

EMPLOYEE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS

This policy is intended to comply with the requirements created by Act 214 enacted by the 2009 Louisiana Legislative Session, amending LSA 17:81(Q):

This policy serves to introduce procedures to ensure that staff and parents are informed regarding the expectations of the Lafayette Parish School System with respect to its employees relative to electronic communication by an employee with a student enrolled at that school. Interactions between employees, parents and students should be cooperative and respectful. The School System's approved electronic communications systems shall be utilized to promote educational excellence. This policy is not intended to limit or impede the use of technology as a meaningful teaching tool.

This policy, as adopted, shall be made available to system employees, parents and students. Nothing in this policy shall be construed to deny any employee of his right to due process under the law. The Lafayette Parish School System shall not be civilly liable for any electronic communication by an employee with a student that is prohibited as provided in this policy.

Technology has advanced to the point that many telecommunication devices are easily accessible and allow swift communication. These devices provide direct communication, including, but not limited to, voice or text-based telecommunication devices, computers and those that facilitate indirect communication using an intermediate method, including but not limited to internet-based social networks.

The Lafayette Parish School System prohibits any type of close personal relationship between a school employee and a student that may be reasonably perceived as unprofessional, such as excessive personal attention outside of school. School employees shall not entertain students, socialize with students, or spend an excess amount of time with students in such a manner as to reasonably create the impression to other students, their parents, or the public that an improper relationship exists. These guidelines are intended to promote the appropriate student-staff relationship. This policy is not intended to limit or impede the use of technology as a meaningful teaching tool.

Such procedures and guidelines shall be made available each year to all School System employees, parents and students. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to deny any employee of his right to due process under the law.

DEFINITIONS

Electronic Communication – a message/interaction through Lafayette Parish School System provided and/or personal devices which provide direct contact, including, but not limited to, voice or text-based telecommunication devices and computers, and other venues that facilitate indirect contact/cyber-interaction using an intermediate method, including, but not limited to, internet-based social networks.

Educational Services – constitutes provision of direct and indirect classroom instruction as well as extracurricular activities provided by the Lafayette Parish School System.

1. All electronic communication by an employee with all students enrolled in the Lafayette Parish School System must be relative to the educational services provided to the student and shall be delivered by means provided by or otherwise made available by the School System for this purpose. School system employees are prohibited from using any system electronic communication with a student for a purpose not related to educational services except for communication with the employee's immediate family if such communication is otherwise authorized.
2. The occurrence of any non-educational services electronic communication made by an employee with a student enrolled at that school using means other than ones provided by or made available by the school system shall be reported by the employee. This report shall be given to the site administrator verbally or sent by email prior to reassuming regular duties, but no later than 24 hours after the occurrence or knowledge of the occurrence and a written report should be completed by the end of that working day. Approved School System electronic communication methods are school system email, school sponsored teacher websites, school websites, school provided phones and other electronic communication that is approved by the Lafayette Parish School System. Records of any reported communication shall be maintained by the site administrators for a period of at least one year.
3. It is the duty of each school system employee to comply with the policy regarding electronic communication. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action, and in extreme circumstances may constitute willful neglect of duty. The Board and School System prohibit retaliation by anyone associated with the School System against one who files a report of an alleged violation. This prohibition extends to the alleged violator of this policy and/or third parties who, directly or indirectly, retaliate against an individual reporting a violation.
4. Any violations or suspected violations of this policy should be reported to the site administrator verbally or by email. The Board through its designees will promptly, thoroughly and fairly investigate reports of an alleged failure by a school employee or student to comply with this policy regarding electronic communication. Appropriate action shall be taken that is consistent with the results of the investigation and the legal requirements afforded by law, e.g. tenure law, Student Code of Conduct.

Violations of the policy and procedures and guidelines include, but not limited to:

- employee failure to report an instance of communication using a non-School System electronic communication system with a student at that school;
- utilizing the School System or personal electronic communication system with a student at that school for non-educational purposes; and
- contacting a student when the parents have opted out of individual communication with employees.

5. All persons associated with the School System shall uphold the law. Any alleged violation of the Board's Policy or these procedures and guidelines involving a school employee that may also be a violation of state or federal law shall be reported to the proper authorities. Some acts are considered criminal and may be subject to prosecution. The Board and School System will fully cooperate with law enforcement agencies and the District Attorney in investigating and prosecuting such criminal offenses.
6. All School System employees shall be informed of implementation, and upon entering into system service, about the policy and procedures and guidelines regarding electronic communication including the possible consequences for a failure to comply with the policy. The policy shall be posted on the School System website for reference.
7. A system-wide letter and/or telephone call will be disseminated to parents during the first semester of the 2009-2010 school year, informing them of the policy and regarding electronic communication by employees with students enrolled at that school. Thereafter, parents and students will be notified as part of the Student Handbook and the LPSS website.
8. The parents have the option to submit written documentation to the school administrator reflecting their desire for their child not to be contacted individually through electronic communication from any school employee at the school where their child is enrolled, group electronic communication excepted.
9. Violations of the policy shall be addressed by site administrators in compliance with the provisions of accepted LPSS disciplinary procedures. Violations that involve repeated or improper contact with students shall result in consequences that may range from a warning up to a recommendation for termination depending upon the severity of the violation.
10. These procedures and guidelines discourage improper employee electronic communication with students at all System schools and improper interaction shall be handled following applicable laws and policies. However, the law clearly prohibits electronic communication by an employee at a school to a student enrolled at that school, unless proper reporting procedures are followed in compliance with law and policy.

Adopted: 11/4/09