File: GBEE

STAFF USE OF TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

1. General Concerns

The North Middlesex Regional School District recognizes the proliferation and, in some instances, usefulness, of online conversation between staff and students and their parents or guardians. However, due to the nature of social networking sites, there exists a risk, without care and planning, that the lines between one's professional life and personal life will be blurred. Our staff should always be mindful of how they present themselves to the world, online and otherwise. Should a staff member engage in any electronic communication with students, the school district is concerned, and the staff member should be concerned, that such activities have the potential to undermine the staff member's authority to maintain discipline and to remain truly objective with their students.

In addition, any online communication using one's own personal resources, as opposed to school district resources, compromises the staff's, as well as the school district's, ability to retain public records in accordance with the requirements of the Commonwealth's public records laws. The law requires public employees who send, receive, or maintain records in their capacity as public employees to retain, disclose, and dispose of such records in compliance with strict provisions of the public records law. This law applies whether or not the record is in the form of a paper document or an electronic communication.

When staff members communicate through school-based resources, such as staff email, such records are retained and archived through the school's information technology department. If, however, a staff member communicates outside of these resources, such information is not retained. The burden falls on the staff member to comply with public records laws when using personal email or social network accounts to communicate with students and parents and guardians.

2. Acceptable Use Policy:

This policy is adopted in addition to, and not as a substitute for, the School District's Acceptable Use Policy, which governs the use of the school district's technological resources.

3. Expectations of Staff

With these concerns in mind, the NMRSD has instituted this policy and establishes its expectations for staff members' use of social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, personal email accounts, text message features of cell phones, use of blogs, and other electronic or technologically based communication systems. Note: Any school-based communication platform available shall have preferred use in order for the retention of public records.

A. **Establishing a Private Social Network Account**: Staff members should:

1) Deny any and all social network account access to any students, as well as parents and community members who are known only through the staff member's professional role in the district.
2) Take specific steps to "privatize" the information placed online.
3) Assume responsibility if any information deemed "private" becomes "public."
4) Be aware of the fact that any information shared privately with an individual could be redistributed without explicit consent.
5) Understand that the same principles applied to face-to-face communication should be applied to an online conversation.
6) Remember that nothing posted online is ever truly "private."

B. Setting Up **a Professional Identity:** The school district expects staff members to maintain a clear separation between their professional and personal lives. NMRSD staff members are prohibited from using personal social networking accounts to communicate with parents and students. Staff members who wish to utilize social networking tools for professional purposes should create separate professional social networking accounts for use with students, parents, and district community members. Suggested protocols:

1) Notify the Director of Technology and the Building Principal that a professional site has been established for school use.
2) Establish a professional social network identity that is separate from a "personal" identity.
3) Use the staff member's district-provided email for all professional social network accounts.
4) Use a professional social network identity and account for communication with students only on matters directly related to education.
5) Link all professional social network accounts to the school and district administration accounts for access to read any and all general messages.
6) Remember that the "friends" associated with such an educational social network account should only be members of the educational community, such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents of such students.
7) Add the official NMRSD page, if one exists, as a "friend" for every account that enables "friends."

C. **Student Privacy and Confidential Information:** At all times, and in the use of any form of communication, staff members will always adhere to student privacy rights and the rights of employees to have their personal and medical information kept confidential.

D. **Archiving Communication:** Staff members may only communicate with students and parents on educational matters using District-sponsored platforms. Remember that the district's email account can be accessed over the web and downloaded to personal devices. In most instances, it is expected that staff members will use the district's account for all school business keeping in mind that:

1) Use of one's personal email account to discuss school business with students and parents is prohibited.
2) Use of personal email for work purposes, as opposed to a school email account, does not shield such email from the provisions of the public records law or discovery in litigation. It only prevents the archiving of such messages through the school district's automatic email archiving system.

3) Any document created or received by a public employee in their professional capacity as such is subject to retention and possible disclosure under the public records law.
4) No matter what medium of communication a staff member selects, they must adhere to appropriate professional/student boundaries.

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E. **Free Speech Expectations**: This policy is not intended to infringe upon a staff member's right to speak publicly on matters of public concern**,** or to communicate with fellow members of their union on workplace issues, so long as such communication adheres to appropriate time, place**,** and manner restrictions and does not interfere with the performance of job duties.

1) When a staff member speaks via social networking sites or uses social media as a tool on matters concerning their work, they are speaking as an employee and not as a citizen.

3) If a staff member is communicating as an employee of the district, they must be aware that readers will assume that they speak for the school district. Therefore, all online communications must be professional at all times.

F. **Code of Conduct:** Any conduct, whether online or not, that reflects poorly upon the school district or consists of inappropriate behavior on the part of a staff member, may expose an employee to discipline up to and including discharge.

1) Even if a staff member is not using a school telephone, computer, classroom or the like to engage in contact with a student, they must remember that such contact is not outside of the school district's authority to take appropriate disciplinary action.
2) If a staff member's behavior is inappropriate, undermines their authority to instruct or maintain control and discipline of students, compromises their objectivity, or causes physical or emotional harm to students, the school district reserves the right to impose discipline.

G. **Restricted Use of School Resources:** Staff members may not access their private social networks accounts using school district technological resources.

Disclaimer: References to various social networks are not included to limit application of this policy to use of just those sites or programs. All online, electronic, telephonic, or computerized means of communication are subject to this policy. Given the rapid pace of technological change, it is not possible to identify all proprietary or commonly named or identified means of such communications.

CROSS REF.: IJNDD Policy on Facebook and Social Networking Web Sites

LEGAL REF.: M.G.L. 71:42

Adopted by the NMRSD School Committee:

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