Electronic Communication Guidelines
SUPPLEMENT TO
PLATTE COUNTY R-3 SCHOOL DISTRICT
EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK 2015-16
ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

Relevant Board Policy Information
Reference Board Policy GBH – Student/Staff Relations, GBCB – Staff Conduct, EHB – Technology Usage

Staff members are encouraged to communicate with students and parents/guardians for educational purposes using a variety of effective methods, including electronic communication. As with other forms of communication, staff members must maintain professional boundaries with students while using electronic communication regardless of whether the communication methods are provided by the district or the staff member uses his or her own personal electronic communication devices, accounts, webpages, or other forms of electronic communication.

The district’s policies, regulations, procedures, and expectations regarding in-person communications at school and during the school day also apply to electronic communications for educational purposes, regardless of when those communications occur. Staff communications must be professional, and student communications must be appropriate. Staff members may use electronic communication with students only as frequently as necessary to accomplish the educational purpose.

Staff members may communicate with students using district-provided forms of communication without first obtaining supervisor approval. These communications may be monitored. With district permission, staff members may establish websites or other accounts on behalf of the district that enable communications between staff members and students or parents/guardians. Any such website or account is considered district sponsored and must be professional and conform to all district policies, regulations, and procedures.

Employees should also note that all social media/communication sites (even personal sites) can fall under the Staff Conduct board policy and can be included in your evaluation or used as grounds for disciplinary action.

Employees are personally responsible for the content they publish online – both on personal posting as well as professional postings. Be mindful that your online behavior should reflect the same standards and values that you use face-to-face.

Use of Photos in Electronic Mediums

Please ensure photos/movies do not contain students that are on the district’s “opt-out” list. Each building should keep a log of those students/staff that do NOT wish for photos/videos of them to be shared.

Also remember not to use copyright protected images. Images should either be your own or available under Creative Commons. Creative Commons is a way that allows you to use certain photos without getting written permission from the owner. Visit http://creativecommons.org/about for more information.

Best Practices/Reminders

The District has drafted guidelines, expectations, and best practices to serve as a guide in the electronic/social media arena. The examples listed are certainly not a complete list of these types of communication options, but just an example of some that are most currently used. Employees are encouraged to offer suggestions or comments for improvement to the rapidly evolving world of
Electronic communication between staff, students, parents, and interested patrons should be transparent. As a public school district, we are expected to maintain openness, visibility, and accountability with regards to all communications.

Faculty and Staff Professional Responsibility
- Remember that online posts and content are an extension of your classroom or the workplace. What is inappropriate in your classroom or the workplace should be deemed inappropriate online.
- Be accountable for the content on your profile and assume that everyone has access to your profile. You are personally responsible for what is on your site. Staff should act on the assumption that all postings are in the public domain.
- If you wouldn’t say or write it in front of your classroom, it is not appropriate to share in the electronic/social networking arena.
- Do not share confidential information whether it is internal school discussions or specific information about students or other staff or school situations, including crisis events. Do not write about a colleague or student without their permission.

Media Relations
- If asked by media to comment on a school-related issue, refer them to the superintendent of schools or director of communications. When in doubt on how you should comment on social media, direct the public to your principal or superintendent.

School Crisis Situations
- During a school lockdown, secure mode, or crisis, employees should not be posting or asking for information online or through other forms of communication (texts, phone calls, etc.). During these situations, rumors can spread quickly and employees should be using this time to make sure that the safety of those in their charge/care is their top priority.

Other Best Practices/Reminders
- Student media releases are required for student images/information.
- Use grammar and spell check.
- Limit use of educational jargon; do not assume your audience is familiar with acronyms.
- If you make a mistake, admit the mistake and correct it quickly. Clearly state if you’ve corrected a previous post. Apologize if appropriate.
- Make regular postings. The purpose of social media is two-way communication and you cannot be a part of the discussion if you do not post regularly.

Types of Electronic Media and Individual Guidelines

Website
The District hosts a website (www.plattecountyschooldistrict.com) for District personnel to share information and announcements with our stakeholders. Each building/department has an assigned webmaster to maintain and update those building or department pages.

Should information need updating, please contact your building or department webmaster, or if a District level page, contact the director of communications.
Each teacher has a current page with basic information added by the technology department. This information along with your school photo if available, a welcome message, and class schedule is required of all teachers. Additional information, or links to outside websites (such as a Google site) can be added by the individual teacher. If staff members choose to have additional links or websites, those sites should be secondary to the District’s website (open in a separate internet browser window).

**Facebook**

Platte County School District has a district-wide Facebook account maintained by the communications department. This system-wide presence highlights the activities and accomplishments of all schools in the District. It is actively monitored and posts are made usually daily, if not multiple times per day.

