

Garfield Heights City Schools

Electronic Communication Guidelines & Rules

Garfield Heights City School District recognizes and encourages the use of all forms of electronic communication necessary to achieve academic success. The District also appreciates the role of electronic communication in maintaining a strong and interconnected school community.

Electronic communication takes many forms, including email, websites, blogs, Skype, text messaging, and the use of social media websites such as Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter. By using electronic communication, our staff, students, and parents are able to achieve a more dynamic method of discussing and addressing the educational needs of our students.

Electronic communication is a privilege and not a right. It must be used with purpose and in a manner that reflects the best professional and ethical practices of this District. Employees who violate professional and ethical standards or Board policy, guidelines or rules in using electronic communication to interact with students, parents, and staff run the risk of losing their jobs and licensure.

These guidelines and rules are intended to assist District employees in identifying how to appropriately use electronic communication so that they may develop proper methods of electronic communication and avoid organizational and personal liability. If you have any questions, please contact the District's Director of Technology, Shari Bailey. Remember, before using electronic communication, if in doubt, first check it out!

General Guidelines

1. Identify Your Role and the Nature of Your Interaction with Students. Students attend our school district to receive an education. The position you hold determines your role and the nature of your interaction with our students. For example, while a custodian is present in the building with students, he/she has little to no one-on-one interaction with students as compared with a teacher who has significant contact with students.

Rule of Thumb: Using electronic communication should not materially change your role or the nature of your interaction with students.

Practice Pointer A: Electronic communication should not take the place of the way you interact with students.

Practice Pointer B: Do not use electronic communication to tell students something you would not be permitted to say to them in your current position.

2. Identify the Reasons You Interact with Students. Your position will also define the reasons why you interact with students. For example, a custodian interacts with students to address operational or safety issues within the school building or on its grounds. A

teacher interacts with students to teach curriculum. A secretary interacts with students regarding tardiness or attendance issues and school administration matters.

Rule of Thumb: Using electronic communication should not materially change the reasons you interact with students.

Practice Pointer A: Do not use electronic communication to create new reasons for students to interact with you, unless you are specifically directed to do so by the Superintendent or his/her designee.

3. Identify When You Interact with Students. Employees interact with students during the school day, at school functions, and/or at school sporting events and extra-curricular activities.

Rule of Thumb: Using electronic communication should not materially change when you interact with students.

Practice Pointer A: Do not use electronic communication to contact students to interact with you outside of the regular school day, unless you are specifically directed or authorized by the Superintendent or his/her designee.

Practice Pointer B: If students contact you by electronic communication outside of the regular school day, do not respond in your capacity as a District employee unless you are specifically directed or authorized by the Superintendent or his/her designee. This practice pointer does not apply to use of Moodle for legitimate educational purposes.

Practice Pointer C: Consider limiting how you use electronic communication outside of work in your personal capacity to minimize opportunities for students or parents to claim that your communication was inappropriate, improper, unprofessional, or in violation of Board policy and District guidelines and rules.

4. Identify the Setting within which You Interact with Students. Your position will also define the setting within which you interact with students. For example, a teacher will interact with students in a classroom, in a hallway, on school grounds and in a setting where other students and adults are present. Any one-on-one interaction in a school building outside the presence of other students and adults is limited and may only take place as specifically authorized by the District.

Rule of Thumb: Using electronic communication should not materially change the setting within which you interact with students.

Practice Pointer A: An employee who only interacts with large groups of students should not use electronic communication to talk with just one

student or a small group of students, unless specifically directed to do so by the Superintendent or his/her designee.

5. Identify the Frequency with which You Interact with Students. Your position dictates how often you interact with students.

Rule of Thumb: Using electronic communication should not materially change the frequency with which you interact with students.

Practice Pointer A: If there is a student in one of your classes that meets one period a day, three days a week, you should not use electronic communication to increase the frequency of your interaction in a manner that changes your role, the nature or reasons for your interaction, or the setting within which it normally occurs.

6. Identify the Topics You Discuss with Students. Your position determines the topics you are authorized to discuss with students. When you talk with students, you discuss either their education or the school environment. For example, teachers discuss curriculum and related topics, while custodians discuss operational or safety issues in the building.

Rule of Thumb: Using electronic communication should not materially change the topics you discuss with students.

Practice Pointer A: Under no circumstances is an employee authorized to discuss his/her personal issues with a student, and it is improper to discuss this topic using electronic communication.

7. Recognize Contact Outside of School can Impact the Educational Environment. Relationships are impacted by what we do. To the extent an employee does something outside of work that impacts the educational environment, he/she is subject to potential disciplinary action. For example, a teacher is not allowed to harass a student. If a teacher uses electronic communication outside of school to continuously contact a student between the hours of 1 a.m. and 4 a.m. by Twitter or text messaging, that teacher has engaged in harassing conduct. The teacher has opened himself/herself up to claims that the conduct constitutes a boundary invasion and violates professional and ethical standards as well as Board policy, guidelines and rules.

Rule of Thumb 1: Electronic communication has the potential of materially changing your role and the nature of your interaction with students, including the reasons you interact, when you interact, the settings within which you interact, the frequency of your interactions and the topics you discuss with students.

Practice Pointer A: Consider whether your personal use of social media (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) opens you up to potential claims by students and parents that you have committed a boundary invasion, violated

professional and ethical standards, or should be disciplined for disregarding Board policy, guidelines and rules.

Practice Pointer B: Consider what settings you choose in using personal social media accounts. Have you limited student and parent access to your personal information by using available privacy settings?

Practice Pointer C: The District does not authorize employees to use personal social media accounts to communicate with students and parents about school matters. *See Specific Rule #8.* Consider limiting access to your personal social media accounts by not “friending” students who are currently enrolled in the District and not accepting “friend requests” from them. Consider also restricting access by parents of students to your personal social media accounts. It should be noted the Ohio Department of Education has suspended and revoked licensure based on how teachers have used electronic communication outside of school in contacting students.

Practice Pointer D: Consider whether your commentary using personal social media accounts is defamatory, obscene, or libelous or in violation of copyright or other laws. Do your comments comply with applicable professional and ethical standards as well as Board policy, guidelines and rules?

Practice Pointer E: Consider whether you have provided links to questionable materials or websites using personal media accounts. Do your links comply with applicable professional and ethical standards as well as Board policy, guidelines and rules?

8. Confidential Information and Privacy Concerns. As an employee, you must honor the privacy rights enjoyed by our students and staff, whether you are inside or outside of school. Confidential information regarding our students and staff must not be disclosed in violation of federal or state law or Board policy.

Specific Rules

1. Never use electronic communication to disclose confidential information regarding staff or students, unless you are directed to do so by the Superintendent or his/her designee.
2. Do not disclose confidential information regarding staff or students on your personal email or personal social media accounts.
3. Never use electronic communication to contact only one student, unless you are specifically directed to do so by the Superintendent or his/her designee.
4. Do not use electronic communication, personal email, or personal social media accounts in a manner that violates your professional standards.

5. Do not use electronic communication, personal email, or personal social media accounts in a manner that violates your ethical standards.
6. Do not use electronic communication, personal email, or personal social media accounts in a manner that violates Board policy or District guidelines and rules.
7. Do not use your personal email to communicate with students or parents about school matters.
8. Do not use text messaging to communicate with students or parents about school matters. This rule does not apply to the District's AlertNow system.
9. Do not use personal social media accounts to communicate with students or parents about school matters.
10. Do not use defamatory, obscene, or libelous language, images, or materials when using electronic communication and social media accounts.
11. Exercise caution in using copyrighted materials when using electronic communication and social media accounts.