

**Digital Communication and Use of Social
Networking Sites by Teaching Staff****M**

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**3282 DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND USE OF SOCIAL
NETWORKING SITES BY TEACHING STAFF**

The Westfield 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 teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors 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 teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors to the highest level of professional responsibility.

The Commissioner of Education has determined inappropriate conduct outside a teaching staff member's, coach's or extracurricular advisor's professional responsibilities may determine them as unfit to discharge the duties and functions of their position. Teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors should be advised the use of internet social networks and digital communications deemed inappropriate by the Board could be cause for dismissal of a non-tenured teaching staff member, coach or extracurricular advisor or to certify tenure charges against a tenured teaching staff member to the Commissioner of Education.

Definitions

For purposes of this policy, "digital communications" are those communications transmitted electronically through a computer, cell phone, or other electronic device. These include, but are not limited to, communications and/or publications using e-mails, text-messaging, instant messaging, or any other form of digital communication that is directed and/or available to pupils or for public display or publication.

While the Board respects the right of teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors to use social networking sites and digital communication, teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors 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 teaching staff member's, coach's and extracurricular advisor's use of these tools does not damage the reputation of the school district, employees, pupils, or their families. Teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors who utilize, post or publish images, photographs, or comments on social networking sites, blogs, or other forms of digital communication outside their professional

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responsibilities shall ensure their use, postings, or publications are done with an appropriate level of professionalism and represent appropriate conduct for a teaching staff member, coach or extracurricular advisor. Teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors 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 teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors 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. Teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors 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 social networking sites or digital communication, teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors:

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 post or publish any materials of a sexually graphic nature, that exhibit or advocate drug or alcohol use or illegal or unethical activity;
5. Shall not post or publish any materials which promote violence;
6. Shall not list current students as "friends" or otherwise connect with current students on personal social networking sites although web or group pages may be created for a district-recognized class, extra-curricular club or athletic team;

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7. Shall not post or publish any materials that may be defined by a reasonable person as profane or obscene;
8. Shall not post or publish any materials that are racist or sexist;
9. Shall not use social networking sites or publish digital communications which would be detrimental to the mission and function of the district;
10. Are prohibited from using their school district title in a manner that is contrary to the mission of the district or not-of an official nature. This prohibition also includes signature lines and personal e-mail accounts. A teaching staff member or coach must use their district title when communicating in an official nature.
11. Shall not post updates to their status on any social networking sites during normal working hours (not including a teaching staff member's lunch period) including posting of statements or comments on the social networking sites of others during school time unless it is related to a school sponsored event; and
12. Shall not post or publish any information the Commissioner of Education would deem to be inappropriate conduct by a teaching staff member or coach.

Teaching Staff Members, Coaches and Extracurricular Advisors Use of Cell Phones to Conduct the Business of the District

As a general matter, teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors shall not give out their private cell phone numbers without prior approval of the building administrator or appropriate program supervisor. Teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors shall limit cell phone interaction with students to contact that pertains to legitimate school business. Legitimate school business includes:

1. Answering academic inquiries regarding homework, other classroom work, or assignments;
2. Scheduling appointments for school related conferences and/or extra help;

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3. Clarifying classroom expectations and/or assignments;
4. Notifications related to classroom, club or sports schedules, events, trips, and assignment deadlines; and
5. Emergency situations that arise on district-approved events and field trips.

Cell phone contact with students shall be as brief and direct as possible.

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 digital 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 teaching staff member's, coach's or extracurricular advisor's activity on any social networking site or any use of digital communication violates the district's policies, the Board or Superintendent may request that the teaching staff member, coach and extracurricular advisor cease such activity. Depending on the severity of the incident, the teaching staff member, coach or extracurricular advisor may be subject to disciplinary action.

This Policy has been developed in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:36-40 and adopted by this Board to provide guidance and direction to teaching staff members, coaches and extracurricular advisors on how to avoid actual and/or the appearance of inappropriate conduct toward pupils and/or the community while using social networking sites and digital communication.

N.J.S.A. 18A:36-40

First Reading: June 17, 2014

Adopted: August 26, 2014