PROFESSIONAL DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

I. PURPOSE

The School District recognizes that digital communication and social media are valuable tools for teaching, learning, collaboration, community engagement, and operational effectiveness. These technologies also create responsibilities for maintaining professional boundaries, protecting student privacy, and preserving public trust.

The purpose of these guidelines is to establish expectations for employees, coaches, advisors, volunteers, contractors, and others acting on behalf of the District regarding the appropriate use of digital communication, social media, and emerging technologies when interacting with students, families, staff, and the public.

These guidelines are intended to:

- Promote student safety and well-being;
- Maintain appropriate professional boundaries;
- Protect confidential and private information;
- Ensure compliance with federal and state laws;
- Preserve public confidence in the School District; and
- Support positive, respectful, and professional communication practices.

II. SCOPE

These guidelines apply to:

- All School District employees;
- Coaches, advisors, and activity sponsors;
- Volunteers and student teachers;
- Contractors or consultants working with students; and
- Any individual acting on behalf of the School District.

These guidelines apply regardless of whether communication occurs using District-owned devices, personal devices, District networks, or personal internet accounts.

III. DEFINITIONS

A. Digital Communication

Any electronic exchange of information, including but not limited to:

- Email
- Text messaging
- Instant messaging
- Direct messaging
- Social media messaging
- Learning management system messaging
- Video conferencing platforms
- Collaboration applications
- Artificial intelligence platforms and chat tools

B. District-Approved Platform

A communication platform approved by the School District for educational, operational, extracurricular, or school-related purposes.

C. Social Media

Online platforms that allow users to create, share, view, or interact with content or communicate with others, including but not limited to:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- TikTok
- X (formerly Twitter)
- Threads
- Discord
- WhatsApp
- GroupMe
- YouTube
- LinkedIn
- Other current, future or emerging social networking platforms

D. Professional Boundary

The appropriate relationship between an employee and student that maintains the employee's professional role and avoids conduct that could reasonably be perceived as personal, exploitative, inappropriate, or inconsistent with the employee's educational responsibilities.

IV. GENERAL EXPECTATIONS

All employees are expected to conduct themselves online and electronically in a manner consistent with:

- Board policies;
- Minnesota law;
- Professional codes of conduct;
- Collective bargaining agreements;
- District values; and
- Expectations applicable to in-person interactions.

Employees should assume that electronic communications may become public and may be reviewed in the context of employment investigations, legal proceedings, public records requests, or student safety concerns.

Employees are personally responsible for content they create, post, share, forward, endorse, or distribute.

V. STAFF-STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS

Maintaining professional boundaries with students is essential. All communications between employees and students shall be professional, educationally appropriate, and related to legitimate school purposes.

A. Approved Communication Methods

Employees shall use District-issued or District-approved accounts, applications, and communication platforms when communicating with students regarding instructional, extracurricular, co-curricular, or other school-related matters.

Approved communication methods include:

- District-issued email accounts;
- District-approved learning management systems;
- District-approved messaging or communication platforms;
- District-approved activity, athletic, or team communication tools; and
- Other communication systems specifically authorized by the Superintendent or designee.

Use of an employee's personal email account, personal social media account, or other non-District-approved communication platform to communicate with a student is prohibited except in a rare circumstance involving an emergency,

an immediate student safety concern, an operational necessity, or the temporary unavailability of District-approved communication methods.

When such an exception is necessary, the communication shall:

1. Be limited to a legitimate and time-sensitive school-related purpose;
2. Remain professional and consistent with appropriate staff-student boundaries;
3. Not occur through a disappearing-message feature or other method designed to prevent retention or review;
4. Include a parent/guardian, administrator, or other appropriate adult whenever reasonably practicable; and
5. Be documented or reported to the employee's supervisor as soon as reasonably practicable.

The use of a personal device does not, by itself, constitute a violation of this section when the employee is accessing a District-issued account or District-approved platform and otherwise complying with District policy and procedures.

B. Transparency

Communications with students should be transparent and capable of review. Whenever feasible:

- Parents/guardians should have access to communications;
- Communications should be archived or retained;
- Administrators shall have access to school-sponsored accounts per District policy.

VI. PROHIBITED STAFF-STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS

Employees shall not engage in electronic communications or social media interactions with students that are inconsistent with professional boundaries or District expectations. Prohibited conduct includes, but is not limited to, the following:

A. Personal Social Media Connections

Employees shall not:

- Initiate or accept social media friend requests with currently enrolled students through personal accounts;
- Follow, subscribe to, or connect with students through personal social media accounts in a manner unrelated to legitimate school purposes;
- Encourage students to interact through personal social media accounts.

B. Private or Disappearing Communications

Employees shall not:

- Use Snapchat, disappearing-message features, or similar applications to communicate privately with students;
- Engage in one-to-one private messaging unrelated to school activities;
- Use personal messaging applications to avoid District oversight or record retention.

