

The “Cool” Teacher

Teachers, who prefer a casual style with students, face new and growing vulnerabilities. There is a vast difference between being friendly versus being a friend. The former is expected, the latter is now very risky. A teacher who is focused on making a “connection” with students may fail to maintain the proper demeanor and distance.

Here are examples of potential problems:

1. the use of street jargon, internet/chat room/text jargon
2. using “texting” instead of email or phone for teacher/student/parent communiqué
3. the use of social networking sites, like Facebook, My Space, Twitter
4. dressing like a teenager as opposed to an adult
5. making it known that he/she listens to their kind of music
6. making it a point to keep up with the movie stars of their generation and talking about it
7. laughing at certain behaviors or language instead of letting the student know it is inappropriate
8. a failure to write referrals
9. writing personal notes that are friendly and/or could be viewed as affectionate
10. a failure to keep community relationships with a student (e.g. YMCA, Sunday school) separate from the classroom
11. inviting students to your home, going to theirs
12. giving students a ride home
13. hanging out with students outside of school
14. inviting or encouraging students to text you for social conversation
15. any personal habit that can be misinterpreted, such as standing too close, staring, winking, touching as a part of conversation

In isolation, some of these behaviors are not necessarily wrong. It’s the cumulative impression that can create a problem. These behaviors can interfere with the teacher’s ability to create a classroom where he or she is an authority figure. These behaviors can also be distractions that encourage the wrong kind of conversations between teacher and student.

As you think about this issue, here is the question to consider: If you are a teacher who uses these approaches and you have been accused of some kind of inappropriate behavior, could you convince a school board that your approach was the right one?