

## 4282 USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND OTHER FORMS OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

The Board of Education has a strong commitment to quality education and the well-being of all pupils, as well as the preservation of the school district's reputation. The Board believes staff members must establish and maintain public trust and confidence and be committed to protecting all pupils attending the school district. In support of the Board's strong commitment to the public's trust and confidence, the Board holds all staff members to the highest level of professional responsibility.

The Commissioner of Education has determined inappropriate conduct outside a staff member's professional responsibilities may determine them as unfit to discharge the duties and functions of their position. Staff members should be advised communications, publications, photographs, and other information appearing on social networking sites deemed inappropriate by the Board could be cause for dismissal of a non-tenured staff member or to certify tenure charges against a tenured staff member to the Commissioner of Education.

Staff members are advised to be concerned and aware such conduct deemed inappropriate may include, but is not limited to, communications and/or publications using e-mails, text-messaging, social networking sites, or any other form of electronic communication that is directed and/or available to pupils or for public display or publication.

While the Board respects the right of staff members to use social networking sites, staff members should recognize they are held to a higher standard than the general public with regard to standards of conduct and ethics. It is important that a staff member's use of these sites does not damage the reputation of the school district, employees, pupils, or their families. Staff members, who utilize, post or publish images, photographs, or comments on social networking sites, blogs, or other forms of electronic communication outside their professional responsibilities shall ensure their use, postings, or publications are done with an appropriate level of professionalism and are appropriate conduct for a school staff member. Staff members should exercise care in setting appropriate boundaries between their personal and public online behavior, understanding that what is private in the digital world often has the possibility of becoming public even without their knowledge or consent.

The school district strongly encourages all staff members to carefully review the privacy settings on social networking sites they use and exercise care and good judgment when posting content and information on such sites. Staff members



should adhere to the following guidelines, which are consistent with the district's workplace standards on harassment, pupil relationships, conduct, professional communication, and confidentiality.

When using personal social networking sites, school staff members:

1. Should not make statements that would violate any of the district's policies, including its policies concerning discrimination or harassment;
2. Must uphold the district's value of respect for the individual and avoid making defamatory statements about the school district, employees, pupils, or their families;
3. May not disclose any confidential information about the school district or confidential information obtained during the course of his/her employment, about any individual(s) or organization, including pupils and/or their families;
4. Shall not use social networking sites to post any materials of a sexually graphic nature;
5. Shall not use social networking sites to post any materials, which promote violence;
6. Shall not use social networking sites, which would be detrimental to the mission and function of the district;
7. Are prohibited from using their school district title as well as adding references to the district in any correspondence including, but not limited to, e-mails, postings, blogs, and social networking sites without the permission of the superintendent or designee unless the communication is of an official nature and is serving the mission of the district. This prohibition also includes signature lines and personal e-mail accounts;
8. Shall not post updates to their status on any social networking sites during normal working hours including posting of statements or comments on the social networking sites of others during school time unless it involves a school project. Employees must seek



approval from the Superintendent of Schools, principal or supervisor for such use; and

9. Shall not post or publish any information the Commissioner of Education would deem to be inappropriate conduct by a school staff member.

The Policy of this district is to maintain a level of professionalism, both during and after the school day. Any publication through any means of electronic communication, which is potentially adverse to the operation, morale, or efficiency of the district, will be deemed a violation of this Policy. If the Board or Superintendent believes that a staff member's activity or posting of pictures on any social networking site violates the district's policies, the Board or Superintendent may request that the employee cease such activity. Depending on the severity of the incident, the staff member may be subject to disciplinary action.

This Policy has been developed and adopted by this Board to provide guidance and direction to staff members on how to avoid actual and/or the appearance of inappropriate conduct toward pupils and/or the community, while using social networking sites.

The Superintendent and the School Principal will annually remind staff members and orient new staff members concerning the importance of maintaining proper decorum in the on-line digital world including social networks such as, but not limited to: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, blogs, etc. Employees must conduct themselves in a way that does not distract from or disrupt the educational process. Employee must be reminded to use good judgment and use caution in their personal use of social networking sites regarding the information and pictures they post on social networking sites. The orientation and reminders will give special emphasis to:

A. Improper fraternization with students using social networking websites on the internet:

1. Teachers may not list currently enrolled high school students as "friends" on networking sites;
2. All e-mail with students must be through the district's computer and/or servers;



3. Teachers must use discretion when sharing their private phone numbers; this information should be used and shared for legitimate school business only;
  4. Inappropriate contact via e-mail or phone is prohibited.
- B. Inappropriateness of posting items with sexual content;
  - C. Inappropriateness of posting pictures of students;
  - D. Inappropriateness of posting items exhibiting or advocating use of drugs and alcohol;
  - E. Examples of inappropriate behavior to be avoided such as, but not limited to: sharing passwords, sending offensive or obscene language/pictures, using harassing language, violating copyright laws, etc;
  - F. Penalties for improper use of district computers, technology and social networking websites;
  - G. Penalties for failure to exercise good judgment in on-line conduct.

