

### **Employee Use of Electronic Communication Tools**

The Board of Education of the Dubuque Community School District recognizes the importance of employees, students, and parents engaging in learning, collaborating, and sharing in digital environments, fostering a community of continuous growth and innovation. The Board of Education strives to ensure that electronic communication tools are used responsibly and safely.

The Board of Education recognizes that school employees have First Amendment rights to free speech and may use social media, during their personal time, to express these rights. However, these rights are not absolute and can be limited under certain circumstances. All school employees, including student teachers, must comply with this policy when using social media for professional or personal purposes. Employees are responsible for their public behavior, even when not acting in their official capacities as school employees. Employees must remain aware that they are accountable for their public behavior, even when not acting in their official roles as school system employees. All school employees, student teachers, and independent contractors whose roles involve direct interaction with students or may reasonably be perceived as acting in an official capacity on behalf of the school district, shall adhere to this policy when using social media for personal purposes. All existing policies and behavior guidelines that cover employee conduct on the school premises and at school-related activities similarly may, depending on the circumstances, apply to an online environment.

For purposes of this policy, 'electronic communications' include, but are not limited to: social media platforms, personal websites, web logs (blogs), wikis, social network sites, online forums, virtual worlds, video-sharing websites, as well as SMS/text messaging, and email. This also encompasses any communication tools generally available to the public or consumers that do not fall within the district's technologies network (e.g., Web 2.0 tools, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat, YouTube, WhatsApp, and collaboration platforms like Apple FaceTime, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom).

#### **A. Employee Speech Rights**

Employees retain the rights to speak as private citizens on matters of public concern subject to limitations necessary to maintain the effective operation of the District and its educational mission.

The District may generally discipline employees for personal social media when:

1. The speech is made pursuant to official job duties (e.g., where the speech is directly related to the employee's job functions or duties or the employee is otherwise speaking in their official capacity); or
2. The speech substantially disrupts school operations and/or the school climate, impairs working relationships, or undermines trust in the employee's professional capacity. There must be a clear and documented connection between the speech and an actual disruption or impairment within the educational setting.

## B. Electronic Communications Involving Students

All electronic communications with students who are currently enrolled in the District must be school-related, conducted using District-controlled technological resources, and fall within the scope of the employees' professional responsibilities. Employees should document and retain any and all communication with students. The following are recommended when communicating with students:

- 1) *School-Related Communication* - Must be conducted using District-controlled technological resources and within professional responsibilities that are monitored and archived. Personal electronic communication tools are prohibited for communicating with students for school-related matters.
  - *Examples:* Using the school's email system to send homework assignments or updates about class projects.
- 2) *Private Communication* - Must be open, transparent, and conducted using District resources. Parent/guardian must be copied on the communication, and it should occur between 5:00 AM and 10:00 PM. Personal electronic communication tools are prohibited.
  - *Example:* Sending a Microsoft Teams link for a virtual teaching session and copying the student's parent/guardian on the email.
- 3) *Group Communication* - Can occur without copying parents/guardians if at least two or more District staff members are included in the communication. If only one staff member is included in the communication, a parent/guardian must be copied. Communication should occur between 5:00 AM and 10:00 PM. Personal electronic communication tools are prohibited.
  - *Example:* A group chat on Microsoft Teams for a class project, including two teachers and all students.
- 4) *Private Social Media* - Employees must discontinue any existing personal social media connections with District students. However, an employee may communicate with a student using personal social media networks to the extent the employee and student have a family relationship or other type of relationship that originated outside of the school setting and is known by the student's parent/guardian.
  - *Example:* An employee may have a relationship with a niece or nephew, a student who is the child of an adult friend, or a student who is a friend of the employee's child.
- 5) *Group Social Media* - Teams/groups/classes may have dedicated pages on social media platforms (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, etc.) if all members and their parents/guardians are invited to join or if the page is "public." Private messages on these platforms must follow the Private Communication guidelines stated herein.
  - *Example:* Creating a Facebook group for the school's drama club where all members and their parents are invited to join.