Schools, teachers, or district-sponsored groups wishing to create their own Facebook page should contact the communications department prior to setting up a profile. The building principal, principal designee(s), teacher, or group supervisor is responsible for monitoring information and keeping it current. With all electronic media, remember your association and responsibility with Platte County School District.

For teacher/classroom/district-sponsored group accounts, the content should be for professional, classroom, or activity purposes only. The account should be set up using the teacher’s or sponsor’s District email address. Staff are allowed Facebook access for school purposes and should explain the purpose and intended educational use of the account to their administrator. An administrator and/or department head should follow the account and/or be included in the Group Page, and the director of communications should be made aware of the Facebook account.

**Additional Guidelines/Notes:**

- Students cannot access Facebook on the District network or district hardware.
- Notify your building principal, activities director (if a sport/activity), and director of communications of your plans to use Facebook for communication.
- Notify your parents/students, if appropriate, of your intent to use Facebook to communicate information to the group as a supplement to your other methods of communication and that Facebook contains commercial advertising that is not endorsed by the District.
- Be cautious how you set up your profile, bio, etc. Use photos, graphics, images, and language befitting the status of a public figure and consistent with your role as an educator/school support staff.
- If you see a comment that you believe is inappropriate and should be removed, contact the Director of Communications to review and decide if removal is appropriate.
- Include the District’s Posting Guidelines on your Page Info-Description section:
  - We welcome your comments as a means of sharing your own experiences, suggesting improvements or chiming in on the conversation. To keep our page focused, we have set some comment guidelines.
    1. This page is moderated and all comments may be reviewed by the Platte County R-3 Communications Department.
    2. To ensure exchanges that are informative, respectful of diverse viewpoints and lawful, we will not allow comments that are or include:
      - Off Topic. We will delete comments not related to the subject of the page entries.
      - Spam. Comments focused on selling a product or service will not be posted.
      - Personal Attacks. If you disagree with a post, we’d like to hear from you. We do ask that you refrain from personal attacks or being disrespectful of others.
      - Illegal. Laws that govern use of copyrights, trade secrets, etc., will be followed.
      - Language. Comments including but not limited to: profane or provocative language, hateful, racially or ethnically offensive or derogatory content, threats, obscene, or sexually explicit language will be deleted.
• Links to outside websites. We will not allow fans to include links to websites for any purpose.

Twitter
Twitter is a social media tool that allows for timely updates and announcements to be sent to “followers.” The District has a twitter handle (PlatteCountyR3), and like Facebook, uses Twitter to highlight activities and accomplishments and provide announcements from the District and all schools. Individual schools are encouraged to create accounts and use this tool to communicate with parents and other school supporters.

For school building or district-sponsored group Twitter accounts, the profile should be generic to the school or group, not associated with an individual/administrator/spONSOR name. The building principal or group supervisor/sponsor is responsible for monitoring information and keeping it current. With all electronic media, remember your association and responsibility with Platte County School District.

For teacher/classroom/district-sponsored group accounts, the content should be for professional, classroom, or activity purposes only. The account should be set up using the teacher’s or sponsor’s District email address. Staff are allowed Twitter access for school purposes and should explain the purpose and intended educational use of the account to their administrator. An administrator and/or department head should become a follower of the account and the director of communications should be made aware of the Twitter account.

Additional Guidelines/Notes:
- Notify your building principal, activities director (if a sport/activity), and director of communication of your plans to use Twitter for communication.
- Notify your parents/students, if appropriate, of your intent to use Twitter to communicate information to the group in addition to your other methods of communication.
- Only “follow” other school Twitter accounts and educational/group-related accounts.
- Keep your personal Twitter account separate from your professional Twitter account.

Other Digital/Social Media Outlets (Emails, Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, Videos)
Classroom blogs and other social media are powerful tools. They create communication and collaboration opportunities between students, parents, teachers, and other district staff, and can have a positive impact on learning.

Additional Guidelines/Notes:
- Notify your building principal of your plans to use a classroom blog or other social media outlet for communication.
- Notify your parents/students, if appropriate, of your intent to use a blog or other social media outlet to communicate information to the group in addition to your other methods of communication.
- Do not post or state anything that you would not state in the classroom.
- Do not discuss students or other employees.

On personal blogs, Platte County School District employees should include disclaimers that the views are their own and not their employer’s. For example: “The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the positions, strategies, or options of my employer.” This standard disclaimer does not exempt employees from irresponsible behavior when commenting on their own site or others.

Revised: September 24, 2015
Platte County R-3 School District, Platte City, Missouri