



Responsible Office: Office of Human Resources

BOARD POLICY 4550

STAFF INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS

PURPOSE

The Board of Trustees (“Board”) is committed to ensuring that all relationships and communications between Washoe County School District (“District” or “WCSD”) staff and students are appropriate and enhance the educational environment. The District values the authorized and appropriate educational use of communication methods such as social media and the benefits offered through such use between staff, students and their families. Through this policy, and any associated administrative regulations, clear procedures and professional development shall be established for all staff, defining appropriate and inappropriate conduct, mandating the reporting of inappropriate conduct, cooperating with law enforcement, and ensuring compliance with applicable laws.

POLICY

1. For the purposes of this policy:
 - a. The use of the word “staff” generally refers to all District employees and volunteers, which may include but is not limited to unpaid coaches, chaperones and advisors, student teachers, members of District committees, and 3rd party consultants and/or vendors, unless otherwise indicated. “Employee” refers to individuals employed by the Washoe County School District including full-time, part-time and temporary employees.
 - b. The use of the word “student” includes students as members of District-sponsored athletic teams and/or extra- or co-curricular activities.
2. Governing Principles
 - a. This policy is not intended to limit appropriate communication between individuals where the communication is related to education and/or school activities or where a relationship exists between the staff member and the student and his/her family. These guidelines are intended to support staff by ensuring a clear understanding of the many factors and possible ramifications to be considered when staff communicate with students, both in the classroom and outside of the classroom.

- b. The District encourages effective communication and healthy relationships between staff and students that are professional and respectful. Such relationships should be restricted to education- or District/school-related matters.
 - c. Online behavior of staff shall reflect the same standards of professionalism, respect and integrity as face-to-face communications with students.
 - d. Staff and students are responsible for using electronic communication, online applications, and social media in a manner that is legal, ethical, and in accordance with all District policies and regulations.
3. Governing Practices
- a. The District recognizes the powerful impact that electronic communication and social media can have on education. The user participation and sharing of information inherent in these media can be beneficial to students and teachers, coaches, and other staff. When used responsibly and safely, they may be effectively integrated into the educational environment to support traditional instruction.
 - b. Nature of Communication.
 - i. Communication with students must be age-appropriate and be limited to education- or District/school-related matters through District approved email or other sources.
 - c. Bullying, Harassment, and Discrimination Prohibited.
 - i. District staff shall not engage in any form of communication, to include electronic, that can reasonably be construed as bullying, harassing, discriminatory or retaliatory towards a student or other District staff member.
 - ii. District staff are prohibited from engaging in or soliciting a relationship with or from communication with a student that is sexual, romantic, or intimate in nature. Likewise, inappropriate staff communication and/or relationships with students are prohibited. Staff communication and relationships with students should be professional in nature.

d. Electronic Communication and Social Media

- i. All District employees shall have access to a District-provided and monitored email account. District assigned email is the official and approved means of email communication for District staff with students on education- or District/school-related matters.
- ii. The appropriate use of texting, email, social media, and/or other communication methods between a teacher/coach/advisor and his/her students is permitted when such communication is:
 1. directed at a class/team or group of students from that class/team; or
 2. limited to matters within the scope of the staff member's professional responsibilities (education- or District/school-related matters); or,
 3. related to a demonstrable emergency or urgent circumstance.

e. Personal Use of Social Media

- i. Personal use of social media, blogs, etc., by an employee shall:
 1. remain under the discretion of the employee; and
 2. Utilize appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites by students.
- ii. Staff should not "friend", "follow" or otherwise interact with students individually or personally from social media accounts. For example, a teacher should not "friend" a former student of the teacher while that students remains enrolled in the District.

f. Parent/Guardian Notification.

