

Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

Purpose:

The Agawam School Committee recognizes the increasing importance of electronic communication and social media for social interaction and education. As the Agawam Public Schools continues working to provide a 21st century education, which prepares students for life in a global economy, it has become apparent that we need to move ahead with both enthusiasm and caution. With the expansion of means and ease of communication comes a heightened concern for student safety and well being.

While the Committee sees the value of social media and electronic communication, the Committee also recognizes that the opportunity for impropriety is increased through this ease of access. This accessibility can provide a forum for cyber bullying, inappropriate behavior, and other potential dangers. The Committee finds that the rapid progress of technology leaves it and the District frequently facing new challenges regarding social media and electronic communication.

The Committee is charged with ensuring our schools' educational environments are safe and conducive to learning. Recognizing this, the Committee has adopted this policy.

Definitions:

Social Media: Any medium hosted on the Internet, on which interactions between students or between the staff of the Agawam Public Schools and students can be conducted. This includes web and mobile-based technologies that support interactive communication between organizations, communities, and individuals that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content. Social media technologies take on many different forms including, but not limited to, on-line magazines, Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, micro blogs, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking, and message boards. Examples of social media websites include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, YouTube, MySpace, Wiki, and Wikipedia.

Electronic Communication: Any communication or interaction, which occurs through electronic means. Such electronic means include, but are not limited to, computers, tablets, cellular devices, so-called "smart phones," iPads, iPods, and Internet capable MP3 players, etc. Such communications and interactions include, but are not limited to, email, texts, posts on social media websites (including text, video, and audio), private messages on social media websites, instant messages, video chat, and blogs, etc. Electronic communications include communications that have no specific intended recipient (i.e., posting a "status" on Facebook that, depending on privacy settings, may be viewed by a group of users).

Student: Any individual currently enrolled in the Agawam Public Schools.

Prohibited Conduct: Staff shall not engage in the following types of conduct, which are strictly prohibited. The following are examples of conduct only and are not intended to be all inclusive. Any conduct, which is similar to that listed below, is likewise prohibited.

- a. Fraternization with students using any social media or electronic communication. Staff may not invite/accept current Agawam Public School students as "friends" on

social media websites. Classroom participation on educational websites or professional pages (described herein) for instructional purposes is permitted with prior approval of the principal or his/her designee.

- b. Electronic communication to student(s) of content of a sexual or explicit nature. This includes posts on social media websites that are publicly visible or accessible, and/or visible or accessible to any student or group of students.
- c. Electronic communication to a student(s) of content advocating the use of alcohol, drugs, and/or other illicit or illegal activities between students and staff. This includes posts on social media websites that are publicly visible or accessible, and/or visible or accessible to any student or group of students.
- d. Electronic communication to student(s) of content encouraging or constituting hazing or bullying. This includes posts on social media websites that are publicly visible or accessible, and/or visible or accessible to any student or group of students.
- e. Electronic communication of private information regarding students or other staff, including, but not limited to, student record information, private cell phone numbers, and private email addresses. This includes posts on social media websites that are publicly visible or accessible, and/or visible or accessible to any student or group of students.

The District: The Agawam Public Schools and its staff.

The Committee: The Agawam School Committee and its members.

Staff: All employees of the Agawam Public Schools and any contractor or individual employed by a contractor who provides services in or to the Agawam Public Schools.

Section 1. Statement to Agawam Public Schools Staff

The Committee recognizes that social media and electronic communications have valuable functionality both in and outside of the classroom. This policy is not intended to limit any staff member's right to speak publicly as a citizen on matters of public concern, or to communicate with fellow union members on workplace issues, so long as such communication adheres to appropriate time, place, and manner restrictions and does not interfere with the performance of job duties.

Notwithstanding this, when staff members speak through social media on matters concerning their work, they are speaking as employees, and, as such, restrictions may be placed upon their freedom to express themselves. Staff members are role models, not students' friends, and should always conduct themselves in accordance with this understanding.

Section 2. Responsibilities of the Committee, the Superintendent, and the Administration

- a. Responsibilities of the Committee:
 1. The Committee is responsible for maintaining, implementing, and updating this policy.

