Merchantville Board of Education 130 South Centre Street Merchantville, NJ 08109	File Code : 4119.26 / 4219.26 Proposed : 08/26/2014 Adopted : 09/09/2014 Revised : Reviewed : 05/06/2024

Electronic Communication by the School Staff

”Electronic communications,” for the purpose of this policy, means a communication transmitted by means of an electronic device including, but not limited to, a telephone, cellular phone, computer, computer network, personal data assistant, or pager. Electronic communications include, but are not limited to, e-mails, instant messages, and communications made by means of an Internet website, including social media and social networking websites. The chief school administrator/principals will annually remind staff members and orient new staff members concerning the importance of maintaining proper decorum in the on-line, digital world as well as in person. Employees must conduct themselves in ways that do not distract from or disrupt the educational process.

The annual orientation and reminder will give special emphasis to improper fraternization with students using electronic communications:

A. School employees may not list current students as “friends” on networking sites without written approval of the school principal;

B. All electronic contacts with students should be through the district’s computer and telephone systems;

C. All electronic contacts by coaches and extracurricular advisors with team members and members of extracurricular activities shall, as a general rule, be sent to all team members and activity participants;

D. School employees will not give out their private cell phone or home phone numbers to students without prior approval of the principal;

E. Electronic communications that are inappropriate and therefore prohibited include but are not limited to:

1. Items with sexual content;

2. Items exhibiting or advocating use of drugs, alcohol or other illegal activities;

3. Items that pertain to students, including confidential information;

4. Any content that significantly affects the employee’s ability to perform his/her job or disrupts the educational environment;

5. Any content that would violate district policies and procedures;

F. Examples of inappropriate behavior from other districts shall be covered and discussed, including behavior to avoid and the need for staff to use common sense in avoiding inappropriate and unprofessional behavior;

G. Staff shall have no expectation of privacy when using district technology, the district network and/or public social media venues;

H. The administration shall monitor for improper staff electronic communications on district computers, other school issued technology, and the district computer network;

I. Staff shall be informed of the consequences that may result from inappropriate electronic communications up to and including dismissal from employment.

The chief school administrator or designees may periodically conduct internet searches to see if staff

members have posted inappropriate materials on-line. When inappropriate use of computers and internet websites is discovered, the school principals and chief school administrator will seek to preserve the problematic or offensive material and will seek to maintain storage and chain of custody of the evidence. The chief school administrator/principal shall promptly bring that alleged misconduct to the attention of the board president.

Cell Phones

As a general rule, school staff shall not contact students' cell phones unless directed to do so by the parent/guardian or student. School district personnel shall limit cell phone interaction with students to contact that pertains to legitimate school business. Legitimate school business includes (but is not limited to):

A. Answering academic inquiries regarding homework, other classroom work or assignments;

B. Scheduling appointments for school related conferences and/or extra help;

C. Clarifying classroom expectations and/or assignments;

D. Notifications related to classroom, club or sports schedules, events, trips, assignments, and deadlines.

Cell phone contact with students shall be as brief and direct as possible. When brief contact is not sufficient and/or feasible to resolve the matter, where appropriate, teachers shall schedule face-to-face conferences during regular classroom and extra-help periods to confer with the student. No cell phone contact shall exceed three replies.

Text Messages

Any text messages by staff members, coaches and volunteers shall, as a general rule, be sent to the entire class, team, club or organization and not to any student individually. Exceptions may include situations involving confidential medical issues, emergencies or individual issues not involving the entire group. Staff shall not send messages containing material that:

A. May be perceived as profane, obscene, racist, sexist or promote illicit, illegal or unethical activity;

B. Violates the district's affirmative action policies (2224, 4111.1, 4211.1, and 6121);

C. Is personal in nature and not related to the business of the district;

D. Can be interpreted as provocative, flirtatious or sexual in nature;

E. Is confidential information and not authorized for distribution;

F. Violates board policy 5131.1 Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying.

Electronic Communication

School district personnel shall adhere to the following guidelines when sending or receiving messages via district owned or issued devices and the district network:

