ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN SUPPORT STAFF MEMBERS AND STUDENTS

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In accordance with the provisions of N.J.S.A. 18A:36-40, the Board of Education adopts this Policy to provide guidance and direction to support staff members to prevent improper electronic communications between support staff members and students.

The Board prohibits all electronic communication between a support staff member and a student. The Commissioner of Education and arbitrators, appointed by the Commissioner, have determined inappropriate conduct may determine a support staff member unfit to discharge the duties and functions of their position. Improper electronic communications by support staff members may be determined to be inappropriate conduct.

For the purposes of this Policy, “electronic communication” means a communication transmitted by means of an electronic device including, but not limited to, a telephone, cellular telephone, computer, computer network, personal data assistant, or pager. “Electronic communications” include, but are not limited to, e-mails, text messages, instant messages, and communications made by means of an Internet website, including social media and social networking websites.

For the purposes of this Policy, “professional responsibility” means a support staff member’s responsibilities regarding co-curricular, athletic coaching, and any other instructional or non-instructional responsibilities assigned to the support staff member by the administration or Board of Education.

For the purposes of this Policy, “improper electronic communications” means an electronic communication between a support staff member and any student of the school district when:

1. The content of the communication is inappropriate as defined in this Policy; and/or

2. The manner in which the electronic communication is made is not in accordance with acceptable protocols for electronic communications between a support staff member and a student as defined in this Policy.
Inappropriate content of an electronic communication between a support staff member and a student includes, but is not limited to:

1. Communications of a sexual nature, sexually oriented humor or language, sexual advances, or content with a sexual overtone;

2. Communications involving the use, encouraging the use, or promoting or advocating the use of alcohol or tobacco, the illegal use of prescription drugs or controlled dangerous substances, illegal gambling, or other illegal activities;

3. Communications regarding the support staff member’s or student’s past or current romantic relationships;

4. Communications which include the use of profanities, obscene language, lewd comments, or pornography;

5. Communications that are harassing, intimidating, or bullying;

6. Communications requesting or trying to establish a personal relationship with a student beyond the support staff member’s professional responsibilities;

7. Communications related to personal or confidential information regarding another school staff member or student; and

8. Communications between the support staff member and a student that the Commissioner of Education or an arbitrator would determine to be inappropriate in determining the support staff member is unfit to discharge the duties and functions of their position.

The following acceptable protocols for all electronic communications between a support staff member and a student shall be followed:

1. E-Mail Electronic Communications Between a Support Staff Member and a Student
ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN SUPPORT STAFF MEMBERS AND STUDENTS

a. All e-mails between a support staff member and a student must be sent or received through the school district’s e-mail system. The content of all e-mails between a support staff member and a student shall be limited to the staff member’s professional responsibilities regarding the student.

b. A support staff member shall not provide their personal e-mail address to any student. If a student sends an e-mail to a support staff member’s personal e-mail address, the staff member shall respond to the e-mail through the school district e-mail system and inform the student his/her personal e-mail address shall not be used for any electronic communication between the support staff member and the student.

c. A support staff member’s school district e-mail account is subject to review by authorized school district officials. Therefore, a support staff member shall have no expectation of privacy on the school district’s e-mail system.

2. Cellular Telephone Electronic Communications Between a Support staff Member and a Student

a. Communications between a support staff member and a student via a personal cellular telephone shall be prohibited.

(1) However, a support staff member may, with prior approval of the Principal or designee, communicate with a student using their personal cellular telephone if the need to communicate is directly related to the support staff member’s professional responsibilities for a specific purpose such as a field trip, athletic event, co-curricular activity, etc. Any such approval for cellular telephone communications shall not extend beyond the specific field trip, athletic event, co-curricular activity, etc. approved by the Principal or designee.

3. Text Messaging Electronic Communications Between Support staff Members and Students
a. Text messaging communications between a support staff member and an individual student are prohibited.

(1) However, a support staff member may, with prior approval of the Principal or designee, text message students provided the need to text message is directly related to the support staff member’s professional responsibilities with a class or co-curricular activity. Any such text message must be sent to every student in the class or every member of the co-curricular activity. Any such approval for text messaging shall not extend beyond the class or activity approved by the Principal or designee.

4. Social Networking Websites and other Internet-Based Social Media Electronic Communications Between Support staff Members and a Student

a. A support staff member is prohibited from communicating with any student through the support staff member’s personal social networking website or other Internet-based website. Communications on personal websites are not acceptable between a support staff member and a student.

b. A support staff member shall not accept “friend” requests from any student on their personal social networking website or other Internet-based social media website. Any communication sent by a student to a support staff member’s personal social networking website or other Internet-based social media website shall not be responded to by the support staff member and shall be reported to the Principal or designee by the support staff member.

c. If a support staff member has a student(s) as a “friend” on their personal social networking website or other Internet-based social media website they must permanently remove them from their list of contacts upon Board adoption of this Policy.

d. Communication between a support staff member and a student through social networking websites or other Internet-based social media websites is only permitted provided the website has been approved by the Principal or designee and all communications or publications using such websites are
ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN SUPPORT STAFF MEMBERS AND STUDENTS

available to: every student in the class; every member of the co-curricular activity and their parents; and the Principal or designee.

Reporting Responsibilities

In the event a student sends an improper electronic communication, as defined in this Policy, to a support staff member, the support staff member shall report the improper communication to the Principal or designee by the next school day. The Principal or designee will take appropriate action to have the student discontinue such improper electronic communications. Improper electronic communications by a support staff member or a student may result in appropriate disciplinary action.

A support staff member and student may be exempt from the provisions outlined in this Policy if a support staff member and student are relatives. The support staff member and the student’s parent shall submit notification to the Principal of the student’s school of their family relationship and their exemption from the provisions outlined in this Policy.

The provisions of this Policy shall be applicable at all times while the support staff member is employed in the school district and at all times the student is enrolled in the school district, including holiday and summer breaks.

A copy of this Policy will be made available on an annual basis, to all parents, students, and school employees either electronically or in school handbooks.


Adopted: 8/21/14