2. The Committee will support the efforts of the Superintendent and the Administration to act upon this policy in a timely manner.
 3. The Committee will require the Superintendent to periodically report upon the results, consequences, and concerns related to this policy.
 4. When necessary, the Committee will update this policy, pursuant to the recommendations of the Superintendent or other relevant parties.
- b. Responsibilities of the Superintendent and the Administration:
1. The Superintendent of Schools will develop and maintain a technology Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). It will be the responsibility of the Superintendent to work with representatives from the staff to review this policy annually and propose updates when appropriate.
 2. The Superintendent and the Administration retain the right to monitor all activity on district related social media, all activity on Agawam Public Schools owned equipment (i.e., computers, tablets, etc.), and all activity on the Agawam Public Schools network for the purpose of maintaining the safety of students and staff and to ensure that this policy is followed by all staff members.
 3. The Superintendent and the Administration will offer an orientation on this policy to all new staff members at the beginning of each school year.
 4. The Superintendent and the Administration will distribute this policy to current staff members annually and will notify all staff of updates and changes to this policy as they occur.

Section 3. Communication Media

a. Cellular Telephones and Text Messaging

Background:

Staff employed by the Agawam Public Schools are charged with, among many things, maintaining a safe educational environment for students. Although staff members should not generally provide their personal contact information such as cellular and home telephone numbers, there are limited instances described herein where it is appropriate to give out this information. Staff who lead school-sponsored trips, or organize events that require travel shall maintain a line of communication with students and parents by providing their personal cell phone number to all student participants and their parents. Students may also provide their personal cell phone numbers to staff who lead school-sponsored trips or organize events that require travel to facilitate ease of communication during travel. The purpose of this limited exchange of personal information is to protect student safety during travel.

Procedures:

1. Prior to providing any student with his/her home and/or personal cell phone number, a staff member shall inform the school's principal or his/her designee and obtain prior authorization.

2. Staff members shall communicate to students and their parents that the staff member's personal cell phone number is being provided for educational, informational, or safety purposes only.
3. Staff members shall only contact students via their personal cell phones for specific purposes (i.e., the student has not returned to a bus on a field trip). The Agawam Public Schools prefers communication related to academic issue occur in class or be directed through district provided email addresses.
4. Staff members who provide students with personal contact information shall explain the limited reason it is being provided and shall report any unauthorized use of this information by students (i.e., a student contacts the staff member via personal cell phone for an unauthorized purpose) to the principal or his/her designee immediately.

b. Email Communication

Background:

Email communication has become a standard way of conveying information between parties. Email communication refers to any electronic mail or messaging done over the Internet.

Procedures:

1. Staff may communicate with students, staff, parents, PTOs, members of the Committee, and members of the community through district owned email addresses regarding issues pertaining to their role as employees of the Agawam Public Schools. Other professional communication may include blogs, wikis, webpages, virtual classrooms, and similar forums. All communication is to remain professional in nature at all times.
2. Staff shall not provide their personal email addresses to students.
3. Staff shall not request students' personal email addresses, nor shall they direct any communication to personal email addresses provided by students unless it pertains to academics and/or school-related activities.
4. All email communication sent from a public entity (i.e., using an Agawam Public Schools owned computer, network, email address, etc.) are part of the public record, may be disclosed, and may be monitored by the District for any reason without notice. Users of district-owned email addresses should have no expectation of privacy in the content of communications on district-owned email addresses.

c. Social Media, Webpages, and Applications

The increased proliferation of social media has provided the Agawam Public Schools with the opportunity to utilize these websites and applications as educational tools. It is a goal of the District's strategic plan to engage students through both traditional media as well as through the use of technological immersion, creating 21st century global citizens. Our goal is to integrate technology with the curriculum through modeling best practices, mentoring, using study groups, developing online formats, and creating and updating technology-related policies.

In accordance with the District's technology plan, the Agawam Public Schools will continue to implement a tablet based technology format. Recognizing that some applications or "apps" may have social networking properties, the use of any application where students must register personal information must be documented with the principal or his/her designee and the Instructional Technology Director. COPA law prohibits the use of services, which require personal information of children under 13. The use of social media, webpages, and applications by staff and students together shall be strictly for educational purposes only. Personal communication between students and staff via social media, webpages, and applications shall be limited to educational purposes.

d. Use of Photographs

1. Staff shall not, without the prior, express written permission of the Superintendent or his/her designee, electronically communicate (including, but not limited to, posting on social media websites) the logo of the school or school district, any photo of the school, or its likeness, or any photo of any other property belonging to the Agawam Public Schools.
2. Staff shall not use, copy, disseminate, or share in any manner, including via social media, photos, or videos of students where the parent(s) or legal guardian(s) has failed to fill out the form titled, "Permission to Photo/Video Students" as provided by the Agawam Public Schools, or has chosen to "opt out" as allowed by the form entitled, "Permission to Photo/Video Students."
3. Staff must keep in mind that videos and images of students may constitute "student records" within the meaning of federal and state law.
4. Staff shall not identify students by their full name in any photograph at any time.

e. Social Networking Websites

With nearly one billion users worldwide, Facebook, Twitter, and other social networks have become ubiquitous.

