

EMPLOYEE AND STUDENT USE OF SOCIAL
MEDIA AND OTHER FORMS OF ELECTRONIC
COMMUNICATION

PURPOSE: This policy describes the district's expectations regarding the use of social media, social networking, phone calls, the internet and other forms of electronic communications by district employees and students. The use of electronic media does not change the basic rules of professional conduct and student behavior. All policies and behavior guidelines currently applicable to students and employees similarly apply to the online environment and electronic communications. This policy should be read in coordination with all other district policies, including but not limited to those regarding student behavior, bullying, employee conduct, nondiscrimination, sexual harassment, professional ethics, other employment terms and conditions, as well as internet safety and appropriate use. Individuals engaging in inappropriate conduct through electronic communications may be subject to discipline.

"Social media" or "social networking" means an interaction with external websites or services based upon participant contributions to the content. Types of social media include social and professional networks, blogs, micro blogs, video or photo sharing and social bookmarking. "Comment" means a response to an article or social media content submitted by a commenter.

Electronic or digital communication includes, but is not limited to, emails, text messages, instant messages, direct messages, social media messages, messages sent through software applications, and any other electronic digital means of communication.

The employee-related requirements in this policy pertain to all employees, regardless of position, length of contract, or hours worked.

Good Judgment and Common Sense with Electronic Communications: Students and employees should use good judgment when using social media and other electronic communications. When they communicate electronically, students and employees should think about the type of image they wish to convey on behalf of themselves, and if applicable, the district. What is posted can be viewed by countless others and is permanently archived. Internet search engines can find information years after it was originally posted. Social media websites and blogs are never truly private. Comments can be forwarded or copied, and archival systems save information even if a post is deleted. Employees and students should be aware that people who electronically follow them have the ability to screenshot, download, forward or otherwise copy and share their message, post, information, video, and photographs with others. Employees and students are strongly encouraged to set and maintain social networking privacy settings at the most restrictive level.

Employees' Electronic Communications and Use of Social Media

General Cautions:

An employee's use of any electronic media for the purpose of communicating with a student or a parent is an extension of the employee's workplace responsibilities—even if that use or communication is on the employee's personal device or media. When employees are communicating informally and off contract hours or for purposes otherwise unrelated to work, they

may still be viewed by others as a representative of the district. Whether posting on social media using personal or district devices, or posting information during or outside of work hours, district employees are urged to carefully consider whether the post puts their professional reputation and effectiveness as a district employee at risk. The board expects employees to use professional judgment and appropriate decorum when using social media.

Employees are responsible for the content in their communications. They shall abide by the following requirements regarding use of social networking websites and other electronic communications, even when done in their personal time, using personal property.

- a. During work time, employees are permitted to use social media sites for incidental personal use and/or communications provided that such use shall not interfere with or conflict with district business, and such use does not occur during student contact time.
- b. District employees must be mindful that digital communications are ultimately accessible to the world. Employees are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the privacy policies, settings and protections on any personal social media sites to which they choose to subscribe. Employees should be aware that posting on websites, including social media sites, should not be presumed to be private.
- c. Employees are encouraged to maintain a clear distinction between their personal social media use and district-related social media sites.
- d. Employees may not disclose confidential or protected information about TPS, its students, alumni or employees. In particular, employees shall not post images, video or audio of students unless the parent/guardian has provided the student's building administrator with written permission to do so, or if it is otherwise allowed by the district's policies regarding student confidentiality. This prohibition does not apply to the context of virtual instruction insofar as official teaching and learning is occurring through the posting of images, video or audio. The provisions of this paragraph do not apply to any video or photography produced or available to the public by any individual not employed by or acting on behalf of the district or news media.
- e. An employee identifying as a District employee on social media who posts to sites outside of the district's network should include a disclaimer to state that the views expressed are personal and do not necessarily reflect the views of the district.
- f. Employees who have concerns or complaints about work- or personnel-related matters should speak with their supervisor or the district's talent management department, or as applicable, a representative of their employee organization. Employees should not use social media to address these concerns except as authorized by state and federal law.
- g. Inappropriate contact with colleagues, parents and students by e-mail, phone or other electronic devices is prohibited. This includes, but is not limited to, unprofessional communications, as well as any communication that harms students, compromises an employee's objectivity, undermines an employee's authority or ability to maintain control of students or work with or around students, is disruptive to the educational environment, or is illegal.
- h. Employees may not post items on social networking websites with sexual content or which advocate the use of illegal drugs or the abuse of alcohol if they are identifying themselves as an employee of the district.
- i. Employees are reminded that if their use of social media makes them aware of possible child abuse or neglect, they have a legal responsibility to promptly report the information to the Department of Human Services and law enforcement.

