

DUDLEY-CHARLTON REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

POLICY

Social Networking

EDC

1. Internet Acceptable Use Policy still in force

This policy is adopted in addition to, and not as a substitute for, the Dudley-Charlton Regional School district's Internet Acceptable Use Policy, IJNDB and IJNDBA, which governs the use of the school district's technological resources.

2. General Concerns

The Dudley-Charlton Regional School District recognizes the proliferation and, in some instances, usefulness of online conversation between staff members and students or between staff and students' parents/guardians. However, due to the nature of social networking sites, there exists a risk that, without care and planning, appropriate boundaries may not be maintained between one's professional life and personal life, and between staff and students. Staff members must always be mindful of how they present themselves to the world online and otherwise.

Should a staff member *friend* a student on Facebook, subscribe to a student's Twitter account, regularly engage in email chat with a student, exchange text messages with students, or engage in other electronic communication, the district is concerned, and the staff member should be concerned, that such activities may undermine the staff member's authority to maintain discipline, may encourage inappropriate behaviors and may compromise the staff member's ability to remain reasonably objective in dealings with his/her students and the assessment of these students. As district staff, we should also be mindful of the risks posed to students' and others' rights of privacy and confidentiality, to other staff members, and to the district in the event of unreasonable or illegal breach of such rights, whether intentional or caused by a failure to exercise due care.

3. Expectations of Staff

With these concerns in mind, the district has adopted and will publish this Social Networking Policy so as to clearly inform the staff and others of the district's expectations and requirements concerning 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.

1. Before endeavoring to establish any social networking account, a staff member should carefully familiarize himself or herself with the features of any such account. For example, Facebook requires account holders to take specific steps to privatize the information they place online. Staff must educate themselves to these features of Facebook or any other social networking site selected. Staff will be held responsible should any information intended to be private become public due

to ignorance of the features of the social network he/she has decided to use or his/her failure to properly use such features.

2. District staff must also know that any information intended to be shared privately with a recipient could be redistributed by such recipient, or become public due to the staff member's knowledge or consent. The same principles that apply to in-person or written communication must be applied to online and other electronic communication. In essence, nothing posted online or electronically communicated is ever truly private.
3. Employees of the district are required as a condition of employment to keep the boundary line between professional life and personal life clearly drawn. Despite the proliferation of social networking sites the district maintains the expectation that its staff members will exercise the requisite forethought in all electronic communications to be sure that the aforementioned boundary line never becomes blurred.

For example, if the district does not maintain a web portal for communications with students and families and a staff member wishes to establish a Facebook account through which he or she will communicate, he or she should establish a Facebook identity that is separate from his/her personal Facebook identity. He/she must use his/her educational Facebook account, exclusively, to communicate with students and their families on matters directly related to education being provided by the district. The *friends* associated with such educational Facebook account should be limited to members of the educational community, such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents/guardians of such students. Staff members must reject *friend* requests from individuals who do not fit into any of these categories.

4. At all times, and in the use of any form of communication, staff members must maintain student privacy rights and the rights of employees and others to have their personal and medical information kept confidential. Information that is protected by law from disclosure to third parties shall not be communicated in a way that unreasonably exposes such information to access or retrieval by those third parties. (For example, no such information shall be sent online or by other electronic communication unless adequately encrypted.) By way of illustrative example only, a staff member shall not post confidential student information on the *wall*, the information section or any part of an educational Facebook account that may be accessible to another staff member's Facebook friends associated with that account. If a staff member wishes to communicate on matters directly related to education provided by the district privately with a student through the educational Facebook account, such communication shall be conveyed only through the private email/message feature of Facebook, so that only the student may view the message and respond to it.
5. As to any matter relating to education the district is providing a student, staff members are to communicate electronically with students and parents/guardians

only through school-based resources, such as school-provided email or web portal accounts. Use of one's personal email account to discuss school business with students and parents/guardians is prohibited. It should be noted that when a staff member uses his/her personal email account the communication falls within the provisions of the Massachusetts Public Records Law as well as being subject to discovery in litigation in certain circumstances. As one consequence (among others), all the staff member's personal emails would have to be searched in the event of public records request, and in the event of ambiguity much of the staff member's personal communication could well become public. Such use of personal email also prevents the archiving of such messages through the district's automatic email archiving system and might well result in a staff member and/or the district having to conduct a very expensive and time consuming search in response to such a request.

