

Social Networking Policy of the Milton Public Schools

I. Internet Acceptable Use Policy still in force

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

II. General Concerns

It is the policy of the Milton Public School District to maintain the professionalism and appropriateness of electronic and/or online communications between students and staff, teachers and coaches at all times. The District recognizes that there are efficient and appropriate means of communication available to staff/teachers/coaches who need to contact students. The Superintendent and the School Principals will annually remind staff members and orient new staff members concerning the importance of maintaining proper decorum in the online, digital world as well as in person. Employees must conduct themselves in ways that do not distract from or disrupt the educational process and which uphold the values and policies of the Milton Public Schools.

The Milton Public Schools recognizes the proliferation of online communication and that such conversation may occur between teachers and students and/or 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. It is important that teachers, staff and coaches are always able to retain the authority and ability to maintain discipline, encourage appropriate behaviors and to remain truly objective with his or her students.

In addition, any online communication using one's own personal resources, as opposed to school district resources, compromises the teacher'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 or school sponsored web pages, such records are retained and archived through the school's information technology department. If, however, a teacher communicates outside of these resources, such information is not retained. The burden falls on the teacher to comply with public records laws when using personal email or social network accounts to communicate with students and/or parents and guardians.

III. Expectations of Staff

With these concerns in mind, the Milton Public Schools has instituted this “Social Networking Policy,” and announces its expectations for staff members’ use of social networks including but not limited to Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, personal email accounts, cell phones/smartphone, texting, use of blogs, and other electronic or technology-based communication systems.

It is acknowledged that there may be instances where communication with personal cell phones or via personal email is warranted. These actions should only occur when necessitated by school-related matters outside of regular school hours and may not be personal in nature. In such limited circumstances, the district anticipates that teachers will make reasonable use of their cell phones/smartphones to convey time-sensitive information on scheduling issues and the like.

Examples of situations which might be appropriate to involve the provision of a personal phone number to a student and/or the collection of one or more student phone numbers are:

a) a field trip where a teacher might provide one or more students with the number in case a group of students might get separated from the main group

b) a coach who needs to contact or convey information to team captains, or send an emergency text message to the team

c) at school-sponsored events for which teachers serve as duly appointed advisors and may need to convey messages in a timely manner to students and may not have access to school-based email accounts, school-provided telephones or school-based web pages.

Except as articulated above in this section, teachers are discouraged from using home telephones, personal cell phones/smartphones or personal email accounts to communicate with students. Your communications with students, even if you do not use school resources for such communications, are within the jurisdiction of the school district to monitor as they arise out of your position as an educator. 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. Even if you are not using a school telephone, computer, classroom or the like to engage in contact with a student, such contact is not outside of the school district’s authority to take appropriate disciplinary action. If your behavior is inappropriate, undermines your authority to instruct or maintain control and discipline with students, compromises your objectivity, or harms students, the school district reserves the right to impose discipline for such behavior. A teacher may also face individual liability for inappropriate online communications with students and/or parents and guardians, as well as exposing the district to vicarious liability in certain instances.

The following is a representative list of **guiding principles, procedures and specific prohibitions of this** policy:

- Improper interactions with students using social media and similar internet sites, social networks, or via smartphone or other electronic communication devices.

a) All electronic contacts with students should be through the district's computer and telephone systems, except in emergency situations.

b) All contact and messages by coaches with team members shall be sent to all team members **or to team captains**, except for messages concerning medical or academic privacy matters, in which case the messages will be copied to the athletic director and the school principal. It is appropriate for teachers and/or coaches to send a group mail email alert to notify parents/guardians of club or sport cancellations or time changes using an official school email account unless an urgent situation requires the use of a personal email account ***as noted above***.

- Teachers, staff and coaches may not list current students as "friends" on networking sites.

- Staff/teachers/coaches shall not respond to social network invitations from current students.

- Teachers, staff and coaches will not give out their private cell phone or home phone numbers without prior approval of the District ***or as noted above***.

- Teachers may not access their personal email accounts **except to access a calendar such as Google Calendar to schedule appointments with a parent or a student** or private social networking accounts using school district computer resources.

- Posting items with sexual content.

- Posting items exhibiting or advocating use of drugs and alcohol.

- Posting examples of inappropriate behavior from other districts as behavior to avoid.

