PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES
WEBSITE POLICY GBEE

A. INTRODUCTION

The Mt. Lebanon School District's Student Communications Policy seeks to encourage communications between employees and students that further the educational mission of the District in providing the best education possible for each and every student. Inasmuch as these communications may involve technologies that convey varying degrees of privacy from the public eye, this document seeks to provide more substantive examples to help navigate the provisions of the Student Communications Policy.

B. SPIRIT OF THE POLICY

The Student Communications Policy states, in simplest terms, that communications between employees and students must be either in the public eye and/or under the editorial control and oversight of District Administration.

If you are ever in doubt, ask yourself the question, "Can anyone see this communication between me and my student(s)? If not, can it be easily reviewed by District Administration?" If the answer to either question is "yes," you are likely on good footing with your student communication.

C. SAMPLE COMMUNICATION TOOLS & CONSIDERATIONS

BLOGS

Mt. Lebanon has been using blogs as communications tools since 2006. To support both the use of a common MTLSD Login ID as well as privacy settings that allow the teacher to keep the classroom discussion away from the public Internet (but still within view of the parents), the District developed its own blog engine, http://blog.mtlsd.org. Employees wishing to use a blog for classroom or other student communications purposes must use one of these blogs.

CELL PHONES/HOME TELEPHONES

Phone calls to students are explicitly allowed in the Student Communications Policy, but care should be taken to ensure that the content of the conversation is in support of the educational mission of the District.

At this time, the district has not provided a system that will allow employees to send students a text message without needing to know the student phone number. As such, text messages that support the educational mission of the district are allowed by this policy. Be sure you adhere to the rules set forth by your building principal regarding exchanging text messages with students. Once the District makes a text message system available to its employees, they will be compelled to utilize it instead of direct text messaging with students.

From Policy GBEE: "The District recognizes that certain staff members reside in our community and, as such, engage in non school related communications, e.g., cutting the grass, babysitting, etc, and those types of personal communications are not covered by this policy, and the District assumes no responsibility for such communications. Inappropriate communications may, however, violate other policies or laws."

DASHBOARD

The Dashboard is the District's primary communication tool between teachers and students and parents. It provides information on a calendar such as assignments, tests, and important dates. It also provides students and parents with a view into their "daily grades" so they can see their achievement and progress as the year progresses. The Dashboard also provides teachers, parents, and students with tools to send email-based communication back and forth. Whenever possible, teachers should email their students and parents using Dashboard.

Part of the Dashboard is a tool called *PowerMail* which allows principals and other administrators to send "mass emails" to large groups of students/parents. Whenever possible, this tool should be utilized rather than direct mass emails.

EMAIL

Email is a great way to communicate with students. Students who establish routines around checking their email on a periodic basis will be better off having developed that skill when they transition from Mt. Lebanon to their next destination. Using email to communicate with them will help them get to that point.

As defined in the Student Communications Policy, all emails to students should be sent and received using your username@mtlsd.net email address. Employees who for whatever reason do not yet have an email/network account need only ask their supervisor. It is strongly recommended that you also use the students' username@mtlstudents.net email address (as opposed to some other third party email provider) in your correspondence.

FACEBOOK

Facebook is a social media tool enjoyed and utilized by staff and students alike. For that reason, it can be a good medium to deliver your school-related messages and content to a group of students who are, for all intents and purposes, "already there." Be cautious in your use of Facebook when you use it to communicate with students by adhering to the following rules:

- Do not "friend" students - Being "friends" on Facebook can lead to communications which are neither public nor within the view of the District Administration...a clear violation of the spirit of the Student Communications Policy.

- Do not "Facebook message" students - Always use email based on the above guidelines instead.

- Fan pages should be created rather than groups - Security should be set to public so that anyone can see the page and the communications that happen on that page. An example is the District Facebook page which can be found at http://www.Facebook.com/MTLSD.

- To be considered an "officially sanctioned" Facebook page, the Technology Director must be one of the administrators of the page.

GOOGLE DRIVE

Google Docs is being used in ever-increasing levels both in and out of our classrooms for individual cloud-based file storage as well as collaborative projects. The suite of Google products including Google Drive, Google Docs, Google Spreadsheet, Google Presentation, etc., is constantly evolving and changing. As you utilize these products to communicate with your students, you must be using your username@mtlsd.net login ID and your students must be using their username@mtlstudents.net login ID.

Considerations for your use of Google Sites can be found under "*WEBSITES & WIKIS*" below.

INSTAGRAM

Instagram is an online photo-sharing and social networking service that enables its users to share pictures. If you use Instagram with your students, your photostream must be public. If you wish to keep your photostream private, you may not allow students to follow you. Similarly, if students have a private photo stream, you should not follow that student. Both of these situations provide avenues for private messaging which violate the spirit of the Student Communications Policy. On the other hand, public comments to each other's photos which are in public view are acceptable under the policy.

LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is a "professional" social network where people build an online resume/CV and connect with professionals with whom they've worked or done business. If there is cause to use this network with your students, your profiles and theirs will be public. There is a private messaging feature that you can use with your "contacts." This feature should not be used with students.

SNAPCHAT

SnapChat is an app that people use to send "expiring" images to each other, sometimes with annotations. Before you send a picture, you decide how many seconds the picture will be able to be viewed before it is deleted from the recipient's phone.

Ironically, recognizing the perils of inappropriate pictures being saved online forever, many students nationwide think that using this app is a "safer" way to exchange such pictures. The hard truth is that there is nothing stopping a recipient from taking a screenshot of a picture and saving it forever. The app does tell the sender that a screenshot was taken, but that doesn't prevent it from happening.

Don't miss an opportunity to help your students learn about the dangers of having a false sense of safety and security. And because of its non-public nature, do not use this app to communicate with students.

TWITTER
Twitter is being used more and more by teachers to keep students informed about classroom happenings and to foster discussions using the #hashtag feature.

Many of the same considerations for using _FACEBOOK_ and _INSTAGRAM_ should be applied to your use of Twitter with students. If students are going to be following your Twitter account, you must not protect your tweets. Similarly, if your students protect their tweets, you should not follow them.

"Direct messaging" between students and teachers should not take place, as that would be out of public view. Use the @Replies feature instead. For example:

@Student sends to employee @CRStengel	d CRStengel what time is the meeting tomorrow?
correct reply from @CRStengel	@Student the meeting is at 7:30am tomorrow
incorrect reply from @CRStengel	d Student the meeting is at 7:30am tomorrow

WEBSITES & WIKIS
Websites and Wikis are valuable tools to provide students and parents with classroom materials and supplemental resources. Inasmuch as they are used as a communications tool, all interactions should subscribe to the spirit of the Student Communications Policy.

MTLSD CMS and Google Sites (using @mtlsd and @mtlstudents logins) are the only officially sanctioned methods of creating a web page for communicating with students whether the site is public or private only to its members.

Remember that there is a School Board Policy named IJNDC-Website Policy and an associated Principles and Procedures document that also govern how employees utilize websites and wikis at Mt. Lebanon.