1. Staff shall not "friend", follow, message, or engage students in any way on social media websites via their personal accounts.
2. Staff wishing to use a social media profile for both personal and educational purposes must maintain separate personal and professional work profiles.
3. Staff shall use privacy settings on individual social media websites to prohibit access by students and parents to their personal social networking pages.
4. Staff may only create professional social media accounts (i.e., accounts used exclusively for educational purposes) on district-approved websites and platforms. The direct link to these pages must be provided to the principal or his/her designee and to the Agawam Public Schools Instructional Technology Director once it is created.
5. Staff shall not communicate with students via the direct messaging feature of any social media site, but rather only communicate through district-provided email accounts or social media posts that are publicly accessible via the staff member's professional account on a district-approved website or platform.

6. Staff shall report any inappropriate use of these sites by students or by fellow staff members to their district administrator immediately.
 7. Staff must cite links to all sources of information from third parties posted on professional social media webpages.
 8. Staff must notify parents of the use of professional accounts on social media sites, and provide students who are unable to access content hosted on these sites with the relevant information necessary for participation in the class through other means (i.e., hand-outs, email, etc.).
- f. Blogs, Wikis, Class Pages, etc.
1. Staff may use blogs, wikis, or any other website for instructional purposes, including but not limited to, homework pages and blog pages.
 2. Staff shall provide the web address of his/her page to the principal or his/her designee before disseminating the address to students.
 3. Staff shall identify students only by their first names on these pages.
 4. Staff shall notify parents of the use of these pages and provide students who do not have access with alternative means of obtaining the information provided over these pages (i.e., hand-outs, email, etc.).
 5. Staff shall cite all sources of content they provide on these pages and comply with applicable copyright laws and other applicable intellectual property laws.

Section 4. Public Records Law and Copyright Protection

The Attorney General of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has determined that any document created or received by a public employee in his or her capacity as such is subject to retention and perhaps disclosure under the public records law.

- a. Staff shall not delete any message posted on a social media site, webpage, blog, homework page, etc.
- b. Staff shall save all direct messages and communications conveyed through social media sites and through their own district email address.
- c. Staff shall comply with applicable copyright laws when posting information produced by another person or entity and shall cite all third-party sources of information posted or shared.

Section 5. Student and Staff Conduct

The district has multiple policies regarding student and staff conduct which overlap with this policy. The Committee and Administration recognize that the use of electronic communication technology in an educational setting presents new challenges to appropriate student and staff conduct. However, behavioral expectations will not be diminished in these settings and

appropriate professional boundaries shall be maintained at all times and through all means of communication. As such, the District retains the right to moderate and restrict student and staff use on District-related pages. The Committee and the Administration expect staff and students to maintain the same level of decorum in electronic communications, including the use of social media, as in face-to-face interactions. This policy is intended to supplement existing policies, not to supersede them.

a. Bullying and Cyber Bullying

The Committee and the Agawam Public Schools are committed to maintaining a safe learning environment for all students. With regard to bullying, please see Policy JBA, *Sexual Harassment, Bullying, and Hazing Policy*, and, in particular, references to cyber bullying. Cyber bullying of any kind will not be tolerated.

b. Acceptable Use of School Equipment and Networks

The Committee and the Agawam Public Schools are committed to maintaining the security of the Agawam Public Schools networks, the quality of Agawam Public Schools equipment, and the privacy of Agawam Public Schools students. See Policy IJNDB-R, *Acceptable Use Policy Technology*.

c. Student Handbooks

At the beginning of each school year, the building administrator or homeroom teacher shall distribute student handbooks which detail the expectations of behavior for Agawam Public School students and set rules for student conduct. Nothing contained in this Policy shall diminish those expectations and rules. The on-line behavior of both students and staff shall reflect the same standards as those used for face-to-face communications at the Agawam Public Schools.

Section 6. Discipline

The Superintendent or assigned designees may conduct internet searches to determine whether staff members have used social media in ways that violate this Policy. If a violation of the Policy is determined to have occurred, the Superintendent or assigned designee shall bring the violation to the attention of the staff member and shall consider and apply disciplinary measures up to and including termination. The disciplinary process for staff shall proceed in accordance with any applicable collective bargaining agreement under which the staff member is covered.

The Agawam Public Schools and the Committee disclaim all liability for the content of materials that users access on Social Media, for damages suffered in the course of or as a result of social media use, and for any related consequences. The Agawam Public Schools shall not be responsible for any unauthorized use of the District's network, including any and all unauthorized costs, financial obligations, fees, charges, or purchases.