

SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Purpose:

The Wilmington School Committee (the “Committee”) recognizes the increasing importance of electronic communication and social media for social interaction and education. As the Wilmington Public Schools (the “WPS”) continues working to provide a 21st century education which prepares students for life in a global economy, it has become apparent that we need to move ahead with both enthusiasm and caution. With the expansion of means and ease of communication comes a heightened concern for student safety and well-being.

While the Committee sees the value of social media and electronic communication, the Committee also recognizes that the opportunity for impropriety is increased through this ease of access. This accessibility can provide a forum for cyber bullying, inappropriate behavior, and other potential dangers. The Committee finds that the rapid progress of technology leaves it and the District frequently facing new challenges regarding social media and electronic communication.

The Committee is charged with ensuring our schools’ educational environments are safe and conducive to learning. Recognizing this, the Committee has adopted this policy.

Definitions:

Social Media: Any medium hosted on the Internet, on which interactions between students, or between the staff of the WPS and students can be conducted. This includes, but is not limited to, web- and mobile-based technologies that support interactive communication between organizations, communities, and individuals that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media technologies take on many different forms including, but not limited to, on-line magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogs, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking, and message boards. Examples of social media websites include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, MySpace, Wiki and Wikipedia.

Electronic Communication: Any communication or interaction which occurs through electronic means. Such electronic means include, but are not limited to, computers, tablets, cellular devices, so-called “smart phones”, and Internet capable MP3 players, etc. Such communications and interactions include, but are not limited to, email, texts, posts on social media websites (including text, video and audio), private messages on social media websites, instant messages, video chat, and blogs, etc. Electronic communications include communications that have no specific intended recipient (i.e., posting a “status” on Facebook that, depending on privacy settings, may be viewed by a group of users).

Student: Any individual currently enrolled in the WPS.

Prohibited Conduct: Staff shall not engage in the following types of conduct, which are strictly prohibited. The following are examples of conduct only and are not intended to be all inclusive. Any conduct which is similar to that listed below is likewise prohibited.

- a. Fraternalization with students using any social media or electronic communication. Staff may not invite/accept current WPS student as “friends” on social media websites. Classroom participation on educational websites or professional pages (described herein) for instructional purposes is permitted with prior approval of the principal or his/her designee.
- b. Electronic communication to students of content of a sexual or other inappropriate nature. This includes posts on social media websites that are publicly visible or accessible, and/or visible or accessible to any student or group of students.
- c. Electronic communication to a student(s) of content advocating the use of alcohol, drugs, and/or other illicit or illegal activities between students and staff. This includes posts on social media websites that are publicly visible or accessible, and/or visible or accessible to any student or group of students.
- d. Electronic communication to students of content encouraging or constituting hazing or bullying. This includes posts on social media websites that are publicly visible or accessible, and/or visible or accessible to any student or group of students.
- e. Electronic communication of private information regarding students or other staff, including, but not limited to, student record information, private cell phone numbers, private photos and pictures, and private email addresses. This includes posts on social media websites that are publicly visible or accessible, and/or visible or accessible to any student or group of students.

The District: The Wilmington Public Schools and its staff.

The Committee: The Wilmington School Committee and its members.

Staff: All employees of the WPS and any contractor or individual employed by a contractor who provides services in or to the WPS.

Section 1. Statement to WPS Staff

The Committee recognizes that social media and electronic communication have valuable functionality both in and outside of the classroom. This policy is not intended to limit any staff member’s right to speak publicly as a citizen on matters of public concern, or to communicate with fellow union members 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.

Notwithstanding this, when staff members speak through social media on matters concerning their work, they are speaking as employees and, as such, restrictions may be placed upon their freedom to express themselves. Staff members are role models, not students' friends, and should always conduct themselves in accordance with this understanding.

Section 2. Responsibilities of the Committee, the Superintendent, and the Administration

a. Responsibilities of the Committee

1. The Committee is responsible for maintaining, implementing, and updating this policy.
2. The Committee will support the efforts of the Superintendent and the Administration to act upon this policy in a timely manner.
3. The Committee will require the Superintendent to periodically report upon the results, consequences, and concerns related to this policy.
4. When necessary, the Committee will update this policy, pursuant to the recommendations of the Superintendent or other relevant parties.

b. Responsibilities of the Superintendent and the Administration

1. The Superintendent of Schools will develop and maintain an Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). It will be the responsibility of the Superintendent to work with representatives from the staff to review this policy annually and propose updates when appropriate.
2. The Superintendent and the Administration retain the right to monitor all activity on district related social media, all activity on WPS owned equipment (i.e., computers, tablets, etc.), and all activity on WPS's network for the purpose of maintaining the safety of students and staff and to ensure that this policy is followed by all staff members.
3. The Superintendent and the Administration will have all staff read and review this policy at the beginning of each school year.

