West Chester Area School District
Expectations for Communicating Electronically with Students

West Chester Area School District (the "District") recognizes that today's students are deeply engaged in electronic forms of communication for their daily interactions with friends, family and their larger social networks. As educators, we too have turned to email, websites, blogs, text messaging and use of social media websites such as Twitter, Facebook and others to communicate with similar groups.   Whereas these forms of communications are dynamic, mobile and quickly reach their audience through technologies that have become an integral part of our online lives, they may, in many circumstances, not meet the public and professional standards for communicating with students that we set for ourselves here in the West Chester Area School District.

The expectations outlined in this document are designed for the purpose of:

1. **Protecting the students, staff, and the District;**
2. **Raising awareness of acceptable ways to use electronic communication tools when communicating with students; and**
3. **Raising awareness of the positive and negative outcomes that may result in using these tools with students.**

The following is a set of expectations that all members of the West Chester Area School District professional community shall adhere to when communicating with students electronically.

Does the communication pass the TAP Test?

Electronic communication with students should always be **T**ransparent, **A**ccessible and **P**rofessional as defined below:

1. **The communication is <u>transparent</u>** – ALL electronic communication between staff and students should be transparent. As a public school district, we are expected to maintain openness, visibility and accountability with regard to all communications.

2. **The communication is <u>accessible</u>** – ALL electronic communication between staff and students should be considered a matter of record, part of the District archives, and/or may be accessible by others.

3. **The communication is <u>professional</u>** - ALL electronic communication from staff to student should be written as a professional representing the West Chester Area School District.   This includes word choices, tone, grammar and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a District professional.   Always choose words that are courteous, conscientious and generally businesslike in manner.

If your communication meets all three of the criteria above, then it is likely that the methods of communicating with students that you are choosing are appropriate.

<u>**Acceptable Communications Methods**</u>

PowerSchool – With the implementation of this student information system, teachers are able to communicate directly with students and parents regarding information related to real-time grades, attendance, comments, assignments and much more right from their grade books.

West Chester Area School District E-Mail – Use of the District email is always an appropriate way to communicate directly with students and parents. District email provides the staff member with a record of the communication. For this reason, only the District-provided email system (your wcasd.net address) shall be used. (*Staff members experiencing difficulty receiving emails from students and parents via their District email account should first check their daily Spam Mail Summary to see if the emails have been inadvertently filtered. Should staff need further assistance, contact the Technology Department*).

School Websites and Moodle – The use of these District-provided tools is strongly encouraged. Their accessibility is ubiquitous and their content is highly transparent. With Moodle, teachers can provide some of the same types of communication that commercial social media websites provide while also providing access to your curriculum beyond your classroom walls. Moodle allows for effective online learning by supporting online discussions, secure chat rooms, online delivery of assessments, and the sharing of documents, images and other media, all in a secure, password protected environment housed entirely on District equipment. All of the content is backed up and directly accessible. Unlike Facebook, Moodle meets all three of the TAP criteria detailed on page one.

Less Acceptable Communication Methods

Text Messaging – Nearly every student has a cell phone today and use of text messaging is rising sharply. This form of communication is typically between individuals and highly personal. Since texting is such a quick and convenient way of communication, a simple message may lead to an extended texting conversation that can get "off topic." **Staff members should be aware that text messaging between a staff member and an individual student can easily be misinterpreted by a parent.** If a teacher/coach/sponsor plans to use texting for emergency or time sensitive contact with students/team members, they must be transparent about such use. He/she shall make parents aware at the beginning of the school year or season that he/she may use texting to communicate with students in emergency or time sensitive situations.

Text messaging shall not be utilized as a regular method of communication with students and may only occur in emergency or time sensitive situations.

Unacceptable Communications Methods

Non-District Email Accounts – West Chester Area School District employees shall not use personal email accounts to communicate with students about school matters.

Online Games and Related Activities – While many people enjoy a variety of gaming systems (Wii, Xbox, etc.) and recreational websites that allow them to compete with others through the Internet, this is not an acceptable activity for staff members to engage in with students.

Using Facebook

How about setting up a Facebook Fan Page for my student groups?

Please refer *to "Board Policy GAAH – Social Media Policy"* to review guidelines for setting up a "WCASD department or activity social media page" and also receive approval from your supervisors the about the intended site and its use.

A Facebook Fan Page, not a Facebook Group, may be appropriate as a supplemental method of communicating electronically with student groups if it is set up correctly.

Unlike Facebook groups, Fan Pages are visible to unregistered students and parents and are indexed and easier to find.   Be sure to follow the same District guidelines for publishing content to any website. Photos of students shall not be posted without parental permission and even with permission, without names or other personally identifiable information. <u>Make sure that your settings do not allow fans to be able to post comments, photos, videos or links to your wall, and that only you have control over the content.</u> Use your @wcasd.net email address to register as contact for the page so that any feedback or comments on the page are sent to the District, not to any personal email addresses.

If you decide to establish a Fan Page, be sure to notify the parents of your students that you will be using this site to communicate information for your group, in addition to your other methods (websites, email, formal letters, etc.) and that these pages may contain commercial advertising that is not endorsed by the District.   Since not every student has a Facebook page or access to Facebook, you must consider this when posting to your page.   The District cannot require students to have Facebook accounts. Therefore, you must make any information posted on Facebook accessible to non-Facebook users by alternate means.

Important Reminders for Employees who use Facebook, Twitter or other Social Media Sites for Personal Purposes

Staff members who are presently using Facebook to communicate with friends, family and their personal networks, should ensure that their privacy setting are set to "Only Friends." If the "Friends of Friends" or "Networks and Friends" settings are used, staff members open their content to a much larger group of people, including students and parents. **Staff members should not "friend" students who are currently enrolled in the West Chester Area School District, nor should you accept their "friend requests."** The wall between the role of a public educator and personal friendships with students should always be visible and strongly communicated.

Any content staff members publish, pictures they post, or dialogue they maintain, whether in Facebook, Twitter, a blog, a discussion thread or other website, should never compromise the professionalism, integrity and ethics in their role as a District professional.   A good question that staff members should ask themselves before posting or emailing a message is, "Would I mind if that information appeared on the front page of the local newspaper?" If the answer is "yes" then do not post it.   Social networking sites are very public places.

Additional information regarding your personal social media sites can be found in "Board Policy GAAH – Social Media Policy" , as well as on the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA) website.

Staff members should contact their Building Principal, Director of Human Resources or Director of Technology with any questions.