

### **1. Internet AUP still in force**

This policy is adopted in addition to the School District's Internet Acceptable Use Policy, which governs use of the school district's technological resources.

### **2. Scope of Policy**

This policy is intended to provide guidelines to Melrose Public School employees and volunteers with regard to electronic information they may provide for public or private dissemination, as well as with regard to electronic communication with students/parents/guardians/public. All online, electronic or computerized means of communication are subject to this policy. Given the rapid pace of technological change it is not possible to identify all proprietary or commonly named or identified means of such communications. The use of the term staff in this policy is intended to include teachers, administrators, advisors, coaches and all other staff both full time and part time, as well as volunteers.

### **3. General Concerns**

The Melrose Public Schools recognizes the proliferation and usefulness of electronic communication between staff and students, their parents or guardians, and the public. Due to the nature of this kind of communication, there exists a risk, without care and planning, that the lines between one's professional life and personal life will be blurred. Staff should always be mindful of how they present themselves to the world, online and otherwise. Should a staff member "friend" a student on Facebook, subscribe to a student's "twitter" account, engage in email "chat" with a student, exchange text messages with students or engage in other electronic communication, the school district is concerned, and the staff member should be concerned, that such activities may undermine the staff member's authority to maintain discipline, encourage inappropriate behavior and compromise the staff member's ability to remain truly objective with the students.

In addition, any electronic communication using one's own personal resources, as opposed to school district resources, compromises the staff member's, as well as the school district's, ability to retain public records in accordance with the requirements of the Commonwealth's public records laws. The law requires public employees who send, receive or maintain records in their capacity as public employees, to retain, disclose and dispose of such records in compliance with strict provisions of the public records law. This law applies whether or not the record is in the form of a paper document or an electronic communication. When staff members communicate through school-based resources, such as district cell phones, staff email or school sponsored web pages, such records can be retained and archived through the school's information technology department. If, however, a staff member communicates outside of these resources, the district's ability to retain such information is limited. The burden falls on the staff member to comply with public records laws when using personal cell phones, email or social network accounts to communicate with students and/or parents and guardians.

### **4. Expectations of Staff**

With these concerns in mind, the Melrose Public Schools has instituted this "Electronic Communication/Social Media Policy," and announces its expectations for staff members' use of social media networks such as Facebook, Linked-in, Twitter, personal email accounts, cell phones including text message features, use of blogs, and other electronic or technologically based communication systems. The implementation of these expectations will be set out as Administrative Procedures, which will be maintained by the Superintendent of Schools, and which will be disseminated to all staff and volunteers annually.

1. All staff members will be responsible for information that they make public through the use of electronic communication.
2. The same principles applied to in-person communication should be applied to online communication, such as privacy, decorum and professionalism. No matter what medium of communication a staff member selects, he/she should adhere to appropriate teacher/student boundaries.
3. The line between professional life and personal life must be clear at all times. Staff members should only use their educational social media account or educational email account to communicate with students and/or parents and guardians, and should only communicate on matters directly related to education. Relationships associated with such educational social media accounts should only be with members of the educational community, such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents of such students. It is strongly recommended that staff reject requests from individuals who do not fit into these categories.

4. At all times, and in the use of any form of communications, staff members will adhere to student privacy rights and the rights of employees to have their personnel and medical information kept confidential. Information that is protected by law from disclosure to third parties will not be communicated online in a way that unreasonably exposes such information.
5. 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. All staff will follow the Administrative Procedures for retaining such records. This includes for example blog entries with comments, text messages, and all other electronic correspondence.
6. This policy is not intended to infringe upon a staff member's right to speak publicly on matters of public concern, or to communicate with other professionals on workplace issues, so long as such communication adheres to appropriate time, place and manner restrictions and does not interfere with the performance of your job duties. However, when speaking as an employee, restrictions may be placed upon one's freedom to express oneself. Those restrictions are intended to preserve student confidentiality, maintain one's status as an educator who should command and receive the respect of students, be able to maintain order and discipline in the classroom, and remain objective with respect to students.
7. Staffmembers are discouraged from using home telephones, personal cell phones, personal email accounts and personal social media accounts to communicate with students, or their parents/guardians. Communications with students/parents/guardians, even if not using school resources, are within the jurisdiction of the school district to monitor as they arise out of one's position as an educator. Any conduct, whether online or not, that reflects poorly upon the school district or consists of inappropriate behavior on the part of a staff member, may expose one to discipline up to and including discharge. Even when not using a school telephone, computer, classroom or the like to engage in contact with a student, that contact is within the school district's authority to take appropriate disciplinary action. If a staff member's behavior is inappropriate, undermines their authority to instruct or maintain control and discipline with students, compromises objectivity, or harms students, the school district reserves the right to impose discipline for such behavior. A staff member may also face individual liability for inappropriate online communications with students and/or parents and guardians.
8. The district recognizes that, in limited cases, use of cell phone text messages, cell phone calls or emails outside of regular school hours may be reasonably necessary. For example, in connection with school sponsored events for which staff serve as duly appointed advisors, they may need to convey messages in a timely manner to students and may not have access to school based email accounts, school-provided telephones or school-based web pages. In such limited circumstances, the district anticipates that staff members will make reasonable use of their cell phones or smart phones to convey time sensitive information on scheduling issues and the like according to the Administrative Procedures in force at the time. These communications are subject to retention and disclosure as described in the Administrative Procedures.
9. When staff members communicate as employees of the district in their online communications, they must be aware that readers will assume they "speak for the school district." Therefore, all online communications must be professional and reflect positively on the school district.
10. No staff member may, without express permission from the Superintendent of Schools, use the school's logo, likeness or any school photographs or other property that belongs to the district.