Section 3. Communication Media

a. Cellular Telephones and Text Messaging

Background:

Staff employed by Wilmington Public Schools are charged with, among many things, maintaining a safe educational environment for students. Although staff members should not generally provide their personal contact information such as cellular and home telephone numbers, there are limited instances described herein where it may be appropriate to give out this

information. Staff who lead school sponsored trips or organize events that require travel are expected to maintain a line of communication with students and parents and may do so by providing their personal cell phone number to student participants and/or their parents. The purpose of this limited exchange of personal information is to protect student safety during travel. Upon request, a staff member leading school sponsored trips or organized events may also obtain a district cell phone for temporary use.

Procedures:

1. Prior to providing any student with his/her home and/or personal cell phone number, a staff member shall inform the school's principal or his/her designee and obtain prior authorization.
2. Staff members shall communicate to students and their parents that the staff member's personal cell phone number is being provided for educational, informational, or safety purposes only.
3. Staff members who provide students with personal contact information shall explain the limited reason it is being provided and shall report any unauthorized use of this information by students, or parents/guardians (i.e., a student contacts the staff member via personal cell phone for an unauthorized purpose) to the principal or his/her designee immediately.

b. Email Communication

Background:

Email communication has become a standard way of conveying information between parties. Email communication refers to any electronic mail or messaging done over the Internet.

Procedures:

1. Staff may communicate with students, staff, parents, PTO's, , and members of the community through district owned email addresses regarding issues pertaining to their role as employees of the WPS. Other professional communication may include blogs, wikis, webpages, virtual classrooms and similar forums. All communication is to remain professional in nature at all times.
2. Staff shall not provide their personal email addresses to students.
3. Staff teaching in grade levels 4 through 12 shall not request students' personal email addresses, nor shall they intentionally direct any communications to personal email addresses provided by students. District owned email addresses have been provided to students in grade levels 4-12 and all email communication between staff and these students shall be directed through district owned email addresses.
4. Staff of all schools whose students have received e-mail addresses shall notify parents that the WPS has provided students with school email addresses as part of the curriculum. Parents must be informed that their child is to use the email address assigned. District email accounts

for students in any grade are only to be used to communicate with WPS students and staff, not with the public at large.

5. All email communication sent from a public entity (i.e., using a WPS owned computer, network, email address, etc.) are part of the public record, may be disclosed, and may be monitored by the District for any reason without notice. Users of district-owned email addresses and networks should have no expectation of privacy in the content of communications on district-owned email addresses.

c. Social Media, Webpages, and Applications

The increased proliferation of social media has provided the WPS with the opportunity to utilize these websites and applications as educational tools. It is a goal of the District's strategic plan to engage students through both traditional media as well as through the use of technological immersion, creating 21st century global citizens. Our goal is to integrate technology with the curriculum through modeling best practices, mentoring, using study groups, developing online formats and creating and updating technology related policies.

The Wilmington Public Schools utilizes tablet based technology in many schools. Recognizing that some applications or "apps" may have social networking properties, the use of any application where students must register personal information must be documented with the principal or his/her designee and the Director of Technology. COPPA law prohibits the use of services which require personal information of children under 13. The use of social media, webpages and applications by staff and students together shall be strictly for educational purposes only. Personal communication between students and staff via social media, webpages and applications shall be limited to educational purposes.

d. Use of Photographs

1. Staff shall not use, copy, disseminate or share in any manner, including via social media, photos or videos of students where the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) has selected to opt out by completing and submitting the form for the Privacy Law in the online Student Contact Update application in the Aspen Parent Portal. This information is available to staff from your school's main office.
2. Staff must keep in mind that videos and images of students may constitute "student records" within the meaning of federal and state law.
3. Staff shall not identify students by their full name in any photograph at any time.

e. Social Networking Websites.

1. An employee's use of any social networking site and an employee's postings, displays, or communications on any social media network must comply with all state and federal laws and

any applicable District policies as well as adhere to the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA).

2. Staff wishing to use a social media profile for both personal and educational purposes must maintain separate personal and professional work profiles.
3. Staff shall not "friend", follow, message, or engage students in any way on social media websites via their personal accounts.
4. Staff shall use privacy settings on individual social media websites to prohibit access by students and parents to their personal social networking pages. There is now case law that confirms that a failure to understand the way a communication system operates is no excuse for professional misuse (*Sumien v. CareFlite*, 2012). Staff will be responsible should any information that is intended to be private becomes public due to a lack of understanding of the privacy features of the social network used or a failure to use such features competently.
5. Staff may only create professional social media accounts (i.e., accounts used exclusively for educational purposes) on district approved websites and platforms. The direct link to these pages must be provided to the principal or his/her designee and to the WPS Director of IT once it is created. The Director of IT will provide staff with a list of approved websites and platforms at the beginning of each school year and an updated list as needed.
6. Staff shall not communicate with students via the direct messaging feature of any social media site, but rather only communicate through district provided email accounts or social media posts that are publicly accessible via the staff member's professional account on a district approved website or platform.
7. Staff shall report any inappropriate use of these sites by students to their district administrator immediately.
8. Staff must cite links to all sources of information from third parties posted on professional social media webpages.
9. Staff must notify parents of the use of professional accounts on social media sites, and provide students who are unable to access content hosted on these sites with the relevant information necessary for participation in the class through other means (i.e., hand-outs, email, etc.).
10. Staff members' who have children currently enrolled in the WPS may use their personal social media accounts to connect with their child or children.

f. Blogs, Wikis, Class Pages, etc.

