The board recognizes the importance of incorporating current technology tools, including new methods of electronic communication, into the classroom to enhance student learning. It further recognizes the importance of employees, students and parents engaging, learning, collaborating and sharing in digital environments as part of 21st century learning. The board strives to ensure that electronic communication tools incorporated into the school curriculum are used responsibly and safely. As practicable, the board will provide access to secure social media tools and board approved technologies for use during instructional time and for school-sponsored activities in accordance with policy 3225/4312/7320, Technology Acceptable Use.

The board acknowledges that school employees may engage in the use of social media during their personal time. School employees who use social media for personal purposes must be mindful that they are responsible for their public conduct even when not acting in their capacities as school system employees. All school employees, including student teachers and independent contractors shall comply with the requirements of this policy when using electronic social media for personal purposes.

For the purposes of this policy, "social media" includes, but is not limited to: personal websites, web logs (blogs), wikis, social network sites, online forums, virtual worlds, video-sharing websites and any other social media generally available to the public or consumers that does not fall within the board's technologies network (e.g., Web 2.0 tools, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube).

A. SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS INVOLVING STUDENTS

Employees are to maintain professional relationships with students at all times in accordance with policies 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations, and 7300, Staff Responsibilities. All electronic communications with students who are currently enrolled in the school system must be school-related and within the scope of the employees' professional responsibilities, unless otherwise authorized by this policy. School personnel may use only school-controlled technological resources and social media tools to communicate directly with students or to comment on student matters through use of the Internet. An employee seeking to establish a social networking website for school-related purposes must have prior written approval from the superintendent or designee and principal and meet the requirements of policies 3227/7322, Web Page Development, and 3225/4312/7320, Technology Acceptable Use.

The use of electronic media for communicating with students and parents is an extension of the employee's workplace responsibilities. Accordingly, the board expects employees to use professional judgment when using social media or other electronic communications.

Employees are prohibited from knowingly communicating with current students through a personal social network page. An internet posting on a personal social media website intended for a particular student will be considered a form of direct communication with that student in violation of this policy. However, an employee may communicate with a student using personal social media networks to the extent the employee and student have a family relationship or other type of appropriate relationship which originated outside of the school setting. For example, an employee may have a relationship with a niece or nephew, a student who is the child of an adult friend, a student who is a friend of the employee's child, or a member or participant in the same civic, social, recreational, sport or religious organization.

B. EMPLOYEE PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The board respects the right of employees to use social media as a medium of self-expression on their personal time. As role models for the school system's students, however, employees are responsible for their public conduct even when they are not performing their job duties as employees of the school system. Employees will be held to the same professional standards in their public use of social media and other electronic communications as they are for any other public conduct. Further, school employees remain subject to applicable state and federal laws, board policies, administrative regulations and the Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators, even if communicating with others concerning personal and private matters. If an employee's use of social media interferes with the employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties, the employee is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Employees are responsible for the content on their social media sites, including content added by the employee, the employee's friends or members of the public who can access the employee's site, and for Web links on the employee's site. Employees shall take reasonable precautions, such as using available security settings, to restrict students from viewing their personal information on social media websites and to prevent students from accessing materials that are not age-appropriate.

School employees are prohibited from accessing social networking websites for personal use during instructional time or with school system technological resources.

C. POSTING TO SOCIAL MEDIA SITES

Employees who use social media for personal purposes must be aware that the content they post may be viewed by anyone, including students, parents and community members. Employees shall observe the following principles when communicating through social networking sites:

1. Employees shall not post confidential information about students, employees or school system business.

2. Employees shall not list current students as “friends” on their personal social networking sites.

3. Employees shall not knowingly allow students access to their personal social networking sites that discuss or portray sex, nudity, alcohol or drug use or other behaviors associated with the employees’ private lives that would be inappropriate to discuss with a student at school.

4. Employees may not knowingly grant students access to any portions of their personal social networking sites that are not accessible to the general public.

5. Employees shall be professional in all internet postings related to or referencing the school system, students and other employees.

6. Employees shall not use profane, pornographic, obscene, indecent, lewd, vulgar or sexually offensive language, pictures or graphics or other communication that could reasonably be anticipated to cause a substantial disruption to the school environment.

7. Employees shall not use the school system’s logo or other copyrighted material of the system without express, written consent from the board.

8. Employees shall not post identifiable images of a student or student’s family without permission from the student and the student’s parent or legal guardian.

9. Employees shall not use internet postings to libel or defame the board, individual board members, students or other school employees.

10. Employees shall not use internet postings to harass, bully or intimidate other employees or students in violation of policy 1710/4021/7230, Prohibition Against Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying, or state and federal laws.

11. Employees shall not post inappropriate content that negatively impacts their ability to perform their jobs.

12. Employees shall not use internet postings to engage in any other conduct that violates board policy and administrative procedures or state and federal laws.

D. CONSEQUENCES

School system personnel shall monitor online activities of employees who access the Internet using school technological resources. Additionally, the superintendent or designee may periodically conduct public internet searches to determine if an employee has engaged in conduct that violates this policy. Any employee who has been found by the superintendent to have violated this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

The superintendent shall establish and communicate to employees guidelines that are consistent with this policy.

Legal References: U.S. Const. amend. I; Children's Internet Protection Act, 47 U.S.C. 254(h)(5); Electronic Communications Privacy Act, 18 U.S.C. 2510-2522; Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. 1232g; 17 U.S.C. 101 *et seq*.; 20 U.S.C. 6777; G.S. 115C-325(e); 16 N.C.A.C. 6C .0601, .0602; State Board of Education Policy TCP-C-014

Cross References: Prohibition Against Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying (policy 1710/4021/7230), Technology in the Educational Program (policy 3220), Technology Acceptable Use (policy 3225/4312/7320), Web Page Development (policy 3227/7322), Copyright Compliance (policy 3230/7330), Staff-Student Relations (policy 4040/7310), Staff Responsibilities (policy 7300)

Adopted: