

STAFF USE OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AND ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Expectations for Communicating Electronically

Phoenix Union High School District No. 210 (the “District”) recognizes that digital forms of communication are widely used for daily interactions with friends, family, and larger social networks. Educational organizations, too, can use e-mail, websites, blogs, text messaging, and social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook, and others to communicate with similar groups. These forms of communications are dynamic, mobile, and quickly reach their audience through technologies that have become an integral part of online life. However, in many circumstances they may not meet the public and professional standards for communicating with students that the District expects of its staff members.

The expectations outlined in this document are designed to:

- Protect the District, its students and staff.
- Raise awareness of socially and ethically acceptable ways to use digital communication tools.
- Raise awareness of the consequences that may result in using these digital tools.
- Define acceptable use of electronic communication.

The following is a set of expectations that all staff members and representatives of the District are expected to follow when communicating electronically.

Does the communication pass the Transparent, Accessible, and Professional (TAP) Test?

Digital communication must be transparent, accessible and professional as defined below:

- **Transparent:** All digital communication from District staff must be transparent. As a public school district, the District is expected to maintain openness, visibility, and accountability regarding all communications.
- **Accessible:** All digital communication to and from District staff are a public record and become part of the District archives. It is accessible by others and outlined in policy IJNDB.
- **Professional:** All digital communication from District staff should be written as a professional representing the District. This includes word choices, tone, grammar, and subject matter that model social and ethical standards and preserve the integrity of staff. Choice of words should be courteous, thoughtful, and mirror professional communication standards.

If the communication meets all three (3) of the criteria above, then it is likely that the chosen methods of communication are appropriate.

Acceptable Communications Methods

Communication methods are deemed “acceptable” because they are monitored by the District and conform to District set parameters, filters, and firewalls. Messages and information using these tools can be monitored by the District, are retrievable, and may be produced as documentation if required.

- **Synergy** is an effective tool for direct communication with students and parents/guardians regarding real-time grades, attendance, comments about behaviors that promote learning, assignments, etc. *Synergy* also encompasses *ParentVue*, *StudentVue*, and *TeacherVue*.
- **District e-mail** is always an appropriate way to communicate directly with students and parents/guardians. District e-mail provides the staff member with a record of the communication. For this reason, only the District-provided e-mail system (username@phoenixunion.org) should be used.
- **School/ District Website.** The use of this District-provided tool is strongly encouraged. The accessibility is widely available and the content is highly transparent. With the District website, staff can provide some of the same types of communication that commercial social media websites provide while also providing access to their curriculum beyond classroom walls. All of the content is backed up and directly accessible. Unlike social media, the District website meets all three (3) of the TAP criteria detailed above.
- **Pre-Approved Social Media.** Social media is increasingly becoming a part of everyday life and it is important to be able to reach students, parents/guardians and the community using methods of communication in which they are comfortable and able to access. Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to communicate through interactive dialogue including but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. It is imperative to keep all social media communication public and professional by using the TAP test. **District policy, GBEF-EA, defines procedures that must be followed in order to receive pre-approval for the use of social media.** These procedures are necessary to protect and inform District staff, students, and parents.

Less Acceptable Communications Methods

- **Mobile Telephone Calls.** Nearly every staff member and student has a cell phone today and contacting individuals by cell phone is often the most direct means of reaching and communicating with the individual. As with all other forms of communication, it is imperative to keep telephone calls with students and parents professional by using the TAP test. If District staff plans to use personal cell phones to contact District students, the staff member must make parents/guardians and his/her immediate supervisor aware at the beginning of the school year or season that the staff member may call a student/parent, the typical subject matter of such calls, and the telephone number that would be used to initiate the contact.

- **Text Messaging.** Nearly every student has a cell phone today and use of text messaging is rising sharply. This form of communication is typically between one or more individuals and is often highly personal in nature. Since texting is such a quick and convenient way of communication, a simple message may lead to an extended texting conversation that can get "off topic". *District staff should be aware that text messaging from a staff member to another staff member or a student could be misinterpreted and should only be used for official business.* If a staff member (teacher/coach/sponsor) plans to use texting for immediate and urgent contact with students/team members, he/she must be transparent about such use. The staff member must make parents/guardians and his/her immediate supervisor aware at the beginning of the school year or season that he/she may use texting and the specific purpose of texting, using the official District form titled Digital Communication Informed Consent and Release (GBEF-EB). If a District staff member puts it in writing, it is considered a public record.

Unacceptable Communications Methods

- **Non-District E-mail Accounts.** District staff should never use personal e-mail accounts to communicate with students. Coaches not employed by the District during the school day must copy all e-mail communication to the designated site administrator. District e-mail accounts are accessible remotely and staff members who find themselves in need of communicating while absent from the school site should use their remote access to District e-mail for communication.
- **Online Games and Related Activities.** While many people enjoy a variety of gaming systems (Wii, Xbox, etc.) and recreational websites that allow them to interact with others through the Internet, this is not an acceptable activity for staff members to engage in with students.
- **Unapproved Social Media.** Any social media not pre-approved for use as prescribed by Policy GBEF-EA is unacceptable.

Guidelines for Using Social Media Communication for Official School Business

General Requirements. A staff member who wants to establish social media interaction with a student must obtain prior parental/guardian permission through the official District form titled Digital Communication Informed Consent and Release (GBEF-EB). The Principal shall maintain this form as a record of the request and its approval. Only District-approved social media sites will be permitted. Since not every student has a Facebook page or even access to a computer, this must be taken into consideration. **The District and its staff shall not require students to have social media accounts, as this should be a family decision.** Therefore, a staff member shall make any information posted on social media accessible by alternate means. *As with any media request, those that come via social media should be referred to the Community Relations Office.*

Student Privacy Information. In accordance with FERPA (The Family Educational Rights and

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Privacy Act), the District must take care to protect a student's identifying information, which includes photos. If parents have not completed the opt-out form in the Student Procedures Handbook, the District may use a student's photo. If a student/parent has opted out of revealing directory information, it is noted in the student's account in Synergy, and use of the student's photo is prohibited.

Confidential or privileged information (grades, attendance records, or other student/staff member record information) about students or staff members shall not be shared.

Process for Social Media Approval. The official District form titled Social Media Account Application (GBEF-EA) must be completed and submitted to the Principal.

Completing and submitting the form does not constitute approval. Approval is given by the Principal and will be communicated to the applicant.

Facebook. A Facebook Fan Page (business page), not a Facebook Group or Personal page, can be appropriate as a supplemental method of communicating electronically with students, parents/guardians, and the community when it is set up correctly. A Fan Page does not allow the Facebook account administrator to be "friends" with any of the users, instead the users "like" or subscribe to updates from the page. This is a more transparent social media presence. FERPA and District guidelines must be adhered to for publishing content to any website. Prior parental/guardian permission is required if pictures of students are going to be posted (refer to Student Privacy Information). Staff members should use their "username@phoenixunion.org" e-mail address to register as the contact for the page so that any feedback or comments on the page are sent to the District, not to any personal e-mail addresses.

Upon administrative approval, the District shall establish the Fan Page. The staff member shall then notify parents/guardians, in writing, that he/she will be using this site in addition to other methods (websites, e-mail, formal letters, etc.) to communicate information and that the Fan Pages may contain commercial advertising that the District does not endorse.

Guidelines for Using Facebook with Students

Staff members, including coaches, and club sponsors, shall follow the guidelines below when setting up and administering an official Facebook Fan Page:

- **Establish goals for the page and request approval.** Prior to setting up a Fan Page, the staff member shall determine goals for the page and ensure that the proposed social media is the best medium for his/her purposes. If so, he/she shall obtain prior approval using the Social Media Account Application.
- **Make the page official.** The staff member shall use school logos and publish appropriate titles that clearly identify the page as the official source of news and information for the department, group, or club. (Official logos are available at www.phoenixunion.org/logos). A school e-mail address and school contact information shall be used when setting up a public profile. A staff member shall not provide personal information on the page and shall not use a personal e-mail account for contact purposes.

- **Notify the parent/guardian** that Facebook is being used to share information, using the official District form titled Digital Communication Informed Consent and Release (GBEF-EB).
- **Posting of comments.** The ability of the subscriber to post comments on the page will depend on the goals for the page. If the goal is simply to share relevant, current information to stakeholders, then prohibiting new posts to the wall is encouraged. This option keeps the page uncluttered and emphasizes only relevant District/school information. If the goals are to provide an environment that promotes an exchange of information and encourages students and parents/guardians to ask questions, then allowing posts may be appropriate. This option will require a District staff member to monitor the page more frequently by removing comments, links or images that are not relevant or are inappropriate. *The use of digital communication constitutes a public record; it must be transparent to all stakeholders, and always contain content reflective of a District professional.* Inappropriate comments, language, or links on a page for which the staff member is responsible could bring the staff member's professionalism into question.
- **The Facebook Fan Page should never be used as a medium for personal conversations.** If a student or parent posts a comment that is of a personal or confidential nature, the comment should be removed. Communication should then be established using a more appropriate method such as the District e-mail system or a phone call.
- **Facebook Fan Pages should not be the primary means by which a District staff member communicates with students.** Rather, it should supplement other communication sources (class or team websites, e-mail, or letters home). Not every student may have a Facebook account and the staff member should always respect family decisions in this regard.

Important Reminders and Guidelines for Staff members who use Facebook, Twitter, or other Social Media Sites for Personal Purposes

Personal social network accounts shall remain separate from work related accounts.

A staff member should never "friend" students or accept such a student's "friend request."

NOTE: Privacy settings may bring a false sense of security. Contrary to what some people think social media sites are very public places. Remember that anything posted on the Internet can live virtually forever.