- i. Parents/guardians shall receive information during the annual online student registration process regarding the District's protocols related to electronic communications between staff and students. These protocols include but are not limited to:
 1. District-assigned student email;
 2. District/school use of electronic communication (e.g. telephone, email);

3. 3rd party internet applications;
 4. Social media and online educational services; and
 5. Guidelines related to appropriate use of communication tools outside the regular school day.
- g. Reporting. Any actual or suspected inappropriate relationship or communication between a District staff member and a student shall be reported immediately to a District administrator or school police officer.
 - h. Student Records Confidentiality. District staff shall comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) in all communications, to include electronic, and may not share any personally identifiable information about students, share any information from any student's educational records, or use a student's photo without the approval of an administrator. Current parental consents apply only to District-sanctioned sites.
 - i. Prohibited Conduct and Disciplinary Action.
 - i. Staff found in violation of this policy may be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal or non-renewal.
 - ii. Volunteers, consultants, and other District representatives may be subject to revocation or termination of his/her ability to have access to students.

DEFINITIONS

1. Following are examples and definitions of social media and online communication types:
 - a. Social network refers to a dedicated website or other application that enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc.
 - b. Microblog refers to an online space where authors create communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content
 - c. Listserv or newsgroup refers to an email exchange where messages are broadcast to every member of a group at once.

- d. Forum refers to a web-based place where users post their comments or opinions on topics. Users may comment on or respond to previous posts. Readers can read and/or respond to all prior posts.
- e. Chatroom refers to an internet space where groups of people meet for live conversations via typed messages
- f. Text message refers to an exchange, usually one-to-one, of communication typically typed into a smartphone or hand-held device.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

1. Through this policy, the District shall:
 - a. Adopt, maintain, and notify staff of procedures necessary to implement this policy to include, but not limited to, mandatory reporting and complaint resolution procedures, the prohibition against sexual misconduct, and appropriate and inappropriate student communication;
 - b. Partner with parents/guardians to inform students about appropriate communication methods;
 - c. Intervene against predatory grooming behaviors aimed at students;
 - d. Seek to protect all persons, regardless of race, color, sex, marital status, age, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or disability by complying with state and federal laws and regulations; and
 - e. Provide timely professional development and learning opportunities offering training and guidance to staff related to appropriate communication methods, with specific focus on the use of social media.

IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES & ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

1. This policy reflects the goals of the District's Strategic Plan and aligns with the governing documents of the District, to include:
 - a. Board Policy 4500, Staff Free Speech
 - b. Board Policy 4505, Standards of Professional Conduct
 - c. Board Policy 7200, 21st Century and Digital Learning
 - d. Board Policy 9201, Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination Prohibited
 - e. Board Policy 9205, Safe and Respectful Learning Environment

- f. Pending: Administrative Regulation, Social Media Use
2. This policy aligns and complies with Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) and Nevada Administrative Code (NAC), to include:
- a. Chapter 200, Crimes Against the Person
 - b. Chapter 201, Crimes Against Public Decency and Good Morals, to include:
 - i. NRS 201.540, Sexual conduct between certain employees of school or volunteers at school and pupil: Penalty; exception.
 - c. Chapter 207, Miscellaneous Crimes, and specifically:
 - i. NRS 207.260, Unlawful contact with child or person with mental illness
 - d. Chapter 391, Personnel
 - e. Chapter 388, System of Public Instruction, and specifically:
 - i. NRS 388.121 – 388.1459, Provision of a Safe and Respectful Learning Environment
 - f. Chapter 432B, Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect
3. This policy aligns and complies with federal laws and regulations, to include:
- a. Title VI of the Civil Rights Act
 - b. Title IX of the Education Amendments

REVIEW AND REPORTING

1. This document shall be reviewed as part of the bi-annual review and reporting process, following each regular session of the Nevada Legislature. The Board of Trustees shall receive notification of any required changes to the policy as well as an audit of the accompanying governing documents.
2. Administrative regulations, and/or other associated documents, will be developed as necessary to implement this policy.

REVISION HISTORY

Date	Revision	Modification
3/13/2018	1.0	Adopted