6) *Prohibited Personal Communication:* **Employees are prohibited from communicating directly with current District students through personal electronic communication tools.**

- Example: Using personal phone numbers to text students.
- Example: Using personal Snapchat, Tik Tok, Instagram, Facebook, or WhatsApp accounts to communicate with students.

### **C. Posting Content on Social Media**

Employees are responsible for the content they post or allow to be posted on their personal social media accounts and other electronic communication platforms. This includes not only posts made by the employee but also content shared by family members, friends, or others with access to the employee's accounts.

To help protect students and maintain professional boundaries, employees are strongly encouraged to use privacy settings on their social media accounts to limit student access to personal content that may not be appropriate for a school setting. Employees should be mindful that social media posts can be seen by a wide audience, including students, parents, and community members, and therefore should exercise caution when sharing personal information or opinions.

Additionally, employees must be aware of the potential long-term impact of their online presence. Posts and comments, even if deleted, may still be accessible or viewed by others and could affect their professional reputation and relationships within the school community.

Employees who use social media for personal purposes should adhere to the following principles:

- 1) Employees must not post confidential information about students, families, employees, or District business.
- 2) Employees should not list current students as “friends” on social networking sites or “follow” students on social networking sites unless covered by an exception.
- 3) Employees shall not engage in inappropriate contact with students through social networking sites, email, text messaging, direct messaging, or phone calls. All communication should be professional, utilizing District electronic communication tools, and within the scope of their duties as District employees.
- 4) Employees must not allow students access to their personal social networking sites that discuss or portray:
  - a. Depicts alcohol, drug use, nudity, sexual content, or other material inappropriate for minors; or
  - b. Would reasonably undermine the employee’s professional role if seen by students.
- 5) Employees shall not use profane, pornographic, obscene, indecent, lewd, vulgar, or sexually offensive language, pictures, memes, or graphics, or any other communication that could reasonably be anticipated to cause a substantial disruption to the District’s learning environment.

- 6) Employees must not use the District's logo or other copyrighted material affiliated with the District without express consent from the District's chief communications officer.
- 7) Employees must not post identifiable images of a student or the student's family without written permission from the student's parent or legal guardian.
- 8) Employees must not use internet postings to libel or defame the Board, individual Board members, superintendent, students, families, or other District employees.
- 9) Employees must not use internet postings to harass, bully, or intimidate other students or employees, in violation of board policy 1001 Anti-Bullying/Anti-Harassment, or state and federal laws.
- 10) Employees must not use personal social media to conduct political activity during working hours or using District resources, in accordance with Iowa law.
- 11) Employees must not post content that substantially impacts their ability to effectively perform their official job duties or substantially disrupts the school environment as stated in Section A.
- 12) Employees must not use internet postings to engage in any conduct that violates board policy, administrative procedures, or state and federal laws.

This policy does not restrict personal political advocacy, religious expression, or other forms of constitutionally protected speech, provided it does not substantially interfere with the employee's job duties, occur during instructional time, or use District resources.

#### **D. Consequences**

When inappropriate use of electronic tools is suspected, District personnel will investigate. Employees will be afforded due process, including the opportunity to respond to allegations. This will include a written notice of the nature of the disruption or impact and an opportunity to address the issue in a timely manner. If an employee's use of social media is found to be in violation of this policy, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action specific to the nature of each violation. Examples of progressive disciplinary actions that may be taken against the employee include:

- *Verbal Warning* - A discussion with the employee about the inappropriate use of electronic tools and expectations for future conduct.
- *Written Warning* - A formal written notice outlining the violation and the consequences of further infractions.
- *Mandatory Training* - Requiring the employee to attend training sessions on appropriate social media use and professional conduct.
- *Probation* - Placing the employee on a probationary period during which their conduct and performance are closely monitored.
- *Suspension* - Temporary removal from job duties with or without pay for a specified period.
- *Termination* - Ending the employee's contracted employment with the District.

Nothing in this policy is intended to:

1. Limit the First Amendment rights of employees;
2. Prevent employees from communicating about matters of public concern; or
3. Interfere with rights under the Iowa Public Employment Relations Act, including discussion of working conditions.

The District will ensure all enforcement of this policy is consistent with constitutional, statutory, and contractual protections.

Adopted: August 11, 2025