Before endeavoring to establish any social networking account, teachers should familiarize themselves with the features of any account they choose to use. For example, Facebook requires account holders to take specific steps to "privatize" the information they place online. You must educate yourself to these features of Facebook or any other social networking site you select. You will be responsible should any information you intended to be "private" becomes "public" due to your own ignorance of the features of the social network you have decided to use or your failure to properly use such features.

You **should also be aware** that any information you share privately with a recipient could be re-distributed by such recipient, without your knowledge or consent. The same principles you apply to in-person communication should be applied to online conversation: use discretion, and

do not place your trust in individuals who have not proven themselves trustworthy. In essence, nothing you post online is ever truly “private.”

The school district expects you to keep the line between your professional life and your personal life clearly drawn at all times. There is no reason why this cannot be done, even in light of the proliferation of social networking sites. All that is required is some forethought before using social networking for both your professional and personal life, to be sure that these lines never become blurred. Advance approval to create a school/class social network account should be obtained from the responsible school principal. The School Principal will notify the Superintendent of any such requests. Once approval is obtained, the educator should only use his/her educational social networking account to communicate with students and/or parents and guardians on matters directly related to education. The “friends” associated with such educational social networking account should only be members of the educational community, such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents of such students. It is required that teachers will reject “Friend” requests from individuals who do not fit into any of these categories.

At all times, and in the use of any form of communications, staff members will always adhere to student privacy rights and the rights of employees to have their personnel and medical information kept confidential. Information that is protected by law from disclosure to third parties will not be communicated online in a way that unreasonably exposes such information to retrieval by those third parties. For example, through an educational social networking account, a teacher may not post confidential student information on the “wall,” the “information” section, or through any part of the social networking account that could be accessible by other “friends” associated with that account. If a teacher wishes to communicate privately with a student through the educational social networking account, such communication shall be conveyed only through the private email/message feature of the social networking account, so that only the student may view the message and respond to it.

Teachers are encouraged to communicate with students and parents on educational matters only, and only through school-based resources, such as school-provided email or web portal accounts. It should be noted that, just because a teacher uses his/her personal email as opposed to a school email account, this does not shield such email from the provisions of the public records law or from discovery in litigation. It only prevents the archiving of such messages through the school district’s automatic email archiving system. We again remind teachers that information sent or received by them, even through personal email or social network accounts, that are related to their capacity as a school employee, are still subject to public records retention, exemption and disclosure requirements.

If a teacher conveys school-related messages to students and parents/guardians on his/her private account, he/she should save such email or any communication conveyed through a social networking site, or print and save a paper copy of such email or other online communication, and file it, and safeguard its privacy, as he/she would any other document concerning that student. The teacher should forward copies of any such emails or online communications to his or her school based email account so that it can be properly retained and

archived in compliance with the requirements of the public records law. Any document created or received by a public employee in his or her capacity as such is subject to retention, and perhaps disclosure under the public records law.

No matter what medium of communication a teacher selects, he/she should adhere to appropriate teacher/student boundaries. You are a role model, not a student's friend, you are his/her teacher, and you should always conduct yourself in accordance with this understanding.

This policy is not intended to infringe upon a teacher'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 complies with any applicable laws, policies or regulations. However, when you speak via social networking sites or tools on matters concerning your work, you are speaking as an employee of the Milton Public Schools and as such restrictions may be placed upon your freedom to express yourself. Those restrictions are intended to preserve student confidentiality, maintain your status as an educator who should command and receive the respect of students, be able to maintain order and discipline in your classroom, and remain objective with respect to your students.

If you are communicating as an employee of the district in your online communications, you must be aware that readers will assume you "speak for the school district." Therefore, all of your online communications, when you are actually acting on behalf of the district, or creating the appearance that you are doing so, must be professional at all times and reflect positively on the school district.

In the use of any social networking site, you may not, without express permission from the superintendent of schools, use the school's logo, likeness or any school photographs or other property that belongs to the school.

All online, electronic 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.

The Superintendent or her/his designees will periodically conduct internet searches to see if teachers, staff or coaches have posted inappropriate materials online. When inappropriate use of computers and websites is discovered, the School Principals and Superintendent will promptly bring that inappropriate use to the attention of the staff member and may consider and apply disciplinary action up to and including termination. Any such discipline will be conducted in accordance with collective bargaining agreements and state and federal law.

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