A. All messages shall pertain to legitimate school business;

B. Personnel shall not reveal district issued passwords to others. If a staff member believes that a password has been lost or stolen, or that email has been accessed by someone without authorization, he/she must contact the supervisor for technology or the principal;

C. District administrators shall have access to the employee's password or passwords for all district owned or issued devices and the use of the district network;

D. Electronic messages on school owned or issued electronic devices and the district network shall be retained for the period of time specified by the Destruction of Public Records Law and board policy 3570 Records (retained three (3) years for external correspondence and one (1) year for internal correspondence);

E. Federal copyright laws shall be observed;

F. Staff shall not send messages that contain material that:

1. May be perceived as profane, obscene, racist, sexist or promote illicit, illegal or unethical activity;
2. Violates the district's affirmative action policies (2224, 4111.1, 4211.1, and 6121);
3. Is personal in nature and not related to the business of the district;
4. Can be interpreted as provocative, flirtatious or sexual in nature;
5. Is confidential and not authorized for distribution;
6. Violates board policy 5131.1 Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying.

G. Personnel shall become familiar with the district's policies and regulation on staff and student access to networked information resources and acceptable use of technology (6142.10 Internet Safety and Technology) before initiating email use;

H. Employees learning of any misuse of the email systems shall notify the supervisor for technology, principal or chief school administrator immediately.

Online Education

An online classroom is still a classroom. Though courses and/or assigned programs of home instruction may be online, appropriate classroom behavior is still mandatory. Respect for the participants is essential for learning and student achievement.

Staff communications with students during online education will be limited to legitimate school business as set forth under cell phones, text messages and electronic communication, above. Professional standards and etiquette shall be observed at all times.

Key Words

Employee Conduct, Cell Phones, Text Messaging, E-Mail, Electronic Communication

Legal References: Use legal reference sheet.

Cross References: List your appropriate policies. See legal reference sheet for possibilities.

Legal References:

N.J.S.A. 2A:38A-1 et seq. Computer System

N.J.S.A. 18A:6-10 Dismissal and reduction in compensation of persons under tenure in public school system

N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties

N.J.S.A. 18A:27-4 Power of boards of education to make rules governing employment of teacher, etc.

N.J.S.A. 18A:36-35 Disclosure of certain student information on Internet prohibited without parental consent

N.J.S.A. 18A:37-13 et seq. Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act

N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20 Powers of board (county vocational schools)

N.J.S.A. 47:3-15 et seq. Destruction of Public Records Law

N.J.A.C. 6A:9-3.3 Professional standards for teachers

N.J.A.C. 6A:9-17.5 Grounds for revocation and suspension of certification

In the Matter of Certificate of Weidemoyer, Exam 2010 April 29.

In the Matter of Certificates of Stenz, Exam 2010: March 25.

In the Matter of the Certificates of Alan Chadrjian, Exam 2011: July 28.

In the Matter of Rhaney, Exam 2011: June 16.

In the Matter of Young, Exam: 2011: Sept 22.

In Re Cluggish, Exam 2011, Dec 16.

Possible Cross References:

*2224 Nondiscrimination/affirmative action

*3570 District records

*4111.1 Nondiscrimination/affirmative action

4117.50 Standards for staff discipline

*4119.21 Conflict of interest

*4119.22 Conduct and dress

*4119.23 Employee substance abuse

4119.24 Staff/pupil relations

*4131/4131.1 Staff development, inservice education, visitation, conferences

*4211.1 Nondiscrimination/affirmative action

*4219.21 Conflict of interest

*4219.22 Conduct and dress

*4219.23 Employee substance abuse

4219.24 Staff/pupil relations

*4231/4231.1 Staff development, inservice education, visitation, conferences

*5125 Student records

*5131 Conduct and discipline

*5131.1 Harassment, intimidation and bullying

*6121 Nondiscrimination/affirmative action

*6142.10 Internet safety and technology

*6144 Controversial issues

*6173 Home instruction

*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.