Model Policy for Electronic Communications Between Employees and Students

I. Statement of Policy

LNSU recognizes electronic communications and the use of social media outlets create new options for extending and enhancing the educational program of the school district. However, LNSU recognizes employees and students can be vulnerable in electronic communications.

In accordance with Act 5 (2018), enacted to prevent the exploitation of students, this policy establishes guidelines for appropriate electronic communications between school Employees and Students.

II. Definitions. For purposes of this policy, the following definitions apply:

A. **Electronic communication**. Electronic communication is any exchange of messages using devices in which individuals exchange messages with others, either individually or in groups. Examples of electronic communication include, but are not limited to, email, text messages, instant messaging, direct messaging, scheduling applications, voicemail, and image sharing and communications made by means of an internet site, including social media and social networking websites.

B. **Social media**: Social media is any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication, including, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, websites and internet forums. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Tik Tok, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and Google+.

C. **Employee**: Employee includes any person employed directly by or retained through a contract of employment the district, an agent of the school, a school board member, and including supervisory union employees.

D. **Private Communication**: Electronic communications that are directed towards one person or small group of people on an approved platform.

E. **Public Posts**: Electronic communications that are directed towards one person or small group of people.

F. **Student:** Student means any person who attends school in any of the grades Prekindergarten through 12.

III. Policy on Electronic Communication Between Students and Employees.

All communication between employees and students shall be professional and appropriate. The use of electronic communication that is inappropriate in content is prohibited.

A. **Inappropriate content of an electronic communication**. Inappropriate content of an electronic communication between an Employee and a Student includes, but is not limited to:
   1. Communications of a sexual nature, sexual oriented humor or language, sexual advances, or content with a sexual inuendo;
   2. Communications involving the use, encouraging the use, or promoting or advocating the use of alcohol or tobacco, the illegal use of prescription drugs or controlled dangerous substances, illegal gambling, or other illegal activities;
   3. Communications regarding the employees' or student's past or current romantic relationships;
   4. Communications which include the use of profanities, obscene language, lewd comments, or pornography;
   5. Communications that are intimidating, or demeaning;
   6. Communications requesting or trying to establish a personal relationship with a student beyond the employees' professional responsibilities;
   7. Communications related to personal or confidential information regarding employee or student that isn't academically focused; and
   8. Private communications between an employee and a student between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. This restriction does not apply to public posts.

B. **Procedures.** The superintendent shall develop procedures for both the receipt and handling of reports filed under this policy (see IV. A. and B. below).

IV. Administrative Responsibilities

A. **Employee communications violation of this policy.** School, school district, and supervisory union staff shall be prohibited from utilizing social media for communication with students directly unless the program or platform is approved for such communication by the school district or independent school; provided, however, that any approved communication program or platform shall allow school officials to archive all communications and prevent all communications from being edited or deleted once a communication has been sent. School,

school district, and supervisory union staff shall also refrain from requiring students to use social media for out-of-school academic work, school sports, extracurricular clubs, or any other out-of-school school sponsored activities. In the event an employee sends an electronic communication that is inappropriate as defined in this policy or that violates the procedures governing inappropriate forms of electronic communication to a student, the student or student's guardian may submit a written report of the inappropriate communication ("Report") to the principal and/or the person designated by the principal to receive complaints under this policy promptly. The report shall specify what type of inappropriate communication was sent by the employee with a copy of the communication, if possible.

Inappropriate electronic communications by an employee may result in appropriate disciplinary action.

B. **Student violation of this policy.** In the event a student sends an electronic communication, that is inappropriate as defined in this policy or that violates the procedures governing inappropriate forms of electronic communication to an employee, the employee shall submit a written report of the inappropriate communication ("Report") to the principal or designee by the end of the next school day following actual receipt by the Employee of such communication. The principal or designee will take appropriate action to have the student discontinue such improper electronic communications.

   While the school district will seek to use such improper electronic communications by a student as a teaching and learning opportunity, student violation of this policy may subject a student to discipline. Any discipline imposed shall take into account the relevant surrounding facts and circumstances.

C. **Applicability.** The provisions of this policy shall be applicable at all times while the employee is employed by the district and at all times the student is enrolled in the school district, including holiday and summer breaks. An employee is not subject to these provisions to the extent the employee has a family relationship with a student (i.e. parent/child, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, etc.).

D. **Other district policies.** Improper electronic communications may also constitute violations of other policies of the district, (i.e. unwelcome sexual conduct may also constitute a violation of the school's separate policy on the Prevention of Harassment, Hazing and Bullying of Students, and/or the Policy for the

Prevention of Sexual Harassment as Prohibited by Title IX). Complaints regarding such behavior should be directed as set forth in those separate policies and procedures.

V. Reporting to Other Agencies

A. **Reports to Vermont Department of Children and Families (DCF)**. When behaviors that violate this policy include allegations of child abuse, any person responsible for reporting suspected child abuse under 33 V.S.A. §4911, et seq., must report the allegations to the Commissioner of DCF. If the victim is over the age of 18 and a report of abuse is warranted, the report shall be made to Adult Protective Services in accordance with 33 V.S.A. §6901 et seq.

B. **Reports to Vermont Agency of Education (AOE)**. If behaviors that violate this policy in a public school involve conduct by a licensed educator that might be grounds under Vermont law for licensing action, the principal shall report the alleged conduct to the superintendent and the superintendent shall report the alleged conduct to the AOE.

C. **Reporting Incidents to the Police**. Nothing in this policy shall preclude persons from reporting to law enforcement any incidents and/or conduct that may be a criminal act.

D. **Continuing Obligation to Investigate**. Reports made to either DCF or law enforcement shall not be considered to absolve the school administrators of their obligations under this or any other policy (such as the Policy on the Prevention of Harassment, Hazing and Bullying), to pursue and complete an investigation upon receipt of notice of conduct which may constitute a policy violation.

Date Warned: October 12, 2026
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