

Personnel - Certified & Non-Certified

USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Electronic communication and social media create new options for extending and enhancing the educational program and can be very effective when used cautiously and professionally. However, as the number of channels of communication in society increase rapidly, so does the rate of misuse. The lines between public and private, personal and professional communications are easily blurred in the digital world.

For the purposes of this policy, electronic communication and social media encompass software, applications (including those running on mobile devices), e-mail and web sites, which enable users to interact, create and exchange information electronically or online.

Staff-Student Relationships

Employees of Ledyard Public Schools are prohibited from establishing unprofessional and inappropriate personal relationships with students who are enrolled in Ledyard Public Schools. When a teacher and a student become “friends” in an online environment, the dynamic between them is forever changed. An invisible line between professional and personal is crossed. Examples of unprofessional and inappropriate relationship communications include, but are not limited to:

- Employees fraternizing or communicating with students as if employees and students were peers – such as writing personal letters or e-mails;
- “Texting” with students, calling students on cell phones, or allowing students to make personal calls to them unrelated to homework, class work, or other subject matter directly related to school activities;
- Sending inappropriate pictures or images to students;
- Discussing or revealing to students inappropriate and unprofessional personal matters about their private lives or inviting students to do the same (other than professional counseling by a school counselor); and
- Engaging in sexualized dialogue, whether in person, by phone, via the Internet, or in writing.

Staff, Student and Parent Communications

Employees should limit phone and electronic communications with students and their parents or guardians to school-related business. Employees should not communicate with students using personal e-mail accounts; all electronic communication with students should be conducted through a District-managed e-mail account.

Employees may not communicate or send messages to students that contain material that: could be defined by a reasonable person as profane or obscene; is racist or sexist in nature; promotes illicit, illegal or unethical activity; or is inappropriately personal in nature.

Employees are required to use appropriately respectful speech in their communications with students, their parents/guardians, other staff members and members of the community. Employees should refrain from using statements that are harassing, defamatory, abusive, discriminatory, threatening, or otherwise reflect negatively on Ledyard Public Schools.

Employees should be aware that all communications engaged in by the employee using a District-owned device, including personal, non-work-related communications, may be monitored by Ledyard Public Schools and subject to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Additionally, personal communications devices and personal e-mail account records can be subject to public and media disclosure under FOIA if they are used to conduct school-related business.

Use of Social Media

The Ledyard Board of Education acknowledges that its employees have the right of self-expression in their private lives, especially through social media. The use of a disclaimer or different user name does not negate one's status as an employee of Ledyard Public Schools.

Employees are personally responsible for any views they express online or the content of any social media they create, copy or publish online. Employees are expected to exercise professional judgment in refraining from posting information that negatively impacts their on-the-job credibility or effectiveness. Such inappropriate content includes, but is not limited to, provocative photographs or images, sexually explicit messages or use of illegal drugs. Employees can also be held accountable for posting photographs or images of students engaging in any conduct which the student is prohibited from doing.

Employees may be sued by other employees, parents or any individual that views an employee's social media postings as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous or creative of a hostile work environment. As such activities are outside the scope of employment, the employees may be personally liable for such claims.

Employees are personally responsible for ensuring that their social media postings do not violate student, staff or District confidentiality requirements. If an employee is unsure about the confidential nature of information the employee is considering posting, the employee shall consult with his/her immediate supervisor prior to making the post.

Employees are required to comply with all Board, District and school policies and procedures with respect to the use of District-owned computer equipment, networks or electronic devices when accessing social media sites. Any access to personal social media activities while on school property or using District-owned equipment must comply with those policies and procedures and may not interfere with an employee's duties at work.

School-Approved Use of Social Media

If an employee seeks to use social media sites as an educational tool or in relation to an extracurricular activity or program sponsored by Ledyard Public Schools, the employee shall inform his/her immediate supervisor prior to establishing the social media site. Once the use of social media has been approved, the employee shall comply with the following rules in establishing and managing the site:

- Parents/guardians of students needing access to the site will be notified of the use of the social media site.
- The employee is responsible for the site's content and will regularly monitor it.
- The employee is responsible for ensuring that use of the site and its content complies with all Board, District and school policies and procedures.

An employee may not use a District-sponsored/authorized social media site for private financial gain, proselytizing, solicitation, political or commercial purposes, or for any other use prohibited by state and/or federal law.

Notice of Electronic Monitoring

Connecticut statutes define "electronic monitoring" as the collection of information on an employer's premises concerning employees' activities or communications by any means other than direct observation, including the use of a computer, telephone, wire, radio, camera, electromagnetic, photo-electronic or photo-optical systems.

In accordance with Connecticut State law, Ledyard Public Schools reserves the right to monitor employee communications conducted using school telephones and/or District-provided e-mail accounts. Additionally, any employee activities and communications conducted via a computer or other

telecommunications device, whether District-owned or not, using a District server are subject to monitoring.

Disciplinary Action

Employees are hereby informed that if students, parents, other employees, the public or news media obtain access to information that indicates a potential violation this policy and bring it to the attention of school administrators, their case will be investigated. Employees should presume that their social media postings and communications will last indefinitely and be seen by, and disclosed to, anyone and everyone.

Ledyard Public Schools has the right to discipline an employee for his/her actions, including any electronic communications, online postings and/or personal use of social media, that:

- Interfere with or disrupt the work of the District;
- Harass students, other employees or members of the community;
- Create a hostile work environment;
- Breach student, employee or District confidentiality;
- Adversely affect the reputation of Ledyard Public Schools; or
- Violate the law, District policies and regulations, and/or other school rules and regulations.

Violation of this policy may lead to discipline up to and including the termination of employment consistent with state and federal law.

References:

Connecticut General Statutes:

10-221. Boards of education to prescribe rules, policies and procedures.

31-48d. Employers engaged in electronic monitoring required to give prior notice to employees. Exceptions. Civil penalty.

31-51q. Liability of employer for discipline or discharge of employee on account of employee's exercise of certain constitutional rights.

53a-24 through 53a-323. Penal Code.

28 U.S.C. 2510-2520 – *Electronic Communication Privacy Act (ECPA) of 1986*

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LEDYARD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Ledyard, Connecticut