

A. INTRODUCTION

Like any means of instruction – textbooks, worksheets, blackboards, etc. - technology is an aid to learning, albeit a remarkable and growing one. It is, however, the *ends, objectives*, and *measures* of education, not their means that ultimately determine instructional effectiveness. For this reason, the use of technology as a *means* of academic achievement should always be *measured* by how well it facilitates the *ends* – i.e., the fundamental objectives – of education: student learning, critical thinking, and character development. As long as technology offers the best means to foster these educational objectives, the Alleghany County School System seeks to promote its safe, legal, and responsible use.

Technological advances in society undeniably require the use of technology in education. One stated goal of federal law, for instance, is to “improve student academic achievement through the use of technology in elementary schools and secondary schools” and the support of “initiatives that provide school teachers, principals, and administrators with the capacity to integrate technology effectively into curricula and instruction that are aligned with challenging State academic content and student academic achievement standards.... [“The Enhancing Education Through Technology Act of 2001,” Sec. 2400 *et seq.*, No Child Left Behind Act of 2002.]

The availability of new technological tools challenge educators to consider their use to enhance student instruction. The Alleghany County School System recognizes the need to seize the useful opportunities these tools offer. Balancing efficiency and student safety with educational quality and innovation, the Alleghany County School System encourages the use of these tools in a way that promotes its mission and academic objectives in a manner that is safe, legal, and age- and pedagogically-appropriate.

B. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. “Instructional Technology Use” and Resources

Instructional technology use (ITU) generally refers to the use of traditional and emerging electronic devices and other means of communication available for teaching, including more recent technologies commonly referred to as “Web 2.0.” These include, but are not limited to: computers, the Internet and worldwide web, e-mail, chat forums, web logs (blogs), listservs, instant messaging, audio or video (A/V) streaming or presentation, teleconferences, use of A/V media such as DVDs, digital images, videotapes, MP3 and other media storage files and formats, online or distance instruction, cellular phones, Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), electronic slide projection (e.g., PowerPoint), and more traditional means such as audio tape and television.

2. Technology Proficiency

Federal and State Law, including the North Carolina Standard Course of Study, mandate that students be proficient in the use of technology. Teachers and administrators, increasingly, should model such proficiency. Recognizing that the abilities of individual staff members to integrate technology into classroom instruction varies widely; all instructional staff are nevertheless expected to increase their technological proficiency whenever it will reasonably improve their instructional effectiveness. Toward that end, instructional staff should use, and may be measured by, standards and indicators available for determining their progress. Such standards may include those contained in the Appendix to this policy, including the “Stages of Professional Development: Integrating Technology into the 21st Century Classroom” and other local or national proficiency standards (e.g., The 2008 National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers).

3. Legal Considerations

Instructional staff shall be informed of and, to the extent feasible, trained in sound legal and pedagogical ITU. Predominant legal considerations include:

- First Amendment:

- (1) Preserving, except where appropriate, all school-related websites and other electronic forums as “closed forums” and, therefore, not expanding the First Amendment rights of students or other users when using such forums unless otherwise desired and approved.

- (2) Understanding that the use of technology resources does not convey or involve any constitutional right of Academic Freedom for instructional staff;

- (3) Refraining from limiting student use of otherwise available technology in a way that infringes their free speech rights, either to express or to access information or ideas.

- Privacy and Confidentiality: ITU must avoid the disclosure of sensitive, personal, or confidential information in violation of state or federal records and sound ethical considerations.
- Defamation and Harassment: ITU must not include communications that allow or foster harassing, defamatory, intimidating or other harmful or potentially harmful expression.
- Copyright and Trademark: ITU must avoid the unauthorized use of protected intellectual property without permission or by legal right to do so.
- Public Records and Retention: ITU must not involve the illegal production

or destruction of electronic records or files that constitute public records and/or that must be stored or archived under state or federal record-keeping requirements.

- Local Policies and Procedures: ITU must conform to all other objectives, policies, rules, and practices of the Alleghany County School System and its constituent schools. This includes following all procedures for review and approval of instructional technology resources.

4. Limitations and Caveats

Instructional staff should always be mindful of the limitations and dangers of technology when considering its use. For example, much information on the Internet is of questionable validity or accuracy. Therefore, a more traditional means of obtaining information or teaching a particular subject may be required.

Because the Alleghany County School System cannot guarantee the educational value of information accessed electronically, instructional staff are expected to use sound judgment and discretion when planning for ITU.

