

## **Social Media and Cell Phone Use Guidance between School Personnel and Students**

A.R.S. § 15-203(A)(44) requires the State Board of Education (Board) to establish best practices for social media and cellular telephone use between students and school personnel, including administrators, teachers, coaches, and counselors. The statute also requires the Board to encourage school districts and charter schools to adopt these best practices and to make them available to public and private schools. Therefore, in the context of these best practices only, the term “school” includes public schools (district and charter) and private schools.

The Board recognizes the increasing use and importance of technology in K-12 education. The Board also recognizes the misuse of technology may be potentially dangerous for students. As a result, these best practices are intended to protect student safety while ensuring educators and students can continue to make use of the technology that is essential to learning and the workplace. Schools continue to have the authority to adopt policies around the use of social media and cell phones between school employees and students.

Social media is the use of web-based and mobile technologies to communicate through interactive dialogue. Social media technologies include but are not limited to blogs, picture-sharing, vlogs, internet application wall-postings, instant and direct messaging, music-sharing, crowdsourcing, voice over IP (VoIP), Facebook, LinkedIn, My Space, Twitter, YouTube, SnapChat, Instagram, TikTok, communications through video games and any successor protocol to transmit information.

Other digital communications covered in these best practices include text messaging, email, audio calls, video calls, or any other electronic communication that is made directly to students.

Technologies are any devices that: transmit sounds, images, texts, messages, videos, or electronic information; electronically records, plays, or stores information; or accesses the Internet, or private communication or information networks. Current examples are smartphones, smart devices, tablets and computers.

The Board ~~advises~~ recommends all schools adopt policies that require employees to utilize school-approved digital communications and electronic devices in a professional manner at all times.

**The Board establishes the following best practices for employees of a school or a vendor that is contracted by a school to serve students (“Educators”):**

- A. Educators should adhere to employer policies related to: technologies, including the use of employer technology, student and parental rights, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), staff ethics and staff-student relations.
- B. Educators should only use school controlled and approved technologies when communicating with students or parents. Educators should not use personal devices to directly communicate with students unless it is through school-controlled and approved technologies.

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- C. Educators should ensure that technologies used to communicate with students and school staff are maintained separate from personal technologies used to communicate with others.
- D. Educators should use technologies to enhance and add value to communications with all recipients and be respectful of those with whom they communicate.
- E. Educators should include a parent, another educator, or supervisor on any communication with students that could be construed as inappropriate pursuant to these best practices. For example, if ~~devices are not provided by the employer and~~ the educator is taking chaperones and students on a field trip and is required to stay in contact with the students throughout the trip, the educator should create a large group messaging thread with other adults in the conversation rather than messaging students directly.
- F. Educators should only communicate with students regarding academic or extracurricular activities and should refrain from communication outside of academic and extracurricular scheduled hours. Communication with students should not be of a personal nature. Communication should not be subject to interpretation. For example, such as statements, pictures, videos, GIFs, or memes of sexual intent, or sexual in nature, eComments on appearance, or comments on educator's personal relationships in or and out of school, aAnything drug or alcohol related, Events, locations, or meet-ups outside of a school sponsored activity or sharing or asking about weekend, summer, or break plans.
- G. Educators ~~should~~ must follow school policies and state law by appropriately reporting communication received from a student of a serious nature (e.g. abuse, suicide, threats of self-harm, threats to other students/school, etc). Educators shall follow all mandatory reporting requirements (A.R.S. § 13-3620).
- H. Educators are responsible for the content of their posting on any form of technology through any form of communication. ~~Inappropriate and~~ immoral and unprofessional content may be subject to disciplinary action by the Board.
- I. Educators, in all instances, must be aware of his/her association with the education field and ensure the related content of any posting is consistent with how the educator wishes to present themselves to colleagues, community members, parents, students and the Board.
- J. Educators should not use school owned or provided technologies to endorse or promote a product, a cause, or a political position or candidate. Educators may be subject to a fine from the employer for such usage of employer owned technologies and may be subject to a fine from the Attorney General or county attorney (A.R.S. § 15-511). Educators who are fined by the Attorney General or county attorney may also be subject to discipline by the Board.
- ~~K. Educators should use technologies to enhance and add value to communications with all recipients and be respectful of those with whom they communicate.~~
- L. Educators should immediately report all misuse, or suspected misuse, of technology to their direct supervisor/administrator. If the communication constitutes immoral or unprofessional conduct, it ~~should~~ must be immediately reported to the Board's Investigative Unit.

**The Board establishes the following best practices for schools:**

- A. Schools should communicate the above and related policies to all employees, including substitute teachers, at the beginning of each school year and to newly hired employees as part

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of the hiring process. This communication should include the consequences, at the school, employer and state levels, for violating employer policies and state regulations.

- B. Schools should establish which technologies are approved for use by employees, including substitute teachers, to communicate with parents and students. Approved technologies shall be communicated to the local governing board members and employees prior to the start of every school year, to newly elected Board members prior to taking office, and to newly hired employees as part of the hiring process.
- C. School controlled technologies approved by the educational employer should have employer administration, access and oversight. As part of the oversight, schools should regularly monitor and spot-check certain words and phrases throughout the school year to ensure approved technologies are used appropriately. Schools should consider limiting which apps and/or websites are allowed to be accessed on the approved technology. Records of communications by employees to students and parents should be easily accessible if requested by the employer, the Board's Investigative Unit, or law enforcement.

Violations of these best practices ~~should~~shall be reported to the Board's Investigation Unit if the communication constitutes immoral or unprofessional conduct. The Board may discipline educators for engaging in immoral or unprofessional conduct, which may include a letter of censure, suspension or revocation of the educator's certification or Educator Identification Number. Note that the Board is not authorized to investigate or discipline immoral or unprofessional conduct of private school educators who do not hold a certificate issued by the state or certain noncertified employees as outlined in (A.R.S. § 15-505).

These best practices do not apply to communications between immediate family members.