

POLICY ON SOCIAL MEDIA

It is the policy of the Attleboro Public School (APS) to maintain the professionalism and appropriateness of electronic and/or online communications among students and teachers, staff, and coaches at all times. The Superintendent and all principals will annually review with employee members and orient new employees concerning the importance of maintaining proper decorum in the online digital world. APS Employees must conduct themselves in ways that do not distract from or disrupt the educational process and that uphold the professional standards of conduct, values, and policies of APS. The orientation and annual review will give special emphasis to:

- 1) Improper fraternization with students using social media platforms, phone, texting or other electronic means.
  - a. APS employees may not friend or follow current students on social media. APS Employees should not engage in direct private communication with students. It is important that teachers, staff and coaches are always able to retain the authority and ability to maintain discipline, encourage appropriate behaviors, and remain truly objective with his or her students.
  - b. The school district expects APS Employees to keep the line between their professional life and their personal life clearly drawn at all times. What is required is some forethought before using social networking for both your professional and personal lives to be sure that these lines never become blurred. For example, if an educator wishes to establish a social media account through which he or she will communicate with students, he or she should establish a personal social media identity or personal e-mail account and an educational social media account or educational e-mail account; the latter, not the former, should be used to communicate with students and/or parents and guardians on matters directly related to education. The "friends" associated with such educational social media accounts should only be members of the educational community, such as administrators, teachers, students and parents of such students. It is expected that APS Employees will reject friend requests from individuals on their personal educational accounts who do not fit into any of these categories. In fact, the district suggests that it is safest and most prudent for teachers, staff and coaches, as a matter of personal policy to not communicate with existing students through non- district social media and e-mail accounts.
  - c. As a recommended practice, APS Employees are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites. However, be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the Internet can easily become public. Furthermore, social media sites can change their current default privacy settings and other functions. As a result, employees are responsible for understanding the rules of the social media site being utilized. APS Employees will be held responsible if any information they intended to be "private" becomes "public" due to their own lack of knowledge of the features of the social network they have decided to use or their failure to properly use such features. You must also know that any information you share privately with a recipient could be redistributed by such recipient without your knowledge or consent. In essence, nothing you post online is ever truly "private."
  - d. **APS Employees are required to communicate with students and parents on educational matters only through school-based resources or means that adhere to this policy. Use of one's personal e-mail account or social networking account to discuss school business with students and parents compromises the APS Employee'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. The law applies whether or not the record is in the form of a paper document or an electronic communication. When the APS Employee communicates through school-based resources, such as APS Employee's e-mail or school sponsored web pages, such records are retained and archived through the school's IT department. It should be noted that, just because a teacher uses his/her personal e-mail as opposed to a school e-mail account, this does not shield such e-mail from the provisions of the public records law or from discovery in litigation. It only prevents the archiving of such messages through the school district's automatic e-mail archiving system. We again remind APS Employee that information sent or received by them, even through personal e-mail or social network accounts that are related to their capacity as a school employee, are still subject to public records retention, exemption and disclosure requirements. When APS Employee members communicate through social networking sites, such information is not retained. The responsibility falls on the employee to comply with public records laws when using personal e-mail or social media accounts to communicate with students and/or parents and guardians.

- e. Team, class, or student organization pages, accounts, or groups will be created only in conjunction with the coach, educator or faculty advisor. All groups must include the appropriate administrator as a member. Access to the page will remain with the coach or faculty advisor.
- f. All contact and messages by coaches and faculty advisors with team members shall be sent to **all team members or to team captains**, except for messages concerning medical or academic privacy matters, in which case the messages will be copied to the athletic director, school principal or appropriate administrator. Contact should **never** be **to an individual student** only.
- g. APS employees will not give out their private phone numbers for voice or text communications. Appropriate texting should be conducted over messaging apps.
- h. No matter what medium of communication a teacher selects, he/she should adhere to appropriate teacher/student boundaries. You are a role model, not a student's friend; you are a student's teacher and you should always conduct yourself in accordance with this understanding. Moreover, all APS Employee are expressly prohibited from any online communication with students and/or their guardians of content generally considered to be unacceptable for children as determined by the administration.
- i. At all times, and in the use of any form of communications, APS Employee members will always 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 to retrieval by those third parties. For example, through an educational Facebook account, a teacher may not post confidential student information on the "wall," the "information" section, or through any part of that Facebook account that would be accessible to other teacher's Facebook "friends" associated with that account. If a teacher wishes to communicate privately with a student, parent or guardian through the educational Facebook account, such communication shall be conveyed only through the private e-mail/message feature of Facebook, so that only the student may view the message and respond to it.

2) Inappropriateness of posting items with sexual content

3) Inappropriateness of posting items promoting or advocating the abuse of drugs, alcohol, tobacco or any unhealthy behavior

4) Inappropriateness of posting content that promotes violence

5) Inappropriateness of posting content that includes or promotes discrimination and/or hateful words and concepts

6) Monitoring and penalties for improper use of district technology

- a. 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 an APS Employee 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, such contact is not outside of the school district's authority to take appropriate disciplinary action. If your behavior is inappropriate, it undermines your authority to 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 in which case the teacher shall indemnify the school district completely.

7) The possibility of penalties, including dismissal from employment, for failure to exercise good judgment in online conduct

8) **If an employee identifies themselves as an Attleboro Public School Employee, whether directly or indirectly, they are representing APS.** 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. In the use of your social media account or other social networking sites, 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. Further you may not post any photograph of a minor without express written consent of that minor's parent or guardian. Any restrictions placed on the use of the school's logo or likeness will be imposed consistent with an employee's right to engage in concerted, protected activity.

- 9) **Employees must refrain from interacting in a professional capacity on non-district social media unless authorized by the Superintendent.** APS recognizes the proliferation and, in some instances, usefulness of online conversations between teachers, staff, coaches and students and/or their parents or guardians. However, due to the nature of social networking sites, there exists a risk, without care and planning, that the lines between one's professional life and personal life will be blurred. Our employees should always be mindful of how they present themselves to the world, online and otherwise

This policy is not intended to infringe upon employee's rights to speak publicly on matters of public concern or to engage in concerted protected activities with fellow members of their union on workplace issues, so long as such communication adheres to appropriate time, place, and manner restrictions and does not interfere with the performance of their duties. However, when APS Employees speak via social networking sites or tools on matters concerning work, you are speaking as an employee and not as a citizen and restrictions may be placed upon your freedom to express yourself. Those restrictions are intended to preserve student confidentiality, maintain your status as an educator who should command and receive the respect of students, be able to maintain order and discipline in your classroom, and remain objective with respect to your students.

The District has multiple policies regarding student and employees conduct which overlap with this Policy. It recognizes that the use of electronic communication in an educational setting presents new challenges to appropriate student and employees 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 communications.

The Superintendent and/or his/her designees will periodically conduct internet searches to see if APS Employees have posted inappropriate materials on-line. When inappropriate use of computers and websites is discovered, the school principals and Superintendent will promptly bring that inappropriate use to the attention of the APS Employee member and may consider and apply disciplinary action up to and including termination. Any such discipline will be conducted in accordance with collective bargaining agreements and state and federal law.