C. ACCEPTABLE INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY USES AND GUIDELINES

1. General Acceptable Use

Alleghany County School System technology resources are to be used for educational, organizational, and communication purposes directly related to the System's educational mission and program. ITU should always be consistent with principles of effective pedagogy and with all other policies pertaining to proper instruction and technology use. Furthermore, instructional staff shall make reasonable efforts to supervise a student's use of the Internet and other electronic resources during school-sponsored activities.

2. Guidelines for Determining Acceptable ITU

The following criteria should guide the consideration and implementation of ITU:

- **Educationally Important and Appropriate**
Any ITU in question should be the most or one of the most effective ways of instructing students on a particular matter. It should also consider the age, maturity, and skill levels of student users. If another means of instruction exists that is more effective, it should normally be selected except for other compelling reasons. Technology should not be used as

end in itself; e.g., just because others are using it or because it is readily available or easy to use.

- **Administratively Manageable**
ITU should not require an undue consumption of resources (e.g., finances, time, supervision) compared to other traditional means of instruction. Generally, ITU should save time or offer better educational value compared to traditional instruction except when the ITU offers other compelling benefits. Instructional staff should be sufficiently skilled to implement the ITU effectively.
- **Operationally Compatible**
ITU should not interfere with, obstruct, or otherwise be incompatible with the network, hardware, or software used by the Alleghany County School System. Instructional staff should confer and, where necessary, obtain approval for ITU if there is a risk or uncertainty regarding the compatibility of a particular ITU.
- **Legally Permissible**
Instructional staff should be adequately informed of the legal principles applicable to ITU. Instructional staff should ensure that their ITU is legally permissible by confirming its propriety with and obtaining approval from appropriate supervisory staff or legal counsel in accordance with applicable procedural requirements. If uncertainty exists as to the legality of any ITU, instructional staff shall refrain from such use until proper approval is granted.
- **Locally and Logically Consistent**
ITU shall conform to all other Alleghany County School policies, rules, and practices and with general principles of sound pedagogy and prudent judgment.
- **Publicly Defensible**
Instructional staff should consider how any ITU would be viewed in the public eye, especially by the parental community. If reasonable doubt exists as to public perceptions of the ITU, instructional staff shall seek advanced approval from an appropriate supervisor and, when appropriate, from the parents of the students who would experience the ITU.

3. Creation and Publication of School-Related Webpages or Similar Web Content

Web pages produced, maintained, and/or supervised by instructional staff must conform to the all the School System's Web Page Development requirements and other applicable policies. Unless otherwise provided, instructional staff members responsible for a school web page are responsible for editing and controlling its

content. Such editorial control remains subject to review by the Superintendent, the principal or their designees.

4. Electronic Publication of Student-Authored Materials

Students may not post a webpage within, or linked from, another school webpage unless the student webpage is for instructional or other school-related purposes. Such student pages shall be subject to instructional staff supervision and control and, to the extent the page reveals information about the student or any other person associated with the Alleghany County School System, requires advanced approval from the principal or his or her designee.

5. Online Courses and Instruction

Any online course offered to students of The Alleghany County School System by one of its instructional staff members must conform to these and all other Alleghany County School policies. Additional procedures and requirements may also be established for such online instruction. The offering of any such course and corresponding rules and requirements shall be subject to advanced approval of the Superintendent or his or her designee.

Any online course offered to students by any person or organization not employed by or acting as an authorized agent of the Alleghany County School System shall be reviewed and approved in advance by the Superintendent or his or her designee. Such review shall include consideration of the course purpose, content, instruction, and means of delivery to ensure that such course is consistent with the educational and technological objectives of the Alleghany County School System. The Superintendent or his or her designee may develop special rules and requirements for such courses.

D. PROHIBITED USES

Instructional staff shall not engage in prohibited ITU. Prohibited ITU include any use that is contrary to the mission, objectives, conduct standards, and performance expectations of the Alleghany County School System. Such uses include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following:

1. Generally Prohibited Uses

General prohibited uses include those identified in the Alleghany County School System General Use Policy (Policy 10100) and other technology policies.

2. Unauthorized Use of Personal Technology Resources

Unless otherwise approved by an authorized school official, ITU shall not involve personally-owned electronic communication forums and devices or those owned, created, or operated for personal use. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of personal websites, e-mail addresses or networks, blogs, social networking sites, PDAs, or any other communication forum or technology device. Furthermore, school webpages shall not include links to student or employee personal webpages or other electronic communication forum without advanced approval by appropriate supervisory personnel and assurances that such use furthers an important educational purpose without creating a foreseeable risk of harm or liability.

