

This draft of the ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION/SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY OF THE MELROSE PUBLIC SCHOOLS is made available for the October 25, 2011 School Committee meeting. Please send feedback to kthorp@melrose.mec.edu. Discussion will begin at the November 1, 2011 meeting.

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 will 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. Staff 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 teachers 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. If staff are communicating 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 school.

From here to the end of this document are Notes about Administrative Procedures in support of the Electronic Communication/Social Media Policy. These procedures will be written by the Superintendent. These notes are only to give an idea of the kinds of procedures that may accompany this policy.

With these concerns in mind, the Melrose Public Schools has instituted this “Electronic Communication/Social Media Procedures Manual,” and announces its expectations for staff members’ use of social 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.

Code of Ethics (this was borrowed from Intel – there are many others online)

If you participate in social media, please follow these guiding principles:

- Stick to your area of expertise and provide unique, individual perspectives on what's going on at Melrose Public Schools and in the world.
- Post meaningful, respectful comments—in other words, no spam and no remarks that are off-topic or offensive.
- Always pause and think before posting. That said, reply to comments in a timely manner, when a response is appropriate.
- Respect proprietary information and content, and confidentiality.
- When disagreeing with others' opinions, keep it appropriate and polite.
- Know and follow the Melrose School District Code of Conduct and Privacy Policy

Rules of Engagement

Be transparent. Your honesty—or dishonesty—will be quickly noticed in the social media environment. If you are blogging about your work at Melrose Public Schools, use your real name, identify that you work for Melrose Public Schools, and be clear about your role. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. Transparency is about your identity and relationship to Melrose Public Schools. You still need to keep confidentiality around proprietary information and content.

Be judicious. Make sure your efforts to be transparent don't violate Melrose Public Schools' privacy, confidentiality, and legal guidelines for external speech. Ask permission to publish or report on conversations that are meant to be private or internal to Melrose Public Schools. All statements must be true and not misleading and all claims must be substantiated and approved. Product benchmarks must be approved for external posting by the appropriate product benchmarking team. Please never comment on anything related to legal matters, litigation, or any parties we are in litigation with without the appropriate approval. If you want to write about the competition, make sure you know what you are talking about and that you have the appropriate permission. Also be smart about protecting yourself, your privacy, and Melrose Public Schools Confidential information. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully.

Write what you know. Make sure you write and post about your areas of expertise, especially as related to Melrose Public Schools and our technology. If you are writing about a topic that Melrose Public Schools is involved with but you are not the Melrose Public Schools expert on the topic, you should make this clear to your readers. And write in the first person. If you publish to a website outside Melrose Public Schools, please use a disclaimer something like this: "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Melrose Public Schools' positions, strategies, or opinions." Also, please respect brand, trademark, copyright, fair use, trade secrets (including our processes and methodologies), confidentiality, and financial disclosure laws. If you have any questions about these, see your Melrose Public Schools administrator. Remember, you may be personally responsible for your content.

Perception is reality. In online social networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as an Melrose Public Schools employee, you are creating perceptions about your expertise and about Melrose Public Schools by our shareholders, customers, and the general public-and perceptions

about you by your colleagues and managers. Do us all proud. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with Melrose Public Schools' values and professional standards.

It's a conversation. Talk to your readers like you would talk to real people in professional situations. In other words, avoid overly pedantic or "composed" language. Don't be afraid to bring in your own personality and say what's on your mind. Consider content that's open-ended and invites response. Encourage comments. You can also broaden the conversation by citing others who are blogging about the same topic and allowing your content to be shared or syndicated.

Are you adding value? There are millions of words out there. The best way to get yours read is to write things that people will value. Social communication from Melrose Public Schools should help our customers, partners, and co-workers. It should be thought-provoking and build a sense of community. If it helps people improve knowledge or skills, build their businesses, do their jobs, solve problems, or understand Melrose Public Schools better—then it's adding value.

Your Responsibility: What you write is ultimately your responsibility. Participation in social computing on behalf of Melrose Public Schools is not a right but an opportunity, so please treat it seriously and with respect.

Did you screw up? If you make a mistake, admit it. Be upfront and be quick with your correction. If you're posting to a blog, you may choose to modify an earlier post—just make it clear that you have done so.

If it gives you pause, pause. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit 'send.' Take a minute to review these guidelines and try to figure out what's bothering you, then fix it. If you're still unsure, you might want to discuss it with your manager or legal representative. Ultimately, what you publish is yours—as is the responsibility. So be sure.

Moderation Guidelines

Moderation is the act of reviewing and approving content before it's published on the site (This applies to social media content written on behalf of Melrose Public Schools, whether the site is on or off Melrose Public Schools.com). Melrose Public Schools does not endorse or take responsibility for content posted by third parties, referred to as user generated content (UGC). This includes text input and uploaded files (video, images, audio, executables, documents).

While we strongly encourage user participation, there are some guidelines we ask you to follow to keep it safe for everyone. Please note that content originating inside Melrose Public Schools is not moderated. This means we allow our blog authors to post directly without approval.

