

Book

Policy Manual

Section

800 Operations

Title

Electronic Communications and Social Media/Networking

Code

816

Status

Legal

1. 20 U.S.C. 1232g

2. 34 CFR Part 99

24 P.S. 510

Adopted

Purpose

Staff members are expected to maintain a high degree of professionalism in all communications. Given the potentially broad reach of electronic communications and the propensity for reaching unintended recipients, staff members must be particularly cognizant of the need for professionalism in regard to their electronic communications.

Employees should not publicly defame themselves, the school district, its students, or stakeholders in any way or in any venue. Employees should ensure that all communications with students are kept professional at all times. Teachers should use the greatest amount of wisdom and professionalism when fostering relationships among adult stakeholders.

The procedures and guidelines in this policy discourage improper employee electronic communication with students at all district schools and establish procedures for proper handling of any prohibited communications.

Definitions

Electronic communication - includes any direct communication facilitated by voice or text-based telecommunication devices, or both, computers, as well as those devices that facilitate indirect communication using an intermediate method, including, but not limited to social media and phone applications. This includes communicating through words, images, videos, and live video, and includes communications on both personal and school district-issued devices.

Educational services - constitutes provision of direct and indirect classroom instruction, as well as extracurricular activities provided by the Central Bucks School District.

Electronic mail - communication by use of the Internet, sent to a person identified by a unique address and received by that person.

Text messaging - the transmission of text, photos, or videos between cellular telephone numbers, or from one electronic account to another electronic account.

Computers - pertains to and includes: (i) desktops; (ii) tablets; (iii) laptops; (iv) smart phones; and (v) any other similar digital device.

Social networks - locations on the Internet where users may interact with other users -- examples are Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, and other social network sites available on the Internet.

Student record - shall mean any item of information gathered within or outside the district that is directly related to an identifiable student.

Guidelines

All electronic communication conducted by an employee with a student must be relative to the educational services provided to the student and shall be delivered by means provided by or otherwise made available by the school district for this purpose. Approved school district electronic communication methods are school district email, school-sponsored teacher websites, school websites, school-provided phones and other applications that have been approved by the school district.

Any web-based/Internet tool used with students must have a clear educational purpose and must be approved prior to use with students. The district approval will come from the Superintendent or his/her designee and will adhere to the requirements of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998.

Teacher and students must conform to the Terms of Use for the specific web-based/Internet tools. For example, some web-based/Internet tools/Terms of Use restrict use to those thirteen (13) years or older or eighteen (18) years or older. Others require parent permission.

Staff members are prohibited from engaging in the following electronic communications or actions:

1. Sending communications to students that are not related to the overall mission of the district.

2. Communication directly with a student through a social network not approved by the district for communications with students.
3. Providing a staff member's personal cell phone number to students.
4. Placing a phone call to a student's personal cell phone.
5. Sending sms/text messages directly to students (this does not include group texting applications that have been approved by the district).
6. Emailing students from a staff member's personal email account.
7. Providing students with a staff member's personal email (non-district provided) account/address.
8. "Friending" or otherwise adding students to their circle of contacts on an online social networking site whose function does not involve enhancing the educational goals of the district.
9. Publicly displaying or posting online material that would be disruptive to the educational process, including, but not limited, messages demonstrating insubordination, immorality, cruelty, unlawful discrimination, or endorsing or encouraging other unlawful acts.
10. Representing personal opinions as those of the district.
11. Revealing or publicizing confidential or proprietary information.
12. Disclosing personally identifiable information related to a student, except in strict accordance with Board policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and its regulations.[1][2][3][4]

Staff are encouraged to use a district-provided means of communication (e.g. district email, district phone) when contacting students. However, emergency circumstances may arise that require a staff member to communicate with a student via a non-district provided method of communication. In such an instance, it is the responsibility of the staff member to report such situations to their supervisor at the first opportunity.

Consequences

The Superintendent or designee shall be responsible to carry out disciplinary action related to any violations of this policy.

The consequence for inappropriate use will result in disciplinary action in accordance with established disciplinary procedures and if the inappropriate use violates federal or state laws, it will be formally reported to the proper legal authorities.