

# POLICY

## SOUTH ORANGE MAPLEWOOD BOARD OF EDUCATION

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### ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS SCHOOL STAFF (M)

#### 3283 ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS SCHOOL STAFF (M)

The Board of Education recognizes electronic communications and the use of social media outlets create new options for extending and enhancing the educational program of the school district. Electronic communications and the use of social media can help students and teaching staff members communicate regarding: questions during non-school hours regarding homework or other assignments; scheduling issues for school-related co-curricular and interscholastic athletic activities; school work to be completed during a student's extended absence; distance learning opportunities; and other professional communications that can enhance teaching and learning opportunities between teaching staff members and students. However, the Board of Education recognizes ~~the vulnerabilities for teaching staff members can be vulnerable in electronic communications with students, and families when using these tools.~~

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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 teaching staff members to prevent improper electronic communications between teaching staff members and students.

The Commissioner of Education and arbitrators, appointed by the Commissioner, have determined inappropriate conduct may determine a teaching staff member unfit to discharge the duties and functions of their position. Improper electronic communications by teaching staff members may be determined to be inappropriate conduct. ~~All devices and "apps" used for electronic communications between teaching staff and students will be considered an extension of any school owned devices used for teaching and communication and will be subject to review by administration. Staff members cannot assume that any personal device is outside the scope of this policy if it is used to communicate with other staff members, students or families.~~

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

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~~The chief school administrator/principals will annually remind staff members and orient new staff members concerning the importance of maintaining proper decorum in the on-line, digital world as well as in person. Employees must conduct themselves in ways that do not distract from or disrupt the educational process.~~ For the purposes of this Policy, "professional responsibility" means a teaching staff member's responsibilities regarding co-curricular, athletic coaching, and any other instructional or non-instructional



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responsibilities assigned to the teaching staff member by the administration or Board of Education.

~~The annual orientation and reminder will give special emphasis to improper fraternization with students using electronic communications;~~

~~A. School employees may not list current students as “friends” on networking sites without written approval of the school principal;~~

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~~B. All electronic contacts with students should be through the district’s computer and telephone systems;~~

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~~C. All electronic contacts by coaches and extracurricular advisors with team members and members of extracurricular activities shall, as a general rule, be sent to all team members and activity participants;~~

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~~D. School employees will not give out their private cell phone or home phone numbers to students without prior approval of the principal;~~

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

1. The content **or frequency** 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 teaching staff member and a student as defined in this Policy.

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Inappropriate content of an electronic communication between a teaching staff member and a student includes, but is not limited to:

1. Communications of a sexual nature, **regardless of the gender identity of the sender or receivers gender identity**, 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;

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3. Communications regarding the teaching staff member's or student's past or current romantic relationships, or perceived relationships regardless of gender identity or sexual preference;
4. Communications which include the use of profanities, obscene language, lewd comments, or pornography;
5. Communications that are harassing, intimidating, or bullying, even if such communication does not constitute a violation of Policy 5512 Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying;
6. Communications requesting or trying to establish a personal relationship with a student beyond the teaching 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 teaching staff member and a student that the Commissioner of Education or an arbitrator would determine to be inappropriate in determining the teaching staff member is unfit to discharge the duties and functions of their position.

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

E. The following guidelines apply to various forms of electronic communication:

1. E-Mail Electronic Communications Between a Teaching Staff Member and a Student
  - a. All e-mails between a teaching 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 teaching staff member and a student shall be limited to the staff member's professional responsibilities regarding the student. Teaching staff members shall not communicate with students via social media and/or messaging.
  - b. A teaching staff member shall not provide their personal e-mail address to any student. If a student sends an e-mail to a teaching staff member's personal e-mail address, the staff member shall

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respond to the e-mail through the school district e-mail system and inform the student ~~his/her~~ their personal e-mail address shall not be used for any electronic communication between the teaching staff member and the student. If this happens a second time, then the teaching staff members shall correct the student a second time and copy their immediate supervisor.