3. Unapproved Uses

Instructional staff shall avoid any ITU that has not received proper advanced review and approval by supervisory staff or other authorized individuals. Each individual school shall establish authorization procedures for specific types of ITU in line with Alleghany County School System policy. In cases when uncertainty or ambiguity exists as to whether advanced approval is required for a particular ITU, instructional staff shall seek approval from appropriate supervisory staff for such use.

4. Unauthorized Opening of Free Speech Forums

Students do not shed their free speech rights when they are at school. However, their rights are limited because, under First Amendment Law, public schools are a “closed forum” with a defined purpose of educating students. Therefore, in ordinary circumstances, school officials may reasonably regulate and direct curricular matters and classroom activities (i.e., take actions that are “reasonably related” to any “legitimate” school purpose).

A school's “closed forum” might become an “open forum” and subject to greater First Amendment scrutiny if school officials or employees do anything that invites students, parents, or other members of the public to express their

viewpoints beyond the narrower boundaries of instructional assignments. For instance, a teacher who creates a website for posting student opinions, but does

not carefully define the purpose of the site and the rules for expression, might, in that instance, inadvertently “open” or “broaden” the speech forum. The effect of this action could render comments made on the site protected speech. This could be the case even if objectionable or offensive to some readers.

Thus, instructional staff shall not, without prior supervisory consideration and approval, prepare and implement ITUs such as a class blog site, listserv, chat room, or webpage that invites student expression beyond specific curricular boundaries. If permission for such a site is granted, the instructor shall clearly communicate to students or other users the limited educational or school-related purpose of such forum along with specific instructions and guidelines for conforming to that purpose.

No school electronic forum shall be “opened” or “widened” under the First Amendment without good reason and without careful supervisory deliberation and approval and, where necessary, the advice of legal counsel. Specifically, ITU shall be limited to strictly school-related purposes consistent with the educational objectives and policies of the Alleghany County School System. In all cases where reasonably feasible, ITU shall include a clear notice to students and other authorized users of the specific purposes, guidelines, and rules for engaging in the ITU.

5. Copyright Violations

The Alleghany County School System prohibits copyright violations. Instructional staff members are expected to exercise diligent care to ensure their use of ITU and that of their students does not violate this prohibition. The use of others’ materials is appropriate and, in fact, encouraged to accomplish legitimate instructional objectives when such use is properly approved by the property holder, is exempted by the copyright doctrine of fair use, is part of the public domain, or is permitted by other legal means.

Instructional staff should, in advance, consult appropriate supervisors and resources to determine how their planned ITU complies with copyright rules and exceptions. The Alleghany County School System and its principals shall strive to ensure that instructional staff are regularly notified and adequately informed of copyright principles and/or available resources in relation to ITU.

6. Safety and Confidentiality Threats

Instructional staff shall not engage in ITU that creates an undue risk of disclosure of confidential or sensitive student or other personal information, including but not limited to, disclosing student identifying information such as student names, contact information, grades, or pictures, unless a disclosure involves “directory information” or is otherwise properly approved.

7. Personal and Off-duty Uses that are Harmful, Disruptive, or Threatening

Instructional staff shall not, whether on or off duty, engage in personal communications or other electronic activities (e.g., the use of personal websites or other non-school pages or forums, personal social networking sites, personal blog sites, personal e-mail) when such use causes or is likely to cause harm, substantial disruption, or material interference related to any individual, operation, or property of the Alleghany County School System.

E. PROCEDURES

1. Notification, Awareness, and Training

Instructional staff members are expected to be familiar and to comply with these and other policies and procedures related to ITU. The Superintendent, Principals, or their designees shall strive to regularly inform and educate instructional staff regarding such policies and procedures.

2. Review and Approval of ITU

The Superintendent or his or her designee may develop rules and guidelines for reviewing, recommending, and approving ITU throughout the Alleghany County School System. Principals or their designees shall be responsible for determining what further rules and guidelines, if any, apply to ITU at their respective schools.

3. Waivers and Exceptions

Any instructional staff member may request a waiver or exception to any provision within this Instructional Use Policy pursuant to any employee grievance or other applicable procedure. Any request for a waiver or exception and any decision in response thereto, shall normally be documented in writing and a copy

provided to the Director of Technology of the Alleghany County School System and/or any other official designated by the Superintendent.

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