

STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS

Background

Excellent communication between District staff and students greatly enhances our students' learning. Accordingly, the District recognizes the ubiquity of electronic mail, text messaging, social networking and other means of digital communication in personal and professional interactions. This policy is intended both to encourage these means of communication and provide employees and others with the District's expectations for communicating in these manners with all students – namely that all student communications are used solely to support the educational mission of the School District in providing the best education possible for each and every student.

The District also recognizes that there are a growing number of social networking applications being developed and purchased for use within the District. These applications provide a safe place for students to learn appropriate online behavior while at the same time enhancing their learning both inside and outside of our classrooms.

Policy

The policy applies to District employees, coaches and volunteers (collectively “staff members”) in their communications with students. When utilizing social networking tools, staff members should only communicate with students to support the educational mission of the District with regard to teaching and learning. Staff members may not communicate with students using external social networking group pages unless that communication is within public view.

Where it supports the educational goals of the District, staff members may correspond with students via email utilizing only District-issued (mtlsd.net) email addresses. If, however, a coach or volunteer does not have an mtlsd.net account, he or she can either request/obtain one from the District (for this purpose) or utilize the other forms of communication as described herein.

Phone calls and text messages to students may also be utilized to support the educational mission of the District. If available, staff members shall utilize District provided methods of text messaging which may include custom-designed in-house applications and/or group texting. Regardless, and in the event that a parent or guardian notifies the District of an objection to his/her child receiving phone calls or text messages, staff members will communicate with the student through phone or text message directed to the parent/guardian directly or, alternatively, to both the parent/guardian and the student. Notification of this policy (and the options available to receive phone calls and text messages) shall be provided to both students and parents/guardians at the commencement of any class and/or activity where this type of communication may be utilized. Either at that time or thereafter, and again regardless of which option is selected, the student and/or parent/guardian will provide his/her telephone number to the staff member.

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.

In addition to the specific rules set forth herein regarding the manner/means of communication, faculty, staff members are reminded that the even more important issue is the content of these communications which, again, must be education-related, professional and consistent with the District's overall mission.

Specific Authorizations

This policy specifically authorizes utilization of social networking by staff members for education-related purposes if and when these communications are completely within the editorial oversight of District Administration. The District encourages staff members to utilize (in proper manner) social networking in light of the many advantages which it brings to the classroom and the overall learning experience.

This policy also specifically permits the use of email, phone, and text message by staff members if and when these communications support the educational goals of the District and adhere to the specific requirements set forth herein.

Specific Requirements Relating to Social Networking

A staff member wishing to create an education-related social media page should contact and (if applicable) obtain approval from his/her supervisor about the intended site and its use. The staff member shall take responsibility for ensuring that the site is used appropriately, including making sure that others posting on the site adhere to confidentiality, privacy, copyright, and all related board policies as well as all applicable local, state, and federal laws/regulations. The District reserves the right to review the site.

Staff members are reminded that they are professionals and are representatives of both the District and the community in all aspects of their lives and should conduct themselves accordingly when utilizing social media/networking.

Staff members are cautioned that they should have no expectation of privacy while using the Internet. The District may conduct periodic web searches in order to determine if the Internet/any social networking operation is being utilized in an inappropriate or illegal manner. Staff members shall not post any material or information protected from disclosure under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, or other applicable laws, regulations or policies including, but not limited to, education records, personally identifiable information, photos, video recordings or audio recordings of students, District staff, parents or other constituents of the District/community and shall follow all Board policies related to protection of confidential information.

Unless specifically authorized by their supervisor, staff members are not authorized and therefore restricted from speaking on behalf of the District. If a staff member chooses to identify himself/herself as a staff member of the District on a social networking site, a disclaimer must be made on the site which makes it clear that his/her writings are his/her own and do not reflect the views of the District. Staff members must be honest about their identity when utilizing social networking sites and must not pretend to be another person or intentionally mask his/her identity.

Staff members shall post only accurate information, adhere to all copyright laws, and reference all sources as required by law. Under no circumstances may staff members discuss situations involving staff or student discipline or performance on a blog or social networking site. The use of images or photographs of students on an education-related blog or social networking site which identifies the student by name without the express written consent of a parent or guardian is absolutely prohibited.

Reporting Violations

Any and all violations of this policy are to be reported by a staff member to his or her supervisor or, if more appropriate, the school principal.

Discipline

Violation of this policy will result in discipline as appropriate up to and including termination, in accordance with all applicable District disciplinary policies and procedures. Moreover, and where warranted, the District shall notify the appropriate public authorities (including but not limited to the police). As to volunteers, violations may result in removal from the position.

Administration Responsibilities

It shall be the responsibility of the Administration:

1. To develop and publish written principles and procedures and/or guidelines where necessary for the implementation of this policy, including illustrations and examples of behavior that would be deemed appropriate and/or inappropriate as well as appropriate notification to parents/guardians regarding the phone calls and text messaging options described above.
2. To ensure that all District employees, coaches and volunteers providing a service to the District and, therefore, subject to this policy receive appropriate training with respect to the provisions of this policy.
3. To continue to monitor student communication-related activities/development and, on that basis, recommend to the Board any necessary update/amendments to this policy so as to continue to ensure that the above-referenced objectives continue to be satisfied.

Communication

This Policy shall be communicated to:

1. All District employees, coaches and volunteers performing services on behalf of the District.
2. All students, parents and guardians.
3. All other members of the community.

Adopted October 17, 2011