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c. If a teaching staff member's communicates with a student via personal email, social media or text message, via app, phone or other device, in violation of this policy, the personal email, social media and/or phone school district e-mail account is subject to review by authorized school district officials. Therefore, a teaching staff member shall have no expectation of privacy on the school district's e-mail system or in any communication with students.

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### 2. Cellular Telephone Electronic Communications Between a Teaching Staff Member and a Student

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

(1) However, a teaching 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 teaching 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 in advance by the Principal or designee.

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### 3. Text Messaging Electronic Communications Between Teaching Staff Members and Students

a. Text messaging communications between a teaching staff member and an individual student are prohibited.

(1) However, a teaching 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 teaching



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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. Any application ("app") that a teaching staff members uses shall be approved by their supervisor and the entire class or team shall have access to the communication (i.e., remind, teamsnap, etc.).

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#### 4. Social Networking Websites and other Internet-Based Social Media Electronic Communications Between Teaching Staff Members and a Student

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

b. A teaching 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 teaching staff member's personal social networking website or other Internet-based social media website shall not be responded to by the teaching staff member and shall be reported to the Principal or designee by the teaching staff member.

c. If a teaching staff member has a student(s) as a "friend" on their personal social networking website or other Internet-based social media website ~~they~~ the teacher must permanently remove ~~them~~ the student from ~~their~~ the teacher's list of contacts upon Board adoption of this Policy. Nothing in this policy requires a teaching staff member not to have public content on a personal social media page that students may "like."

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d. Communication between a teaching 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 available to: every student in



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the class; every member of the co-curricular activity and their parents; and the Principal or designee.

#### Cell Phones

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~~As a general rule, school staff shall not contact students' cell phones unless directed to do so by the parent/guardian or student. School district personnel shall limit cell phone interaction with students to contact that pertains to legitimate school business. Legitimate school business includes (but is not limited to):~~

- ~~1. Answering academic inquiries regarding homework, other classroom work or assignments;~~
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- ~~2. Scheduling appointments for school related conferences and/or extra help;~~
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- ~~3. Clarifying classroom expectations and/or assignments;~~
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- ~~4. Notifications related to classroom, club or sports schedules, events, trips, assignments, and deadlines.~~

~~Cell phone contact with students shall be as brief and direct as possible. When brief contact is not sufficient and/or feasible to resolve the matter, where appropriate, teachers shall schedule face to face conferences during regular classroom and extra help periods to confer with the student. No cell phone contact shall exceed three replies.~~

#### Text Messages

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~~Any text messages by staff members, coaches and volunteers shall, as a general rule, be sent to the entire class, team, club or organization and not to any student individually. Exceptions may include situations involving confidential medical issues, emergencies or individual issues not involving the entire group. Staff shall not send messages containing material that:~~

- ~~1. May be perceived as profane, obscene, racist, sexist or promote illicit, illegal or unethical activity;~~
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- ~~2. Violates the district's affirmative action policies;~~
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- ~~3. Is personal in nature and not related to the business of the district;~~
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- ~~4. Can be interpreted as provocative, flirtatious or sexual in nature;~~



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~~5. — Is confidential information and not authorized for distribution;~~

~~6. — Violates board policy Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying.~~

#### ~~Social Network~~

#### ~~Social Networking Websites and other Internet Based Social Media Electronic Communications Between Teaching Staff Members and a Student~~

~~1. — A teaching staff member is prohibited from communicating with any student through the teaching staff member's personal social networking website or other Internet based website. Communications on personal websites are not acceptable between a teaching staff member and a student.~~

~~2. — A teaching 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 teaching staff member's personal social networking website or other Internet based social media website shall not be responded to by the teaching staff member and shall be reported to the Principal or designee by the teaching staff member.~~

~~3. — If a teaching 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.~~

~~4. — Communication between a teaching 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 available to: every student in the class; every member of the co-curricular activity and their parents; and the Principal or designee.~~

