter from an educator that shamed the student for behaviors he exhibited, some of which may have been related to his disabilities. The power struggle between the student and teacher continued the rest of the school year. At the end of the school year, the student's mother submitted a complaint to the district, and the district found that the educator engaged in harassment based on the student's disability. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on his educator's license for two years.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1498

An educator sent a female student two personal notes. One note told the student she was his favorite, and the other note included a drawing of a dancer and was signed with a heart by his signature. The educator also engaged in horseplay with students during recess, including allowing students to jump on his back and shoulders. The educator received a letter of reprimand to remain on his educator's license for two years.

Letter of Warning

UPPAC Case no. 18-1537

An educator moved a misbehaving student into a chair in the school hallway and guided another student by the back of the head and shoulders to her classroom. In her room, the educator took the student's shoe and removed his shirt after he put his arms inside of it. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1559

An educator took a misbehaving student by the arm, escorted him out of the classroom, and walked him to a neighboring classroom. While the student was physically resisting this escort, the educator kept ahold of his arm or wrist the entire time. The principal expressed concern regarding the educator's performance, particularly her somewhat abrasive

manner of communicating with student, coworkers, and community members. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1565

An educator told inappropriate jokes in his anatomy class in violation of a previous directive. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1546

An educator grabbed a misbehaving 1st grade student by the wrist and pulled, in an attempt to get the student to stand up. When the student resisted, the educator let go. The educator held the student's wrist for about four seconds. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1532

An educator and CTE instructor registered as a student and took a CTE test, which violated test administration policy. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1567

An educator commingled funds from a professional association with district funds by using a school credit card to make purchases for the professional association and reimbursing the school with a check from the association. After an audit, all funds were returned to the proper organization and the educator reimbursed the school for her accidental purchase. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1575

An educator sent an unprofessional email to the guardian of a student who did not speak English. The email stated, "we live in America!!! English is spoken here and we don't have to provide an interpreter!!!!" The educator also failed to follow district purchasing policies. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 19-1590

After receiving explicit instruction from her school not to have contact with students, an educator spoke with a student over the phone after her termination. A parent

reported that the educator initiated the call. The educator denied this and asserted that the student unexpectedly called her. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 19-1603

An educator shared information about his personal life with students thereby creating a casual relationship between them. The educator also violated the district policy about electronic communication and social media use by texting students individually rather than in a group. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1576

An educator accidentally left his concealed weapon on a toilet paper roll in a faculty restroom. It was found by another faculty member approximately an hour or two later. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1535

After resigning her position, an educator changed permissions on thousands of documents in Google Docs, giving her husband access to all the documents. She did this so she would have access to any documents she created so she could use them at a future job. However, she failed to sort through the documents, and she inadvertently gave her husband access to some documents with private student data, including names and SAGE test scores. There is no evidence to show that the educator accessed the data, and when the issue was brought to the educator's attention several months later, she deleted the files. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1582

An educator engaged in peer-like behaviors when he allowed and/or asked a student to use a scalp massager on his head. The student later complained of the

behavior, but the student made clear that she did not perceive this interaction as a sexual advance. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1450

An educator engaged in several boundary violations, including hugging students, calling them pet names, and kissing a female swimmer on the forehead following a big race. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1472

An educator physically moved students in non-emergency situations, grabbed items from students' hands, and spoke negatively about her students to her paraprofessionals during class. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1524

An educator thought a news story in which a sixth-grade student at their school was featured as a bullying victim unfairly portrayed their school as a bullying school. The educator posted an inappropriate comment under the story on the news organization's Facebook page targeted at the student. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 17-1446

An educator engaged in minor incidents of improper physical contact with a student and created a negative learning environment in his classroom. The educator received a letter of warning.

UPPAC Case no. 18-1543

An educator used profanity in front of students and discussed inappropriate topics in her classroom, including a lengthy discussion about sexual assault and asking students to identify their religious affiliation. The educator received a letter of warning.



QUESTIONS? PLEASE CONTACT US

Our UPPAC team is available if you need to report an ethical violation, have questions about the ethics of a situation, or if you would like us to provide training to your LEA regarding the educator standards. Please contact UPPAC at (801) 538-7745.