C. Inappropriate Communications

Employees shall not:

- Engage in communications that are romantic, sexual, flirtatious, suggestive, or otherwise inappropriate;
- Share personal relationship concerns, intimate details, or personal problems with students;
- Encourage students to keep communications secret from parents or school personnel;
- Communicate with students as peers rather than in a professional educator-student relationship.

D. Personal Contact Information

Employees should avoid providing personal phone numbers, personal email addresses, or personal social media accounts to students unless specifically authorized by administration for a legitimate school purpose.

VII. COACHES, ADVISORS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR PROGRAMS

Coaches, advisors, directors, and activity sponsors frequently communicate with students outside the school day. Such communications must remain professional and school-related. School-sponsored groups, teams, clubs, and organizations shall use District-approved communication tools whenever available. Employees who create school-related social media accounts must:

- Inform their supervisor or designee;
- Use District contact information whenever possible;
- Maintain professional content;
- Monitor interactions regularly;
- Remove inappropriate content promptly;
- Ensure communications remain accessible and transparent.

Private messaging between coaches/advisors and individual students should be limited to legitimate school purposes and, whenever practical, include parents or occur through approved platforms.

VIII. SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY EMPLOYEES

The District recognizes employees' rights as private citizens to participate in social media and public discourse. However, employees are expected to exercise professional judgment when posting online content. Employees shall not:

- Disclose confidential student information;
- Disclose private personnel information;
- Violate FERPA or other privacy laws;
- Post content that materially disrupts school operations;
- Post discriminatory, harassing, threatening, or unlawful content;
- Misrepresent District positions or official communications.

Employees identifying themselves as District employees on personal accounts should make clear that opinions expressed are their own and do not necessarily represent the School District.

IX. STUDENT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

Employees shall protect confidential information at all times. Employees shall not post, share, transmit, or disclose:

- Student educational records;
- Personally identifiable student information;
- Student disciplinary information;
- Student health information;
- Confidential employee information;
- Private parent information;
- Information protected by law, policy, or administrative procedure.

Photos, videos, recordings, and student work may only be shared in accordance with state and federal laws, District policies, procedures and applicable parent/guardian permissions.

X. ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND DIGITAL CONTENT

The District recognizes that artificial intelligence and emerging technologies create new opportunities and risks. Employees shall not:

- Use AI-generated content to misrepresent students, staff, or District activities;
- Create or distribute manipulated images, videos, audio recordings, or "deepfakes" involving students or employees;
- Use AI tools in ways that violate privacy laws or District policies;
- Upload confidential student information into unauthorized AI systems.

Employees using AI-supported tools for educational purposes must do so in accordance with District technology guidelines and applicable data privacy requirements.

XI. DISTRICT-SPONSORED SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

District-sponsored social media accounts are official District communication tools.

Building principals, department leaders, or designated administrators shall oversee school-sponsored accounts. District-sponsored accounts should:

- Support educational or operational goals;
- Present accurate information;
- Promote respectful communication;
- Be regularly monitored;
- Follow branding and communication standards established by the District.

The District reserves the right to remove content or discontinue accounts that do not comply with District expectations.

XII. HARASSMENT, BULLYING, AND DISCRIMINATION

Electronic conduct that violates District policies regarding:

- Harassment,
- Bullying,
- Discrimination,
- Retaliation,
- Threats,
- Intimidation, or
- Inappropriate conduct

is prohibited regardless of whether the conduct occurs on District-owned or personal devices.
Employees remain subject to District policies and professional standards when engaging in electronic communications.

XIII. REPORTING CONCERNS

Employees who become aware of:

- Inappropriate staff-student communications;
- Potential boundary violations;
- Misuse of social media;

- Threats to student safety; or
- Possible policy violations

shall promptly report concerns to a supervisor, principal, Human Resources, or another designated administrator. Failure to report known concerns may result in corrective action.

XIV. INVESTIGATION AND RECORD REVIEW

The District reserves the right, consistent with applicable law and policy, to investigate allegations of misconduct involving digital communications or social media activity.

Information obtained through public sources, District systems, reports from students or parents, law enforcement investigations, or other legitimate means may be reviewed during an investigation. Employees should have no expectation of privacy when using District-owned devices, District networks, or District communication systems.

XV. VIOLATIONS

Violations of these guidelines may result in:

- Coaching or corrective action;
- Revocation of technology privileges;
- Discipline up to and including termination;
- Reporting to licensing agencies when required;
- Referral to law enforcement when warranted.

Nothing in these guidelines limits the District's authority to address conduct that violates Board policy, law, professional standards, or collective bargaining agreements.

XVI. RELATED POLICIES

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with:

- Internet, Technology, and Personal Electronic Communication Device Acceptable Use and Safety Policy (Policy 524)
- Public and Private Personnel Data (Policy 406)
- Protection and Privacy of Pupil Records (Policy 515)
- Employee Conduct and Discipline Policies (Policies 403 and 423)
- Harassment and Violence Policy (Policy 413)
- Bullying Prohibition Policy (Policy 514)
- Applicable Minnesota statutes and federal laws