Staff is also discouraged from using home telephones and personal cell phones to communicate with students and their families. The provisions in #5 above, except to the extent that a particular telephonic communication does not generate a written document, apply to telephonic communication as well. And staff members at all times must bear in mind that cellular telephones do not provide secure communication, but on the contrary are susceptible to being intercepted or inadvertently overheard by third parties at any time. No conversation relating to a confidential matter shall ever be conducted by cellular telephone except in case of an immediate emergency which precludes any other reasonable method of communication, and in the event of such an emergency communication the staff member shall prepare and submit to his or her immediate supervisor, without any avoidable delay whatsoever a written report detailing in full the need for and content of the communication.

6. If a staff member were to inadvertently convey a school-related message to a student or parent/guardian on the staff member's private account, the staff member must save such email to his/her school email account or print and save a paper copy of such email and file it in the appropriate school file, and maintain its confidentiality as he/she would any other document concerning that student. Any document created or received by a public employee in his or her capacity as such is subject to Commonwealth and federal laws regarding retention and disclosure except as specifically exempted under the public records law, as well as to discovery by court order in certain circumstances.
7. No matter what medium of communication a staff member selects, he/she should adhere to appropriate staff member/student boundaries. Staff members are role models, not students' friends. District employees are expected to always conduct themselves in accordance with this understanding.
8. 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 your job duties. However, when district employees speak via social networking sites or tools on matters concerning work, they speak as employees and not as citizens, and certain restrictions apply to their freedom of expression. Those restrictions are intended to preserve student safety and confidentiality, and to maintain an employee's status as a staff member who should: (a) command and receive the respect of students, (b) be able to maintain order and discipline in the classroom, and (c) remain objective with respect to their students.

9. The district has, expressly reserves, and in any situation it deems appropriate will exercise: (a) the requisite authority to monitor all communications which arise out of or in connection with one's position as an employee, including all such referenced above in the manner permitted by law; and (b) its right to take appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including discharge from employment, due to inappropriate behavior, such as failure to adhere to the standards and limitations set forth in this policy, including by way of example only, any such which undermines an employee's authority or ability to instruct or maintain control and discipline of students, compromises his/her objectivity, or is harmful to a student's safety or best interest. The district also reserves the right to advise appropriate legal officials of any violation of law. Employees should also be mindful at all times that any inappropriate communication may give rise to liability for oneself (e.g. for defamation or unreasonable invasion of privacy) and that the district could be sued in connection with same and thus incur costs of defense and other possible loss and expense. Any staff member who becomes aware of a violation of this policy should immediately notify his or her immediate supervisor of same.
10. Staff members should not access their private Facebook or other social networking accounts using school district computer resources.
11. When communicating as an employee of the district, or concerning any subject matter which falls, or which a person could reasonably perceive as falling, within the ambit of one's duties as such an employee, one must be aware that a reader may assume that he or she speaks for the district or may judge the quality of the education provided by the district based thereon. Therefore, all communications in any such circumstance must be professional at all times and must not reflect negatively on the services which the district provides any student nor communicate any information which the employee knows, or with reasonable care should know, is inaccurate.
12. In the use of a Facebook account or other social networking site or blog, a district employee may not, without express permission from the superintendent of schools or his/her designee, use the school's logo, likeness, or any school photograph or other property belonging to the school, nor, in violation of the law, post or include any material protected by copyright or trademark. In no event shall a district

employee include in any communication or posting on such an account or site, information which would allow a third party to ascertain information about a student which might place the student at risk. By way of example only, this would include a student's photograph with identifying information such as address, telephone number, birth date, school that the student attends, etc.

(No reference to Facebook herein is intended to limit application of the policy's provisions to use of that program. 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, so this policy is to be broadly construed in such a way as to effectuate the purposes expressed in Section 2 above and expressed in or reasonable to be inferred from other sections of the policy.)

Adopted September 14, 2011

Proposed for Amendment: First reading, June 25, 2014

Second reading, July 16, 2014