

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

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**4282 DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND USE OF SOCIAL
NETWORKING SITES BY SUPPORT 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 support 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 support staff members to the highest level of professional responsibility.

The Commissioner of Education has determined inappropriate conduct outside a support staff member's professional responsibilities may determine them as unfit to discharge the duties and functions of their position. Support 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 support staff member or to certify tenure charges against a tenured support staff member to the Commissioner of Education.

Support staff members are advised 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 digital communication that is directed and/or available to pupils or for public display or publication.

While the Board respects the right of support staff members to use social networking sites, support 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 support staff member's use of these sites does not damage the reputation of the school district, employees, pupils, or their families. Support staff members who utilize, post or publish images, photographs, or comments on social networking sites, blogs, or other forms of digital communication outside their professional responsibilities shall ensure their use, postings, or publications are done with an appropriate level of professionalism and represent appropriate conduct for a support staff member. Support 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.

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The school district strongly encourages all support 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 digital communication, school support 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 to post 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;
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 which would be detrimental to the mission and function of the district;

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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 support staff member 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 support 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 school staff member.

Support Staff Members Use of Cell Phones to Conduct the Business of the District

As a general matter, support staff members shall not give out their private cell phone numbers without prior approval of the building administrator or appropriate program supervisor. 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 staff member's activity 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 in accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:36-40 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 digital communication.

First Reading: June 17, 2014

Adopted: August 26, 2014