1. Staff may use blogs, wikis, or any other website for instructional purposes, including but not limited to homework pages and blog pages.

2. Staff shall provide the web address of his/her page to the principal or his/her designee before disseminating the address to students.
3. Staff shall identify students only by their first names on these pages.
4. Staff shall notify parents of the use of these pages and provide students who do not have access with alternative means of obtaining the information provided over these pages (i.e., hand-outs, email, etc.)..
5. Staff shall cite all sources of content they provide on these pages and comply with applicable copyright laws and other applicable intellectual property laws.

Section 4. Public Records Law and Copyright Protection

The Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has determined that 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.

- a. Staff shall not delete any message posted on a social media site, webpage, blog, homework page, etc.
- b. Staff shall comply with applicable copyright laws when posting information produced by another person or entity and shall cite all third-party sources of information posted or shared.
- c. Use by a staff member of his/her personal e-mail rather than school e-mail does not shield such e-mail from the provisions of the public records law or from discovery in litigation. The staff member 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 public records law. In order to respect privacy, a student's name should be avoided in any communications that includes sensitive information about students.

Section 5. Student and Staff Conduct

The district has multiple policies regarding student and staff conduct which overlap with this policy. The Committee and Administration recognize that the use of electronic communication technology in an educational setting presents new challenges to appropriate student and staff conduct. However, behavioral expectations will not be diminished in these settings and appropriate professional boundaries shall be maintained at all times and through all means of communications. As such, the District retains the right to moderate and restrict student and staff use on District related pages. The Committee and the Administration expect staff and students to maintain the same level of decorum in electronic communications, including the use of social media, as in face-to-face interactions. This policy is intended to supplement existing policies, not to supersede them.

- a. Bullying and Cyber Bullying

The Committee and WPS are committed to maintaining a safe learning environment for all students. With regard to bullying, please see Policy Section JICFB - Bullying Prevention, and, in particular, references to cyber bullying. Cyber bullying of any kind will not be tolerated.

b. Acceptable Use of School Equipment and Networks

The Committee and WPS are committed to maintaining the security of WPS networks, the quality of WPS equipment, and the privacy of WPS students. This policy is supplementary to, and not a substitute for, the WPS Acceptable Use Policy, which governs use of the school district's technology resources.

c. Student Manuals

At the beginning of each school year the building administrator shall post the student handbooks which detail the expectations of behavior for WPS students and set rules for student conduct on the school's website. Nothing contained in this Policy shall diminish those expectations and rules. The on-line behavior of both students and staff shall reflect the same standards as those used for face-to-face communications at the WPS.

Section 6. Discipline

The Superintendent or assigned designees may conduct internet searches to determine whether staff members have used social media in ways that violate this Policy. If a violation of the Policy is determined to have occurred, the Superintendent or assigned designee shall bring the violation to the attention of the staff member and shall consider and apply disciplinary measures up to and including termination. The disciplinary process for staff shall proceed in accordance with any applicable collective bargaining agreement under which the staff member is covered, as applicable.

The WPS and the Committee disclaim all liability for the content of materials that users access on Social Media, for damages suffered in the course of or as a result of social media use, and for any related consequences. The WPS shall not be responsible for any unauthorized use of the District's network, including any and all unauthorized costs, financial obligations, fees, charges, or purchases.

References:

Massachusetts General Laws. (Current). Public Records Law G.L. Chapter 66. Massachusetts General Laws. MA, United States.

U.S. Code. (2000, December 21). Children's Internet Protection Act, 47 U.S.C. §254 (CIPA).

U.S. Code §6501, et seq. (COPPA). (1998). Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, 15 U.S.C. §6501, et seq. (COPPA).

17 U.S.C. § 101 et. seq. (Copyrights)

15 U.S.C. § 6501 et. seq.

Children's Internet Protection Act of 2000 (CIPA) 47 U.S.C. § 254

47 C.F.R. § 54.520 (FCC rules implementing CIPA)

Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, 20

U.S.C. §1601, et seq., as amended.

Acknowledgements:

Longmeadow Public Schools Acceptable Use Policy Draft (2013, April 8)

<http://www.longmeadow.k12.ma.us/news/draftacceptableusepolicy>

Triton Regional School District Acceptable Use Policy. (2014, April 30)

<http://www.trsd.net/wpfb-file/jre1048-acceptable-use-policy-agreement-pdf-4/>

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