Balanced online dialogue. Whether content is pre-moderated or community moderated, follow these three principles: the Good, the Bad, but not the Ugly. If the content is positive or negative and in context to the conversation, then we approve the content, regardless of whether it's favorable or unfavorable to Melrose Public Schools. But if the content is ugly, offensive, denigrating and completely out of context, then we reject the content.

Legal Boilerplate (see Mass.gov)

Mass.gov Legal Guidance Toolkit

http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=afterterminal&L=6&L0=Home&L1=Research+%26+Technology&L2=Information+Technology+Services+%26+Support&L3=Application+Services&L4=Mass.Gov&L5=Social+Media+Guidance+%26+Best+Practices&sid=EOaf&b=terminalcontent&f=itd_portal_services_social_media_legal_toolkit_abstract&csid=EOaf

Training

Public Records Law / Archiving

What is included? What is excluded?

If a teacher conveys school related messages to students and parents on his/her private account, he/she should save such email or any communication conveyed through a social networking site, or print and save a paper copy of such email or other online communication, and file it, and regard its privacy, as he/she would any other document concerning that student. The teacher should forward copies of any such emails or online communications to his or her school based email account so that it can be properly retained and archived in compliance with the requirements of the public records law. 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.

How to retain text messages (I know how with iphones, but other ones?)

How to transfer these archived documents to the school district for retention?

Use of Student Information and Pictures

Applicable Copyright issues

Acceptable use of Personal Equipment

Expand on this -

Teachers are discouraged from using home telephones, personal cell phones, personal email accounts and personal Facebook accounts to communicate with students. Your communications with students, even if you do not use school resources for such communications, are within the jurisdiction of the school district to monitor as they arise out of your 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 an employee to discipline up to and including discharge. Even if you are not using a school telephone, computer, classroom or the like to engage in contact with a student that such contact is not outside of the school district's authority to take appropriate disciplinary action. If your behavior is inappropriate, undermines your authority to instruct or maintain control and discipline with students, compromises your objectivity, or harms students, the school district reserves the right to impose discipline for such behavior. A teacher may also face individual liability for inappropriate online communications with students and/or parents and guardians, as well as exposing the district to vicarious liability in certain instances.

Blogs/Wikis etc - must be moderated by staff

Mass .gov Social Media Usage and Policies

http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=gov3terminal&L=3&L0=Home&L1=Key+Priorities&L2=Civic+Engagement+%26+Strong+Communities&sid=Agov3&b=terminalcontent&f=staying_informed_involved_online&csid=Agov3

Emails-

recipient list may not be visible.

All emails must go through the coordinator, and except for privacy issues, all emails must go to the entire group.

Best Practices

Mass.gov Social Media Guidance and Best Practices

<http://www.mass.gov/?pageID=afsubtopic&L=6&L0=Home&L1=Research+%26+Technology&L2=Information+Technology+Services+%26+Support&L3=Application+Services&L4=Mass.Gov&L5=Social+Media+Guidance+%26+Best+Practices&sid=EOaf>

How to gain an exception

How will these procedures will be enforced

Additional Notes:

1. Before endeavoring to establish any social networking account, teachers should familiarize themselves with the features of any account they choose to use. For example, Facebook requires account holders to take specific steps to “privatize” the information they place online. You must educate yourself to these features of Facebook or any other social networking site you select. You will be responsible should any information you intended to be “private” becomes “public” due to your own ignorance of the features of the social network you have decided to use or your failure to properly use such features.
2. You must also know that any information you share privately with a recipient could be re-distributed by such recipient, without your knowledge or consent. The same principles you apply to in person communication should be applied to online conversation: use discretion, and do not place your trust in individuals who have not proven themselves trustworthy. In essence, nothing you post online is ever truly “private.”
3. The school district expects you to keep the line between your professional life and your personal life clearly drawn at all times. There is no reason why this cannot be done, even in light of the proliferation of social networking sites. All that is required is some forethought before using social networking for both your professional and personal life, to be sure that these lines never become blurred. For example, if the district does not maintain a web portal for staff to communicate outside of school hours as necessary with students and families, and an educator wishes to establish a Facebook or personal email account through which he or she will communicate with students, he or she should establish a Facebook identity and email identity that is separate from his/her “personal” Facebook identity or personal email account. He/she should only use his/her educational Facebook account or educational email account to communicate with students and/or parents and guardians on matters directly related to education. The “friends” associated with such educational Facebook account should only be members of the educational community, such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents of such students. It is strongly recommended that teachers will reject friend requests from individuals who do not fit into any of these categories.
10. Teachers may not access their personal email accounts or private Facebook accounts using school district computer resources.
11. If you are communicating as an employee of the district in your online communications, you must be aware that readers will assume you “speak for the school district.” Therefore, all of your online communications, when you are actually acting on behalf of the district, or creating the appearance that you are doing so, must be professional at all times and reflect positively on the school district.
12. In the use of your Facebook account or other social networking site, you may not, 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 school.
13. References to “Facebook” are not included to limit application of their policy to use of that program. 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.