Maintaining Professional Employee-Student Boundaries in Electronic Communications

Warm and caring communications with students that incorporate clear and consistent professional boundaries support the best interests of students and employees alike. Employees must maintain appropriate professional boundaries in their electronic communications with students and prevent any appearance of inappropriate communication. In particular:

- a. Prior to the start of the school year, the superintendent's designee(s) shall compile a list of approved digital platforms for communications between district employees and students that are accessible by school/district leaders. The list will be posted on the district website and distributed to district employees. As feasible, the approved platforms will automatically include or otherwise allow parents/guardians to "opt in" to such communications.
- b. When an employee wishes to electronically communicate with a group of students, the district encourages the employee to use a district-approved digital platform.
- c. Any digital employee communication with an individual student **must** include the student's parent/guardian **unless** the employee is using a district-approved communication application **and** the communication relates to school and academic matters. Failure to do so is a violation of the law and this policy, and pursuant to state law, employees alleged to have violated this requirement shall be placed on administrative leave while the district investigates the incident and notifies the board of education. If the investigation finds that no misconduct occurred, the school personnel shall be reinstated and the incident shall be noted in the school personnel's employee file. If the investigation finds misconduct occurred, the school personnel shall be disciplined according to district policies, up to and including and including termination of employment, and the incident shall be reported to law enforcement as required by state law.
- d. Employees are strongly encouraged not to "follow" students' social media.
- e. Employees are encouraged not to link their personal social media profiles and personal sites to students' online profiles unless the employees are using district-registered accounts or accounts otherwise accessible to school or district leaders.

Caveat:

An employee may engage in otherwise unapproved forms of communication with an individual student in order to address an imminent health or safety emergency. However, the employee is expected to report the situation and the nature of the communication to the parent/guardian and the employee's supervisor as soon as possible. Also, this policy is not intended to interfere with communications involving legitimate, non-school-related relationships/contexts (e.g., situations in which the student and employee are family members, or the common communications that might occur within a shared civic, social or faith community).

Student Bullying and Electronic Communications

As explained in Board policy, students are expressly prohibited from any form of bullying or harassing behavior at school, which includes but is not limited to bullying through social media,

online instruction or other electronic communication. (See policy 2119 and its regulation 2119-R, as well as policy 4901 and regulation 4901-R). The district may take disciplinary action against a student for bullying and harassing behavior occurring outside of the regular school day if it causes a substantial and material disruption at school or an interference with the rights of students and personnel to be secure. Students should contact a teacher or an administrator any time they feel unsafe, victimized or uncertain about a situation involving threatening, bullying, inappropriate, illegal or harmful social media content. Parents and guardians should also inform the school leader if their student reports feeling harassed or bullied.

General Notice Regarding Access to District Network, Social Media and Other Electronic Communication Sites

Many social media and social networking websites are not accessible on the TPS network or TPS devices because they have been blocked. If employees, including teachers, would like to request that a website be made accessible to use for teaching and learning, that person shall submit a written request to the district's service desk for review, identifying the online tools to be used and the instructional purpose in using them. While on district property, neither TPS employees nor students may use an outside, proprietary network to access websites that are blocked on the TPS network. District technology, network and other technology-related resources (including the use of district-provided internet) is subject to examination whether accessed by a district or personal device.

Pursuant to its obligations under state and federal law, district leaders may require employees to provide them access to and copies of any electronic communications they use in the course of school business, including their communications with students or parents. Such communications include, but are not limited to: text messages, application-relating messaging, screen shots, content relating to a district student, and webpage posts. While an employee may be required to produce copies of all public records from their personal equipment, this policy does not authorize an administrator to inspect an employee's personal equipment without the employee's express consent.