## Telephone Contact with Students

School district personnel shall limit cell phone interaction with students to emergencies or contact that pertains to legitimate school business.

Legitimate school business includes, but is not limited to:

- A. Answering academic inquiries regarding homework, other classroom work or assignments;
- B. Scheduling appointments for school related conferences and/or extra help;
- C. Clarifying classroom expectations and/or assignments;
- D. Notifications related to classroom, club or sports schedules, events, trips, assignments and deadlines.
- E. Inquiries as to a student's well-being following an accident/illness/family tragedy or personal traumatic experience.



Phone contact with students shall be as brief and direct as possible. When brief contact is not sufficient and/or feasible to resolve the matter; teachers shall schedule face to face conferences during regular classroom and extra-help periods to confer with the student. Contact should not exceed three replies.

## Text Messages

Staff members, coaches or volunteers shall use discretion when sending a text message to any student individually. We encourage all text messages to be sent to the entire class, team, club or organization. Contact should not exceed three replies. Staff shall not send messages that contain material that may be defined by a reasonable person as profane or obscene; that are racist, sexist or promote illicit, illegal or unethical activity; or messages that:

- A. Violate the district's affirmative action policy;
- B. Are personal in nature and not related to the business of the district;
- C. Can be interpreted as provocative, flirtatious or sexual in nature;
- D. Contain personal and confidential information to persons not authorized to receive that information.

## Computer Communication

School district personnel shall adhere to the following guidelines when sending or receiving messages via internal or external e-mail:

- A. Personnel shall not reveal passwords to others. If a staff member believes that a password has been lost or stolen, or that e-mail has been accessed by someone without authorization, he/she should contact his/her supervisor immediately, e-mail windows should not be left open on the screen when the computer is unattended;
- B. Staff shall not send messages that contain material that may be defined by a reasonable person as obscene; that are racist, sexist or promote illegal or unethical activity; or messages that:
  - 1. Violate the district's affirmative action policy;



2. Contain personal and confidential information to persons not authorized to receive that information.
- C. Personnel shall become familiar with the district's policies and regulations on staff and student access to networked information resources before initiating e-mail use;
  - D. Employees learning of any misuse of the e-mail systems shall notify the superintendent, their supervisor or the principal immediately.

## Implementation

A copy of this Policy shall be made readily available to all staff members.

The superintendent or designees will periodically conduct internet searches to see if teachers or staff members have posted inappropriate materials on-line and/or when informed that teachers or staff members may have posted inappropriate materials on-line. When inappropriate use of computers and websites is discovered, the superintendent or designee will download the offensive material, investigate and determine how best to proceed. Penalties include, but are not limited to: a written reprimand, suspension, salary increment withholdings, tenure charges and/or dismissal.

Misuse of the internet or other electronic communications during school hours and/or with school equipment may be reported to law enforcement authorities.

## Legal References:

- N.J.S.A. 18A:6-10 Dismissal and reduction in compensation of persons  
under tenure in public school system
- N.J.S.A. 18A:25-6 Suspension
- N.J.S.A. 18A:29-14 Salary increment withholding
- N.J.S.A. 18A:28-5 Tenure
- N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties
- N.J.S.A. 18A:27-4 Power of boards of education to make  
rules governing employment of  
teacher, etc., employment there under
- N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20 Powers of board (county vocational  
schools)

Hicks v. Pemgerton Board of Ed., 1975 S.L.D. 332



# POLICY

## NORTHERN HIGHLANDS BOARD OF EDUCATION

West Orange Board of Ed. v. Lieb 1985 SLD 933

Board of Ed. of the Boro of Madison v. Grundfest, 3/29/2000, rv'd. by the State Board

Quiroli v. Linwood Board of Ed., 1974 S.L.D. 1035

Carlstadt Teachers Assn. v. Carlstadt Board of Ed., App. Div., unreported decision  
Docket No. A-1469-80-T4, decided March 26, 1982, 1982 S.L.D. 1448

Adopted: 20 August 2012

