

Expectations for Communicating Electronically with Students

The Lake County Tech Campus (LCTC) recognizes that today's students are deeply engaged in electronic forms of communication for their daily interactions with friends, family and their larger social networks. As educators, we too have turned to email, websites, blogs, text messaging, and use of social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, and others to communicate with similar groups. Whereas these forms of communications are dynamic, mobile, and quickly reach their audience through technologies that have become an integral part of our online lives, they may, in many circumstances, not meet the public and professional standards for communicating with students that we set for ourselves here at LCTC.

The expectations outlined in this document are designed for the purpose of:

- 1. Protecting the students, staff, and the District;**
- 2. Raising awareness of acceptable ways to use electronic communication tools when communicating with students; and**
- 3. Raising awareness of the positive and negative outcomes that may result in using these tools with students.**

The following is a set of expectations that all members of the LCTC professional community are expected to adhere to when communicating with students electronically.

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Does the communication pass the TAP Test?

Electronic communication with students should always be Transparent, Accessible and Professional as defined below:

1. **The communication is transparent.** – ALL electronic communication between staff and students should be transparent. As a public school district, we are expected to maintain openness, visibility and accountability with regards to all communications.

2. **The communication is accessible.** - ALL electronic communication between staff and students should be considered a matter of record, part of the school archives, and/or may be accessible by others.

3. **The communication is professional.** – ALL electronic communication from staff to student should be written as a professional representing LCTC. This includes word choices, tone, grammar and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a LCTC professional. Always choose words that are courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike in manner.

If your communication meets all three of the criteria above, then it is very likely that the methods of communicating with students that you are choosing are very appropriate; moreover, encouraged.

Acceptable Communications Methods

LCTC Email - Use of school email is always a very appropriate way to communicate directly with students and parents. School email provides the staff member with a record of the

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communication. For this reason, only the school-provided email system (your @techcampus.org) should be used. Please refer to the LCTC Email Standards for best practice guidelines in its use. *(Staff members experiencing difficulty receiving emails from students and parents via their school email account should first check their daily Spam Mail Summary to see if the emails have been inadvertently filtered. Should staff need further assistance, please contact the IT Dept.)*

School Websites and School Sponsored Communication Tools - The use of these school-provided tools is strongly encouraged. Their accessibility is ubiquitous and their content is highly transparent. All of the content is backed up and directly accessible. Unlike Facebook, any school approved tool would meet all three of the TAP criteria detailed above.

Less Acceptable Communications Methods

Text Messaging - Nearly every student has a cell phone today and use of text messaging is rising sharply. This form of communication is typically between individuals and highly personal. Since texting is such a quick and convenient way of communication, a simple message may lead to an extended texting conversation that can get “off topic.” **Staff members should be aware that text messaging between a staff member and an individual student can easily be misinterpreted by a parent.** If any staff member plans to use texting for immediate and urgent contact with students/team members, they must be transparent about such use. He/she must make parents aware at the beginning of the school year or season that he/she may use texting.

Unacceptable Communications Methods

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Non-School Email Accounts – LCTC employees should never use personal email accounts to communicate with students about school matters.

Online Games and Related Activities – While many people enjoy a variety of gaming systems (Wii, Xbox, etc.) and recreational websites that allow them to compete with others through the Internet, this is not an acceptable activity for staff members to engage in with students.

Using Facebook

How about setting up a Facebook Fan Page for my student groups?

A Facebook Fan Page, not a Facebook Group, can be appropriate as a supplemental method of communicating electronically with student groups if it is set up correctly. Unlike Facebook groups, Fan pages are visible to unregistered students and parents and thus indexed and easier to find. Be sure to follow the same school guidelines for publishing content to any website, in that photos of students are not posted in conjunction with their names or other personally identifiable information. Use your “@techcampus.org” email address to register as contact for the page so that any feedback or comments on the page are sent to the school, not to any personal email addresses.

If you decide to establish a fan page, be sure to notify the parents of your students that you’ll be using this site to communicate information for your group in addition to your other methods (websites, email, formal letters, etc.) and that these pages may contain commercial advertising that is not endorsed by the school. Since not every student has a Facebook page or even access to Facebook, you must consider this when posting to your page. LCTC cannot require students

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to have Facebook accounts, as this should be a family decision. Therefore, you must make any information posted on Facebook accessible to non-Facebook users by alternate means.

Important Reminders for Employees who use Facebook, Twitter, or other Social Media Sites for Personal Purposes

Staff members who are presently using Facebook to communicate with friends, family and their personal networks, should ensure that their privacy settings are set to “Only Friends.” If the “Friends of Friends” or “Networks and Friends” settings are used, staff members open their content to a much larger group of people, including students and parents. **Staff members should never “friend” students who are currently enrolled at LCTC, nor should you accept their “friend requests.”** The wall between the role of a public educator and personal friendships with students should always be visible and strongly communicated.

Any content staff members publish, pictures they post, or dialogue they maintain, whether in Facebook, Twitter, a blog, a discussion thread or other website, should never compromise the professionalism, integrity and ethics in their role as a LCTC professional. A good question that staff members should ask themselves before posting or emailing a message is, “Would I mind if that information appeared on the front page of the local newspaper?” If the answer is “yes,” then do not post it. Contrary to what some people think, email and social networking sites are very public places.

Staff members should contact a member of the Tech Campus Leadership Team with any questions.

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