#### ~~Electronic Communication/Email~~

~~School district personnel shall adhere to the following guidelines when sending or receiving messages via district owned or issued devices and the district network:~~

~~1. — All messages shall pertain to legitimate school business;~~



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- ~~2. Personnel shall not reveal district issued passwords to others. If a staff member believes that a password has been lost or stolen, or that email has been accessed by someone without authorization, he/she must contact the supervisor for technology or the principal;~~
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- ~~3. District administrators shall have access to the employee's password or passwords for all district owned or issued devices and the use of the district network;~~
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- ~~4. Electronic messages on school owned or issued electronic devices and the district network shall be retained for the period of time specified by the Destruction of Public Records Law and board policy 3570 Records (retained three (3) years for external correspondence and one (1) year for internal correspondence);~~
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- ~~5. Federal copyright laws shall be observed;~~
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- ~~6. Staff shall not send messages that contain material that:~~
  - ~~a. May be perceived as profane, obscene, racist, sexist or promote illicit, illegal or unethical activity;~~
  - 
  - ~~b. Violates the district's affirmative action policies;~~
  - 
  - ~~c. Is personal in nature and not related to the business of the district;~~
  - 
  - ~~d. Can be interpreted as provocative, flirtatious or sexual in nature;~~
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  - ~~e. Is confidential and not authorized for distribution;~~
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  - ~~f. Violates board policy Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying.~~

#### Reporting Responsibilities

In the event a student sends an improper electronic communication, as defined in this Policy, to a teaching staff member, **or in response to any communication to the team or class mates,** the teaching 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 teaching staff member or a student may result in appropriate disciplinary action.

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~~Staff shall have no expectation of privacy when using district technology, the district network and/or public social media venues;~~

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~~The chief school administrator or designees will periodically conduct internet searches to see if staff members have posted inappropriate materials on line. When inappropriate use of computers and internet websites is discovered, the school principals and chief school administrator will seek to preserve the problematic or offensive material and will seek to maintain storage and chain of custody of the evidence. The chief school administrator/principal shall promptly bring that alleged misconduct to the attention of the board president.~~

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~~Staff shall be informed of the consequences that may result from inappropriate electronic communications up to and including dismissal from employment.~~

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~~G. Personnel shall become familiar with the district's policies and regulation on staff and student access to networked information resources and acceptable use of technology before initiating email use;~~

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~~H. Employees learning of any misuse of the email systems shall notify the supervisor for technology, principal or chief school administrator immediately.~~

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#### ~~Online Education~~

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~~An online classroom is still a classroom. Though courses and/or assigned programs of home instruction may be online, appropriate classroom behavior is still mandatory. Respect for the participants is essential for learning and student achievement.~~

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~~Staff communications with students during online education will be limited to legitimate school business as set forth under cell phones, text messages and electronic communication, above. Professional standards and etiquette shall be observed at all times.~~

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#### ~~Implementation~~

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~~This policy shall be made available electronically or otherwise disseminated to all staff members, annually or as needed.~~

**[Optional: District may select one of the following exemption options**

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~~A teaching staff member and student may be exempt from the provisions outlined in this Policy if a teaching staff member and student are relatives. The parent of a student and the teaching staff member requesting an exemption from the provisions of this Policy must submit a written request to the Principal of the student's school indicating the family relationship between the student and the teaching staff member. The Principal will~~

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~~provide written approval of the request to the teaching staff member and the student. If the Principal does not approve the request, the teaching staff member and the student must comply with all provisions of this Policy. The Principal's approval of a request for this exemption shall only be for the individual teaching staff member and student included in the request and for the school year in which the request is submitted.~~

~~A teaching staff member and student may be exempt from the provisions outlined in this Policy if a teaching staff member and student are relatives. The teaching 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.]~~

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

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The provisions of this Policy shall be applicable at all times while the teaching 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.

[N.J.S.A. 18A:36-40](#)

Adopted: 28 July 2014  
Revised: 19 March 2018

First Reading: November 15, 2021  
Second Reading:  
Adopted:

