

USE OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS DEVICES AND APPLICATIONS BY SCHOOL PERSONNEL

The use of electronic and digital communications devices and applications can be effective means for accomplishing the work of the Church and achieving the mission of the Catholic school.

When using electronic communications devices and applications, principals/chief school administrators, teachers and other school personnel (collectively “School Personnel”) must be aware they are representing the Church and school and must exercise appropriate standards of professional and ethical conduct. The content of such communication must be consistent with the educational purposes and principles of the school and the Archdiocese.

Each school should develop and implement clearly written local policies and procedures regarding access to and use of electronic and digital communications and information devices and applications by School Personnel. These policies should reflect the expectations of the particular school, the equipment and resources available at that school, and the procedures and methods by which School Personnel have access to those resources.

In order to achieve these goals, the following procedures shall be implemented in every archdiocesan school:

1. The content of communications by School Personnel must be appropriate¹, professional and succinct and contain only information related directly to their area of responsibility. Personal conversations are the preferred method of conveying information relating to student performance and behavior and for addressing problems or controversy.
2. All electronic and digital communication and information sharing with students and parents/guardians by School Personnel must occur through applications provided and monitored by the school (“School Technology”). School Technology includes websites and web pages, e-mail, blogs, social networks, instant or text messaging, and the like. Limited exceptions to this policy are identified in items 5 and 6 below.
3. If a school does not provide School Technology, then School Personnel may not use personal websites, blogs, e-mail, social networking sites, text messaging, and the like to communicate with students. Limited exceptions to this policy are identified in items 5 and 6 below.
4. All use of School Technology by School Personnel to communicate with students should identify the sender and recipient by actual name only.
5. For convenience, School Personnel may communicate with parents using a personal cell phone utilizing the voice function.
6. To ensure student safety in an emergency situation, School Personnel may communicate with students and/or parents using a personal cell phone utilizing the voice function or text messaging function.

¹ Examples of inappropriate electronic communications include, but are not limited to, communications which: (1) are a violation of State or Federal law or promote illegal activity; (2) promote or oppose a candidate for public office; (3) are intended for mass mailings, except through authorized listservs provided and maintained by the school; (4) distribute home addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses or other personal information of students, parents or school personnel; (5) contain commercial or personal advertisements, solicitations or promotions; (6) contain photographs of students, parents or school personnel in violation of school policy; (7) are in violation of the school harassment policy; (8) determined by the Principal/Chief School Administrator to be Inappropriate Electronic Conduct as this term is defined in the school’s Internet Acceptable Use Policy as described in 5202.71.

7. Parents/guardians shall be advised of the availability of School Technology and the parameters of this policy and shall have appropriate access to and shall be encouraged to visit these applications regularly. This shall include expectations and limitations for electronic and digital communications by School Personnel with students and parents/guardians using both School Technology and personal technology and applications.
8. Parents/guardians shall also be encouraged to report to the Principal/Chief School Administrator any electronic or digital communications from School Personnel that are in violation of this policy.
9. School Personnel shall have no expectation of privacy when utilizing School Technology or when communicating with students and parent/guardians.
10. Violations by School Personnel of the electronic and digital communication policy shall be subject to the full range of disciplinary consequences up to and including termination.

The school, in the person of the Principal/Chief School Administrator, is responsible for the accuracy and appropriateness of content posted on school sponsored, hosted, or maintained websites, blogs, social networking sites, applications and the like. The school must insure that the format and content are consistent with all relevant archdiocesan policies. The school must also take steps to insure that all applicable restrictions and regulations are met, such as appropriate presentation of copyrighted materials and specified age qualifications for social networking sites.

The Principal/Chief School Administrator should employ an Internet Acceptable Use Policy (“AUP”) as one means of directing and monitoring Internet and communications activities and ensuring safety and appropriate use. This should encompass all Internet accessible technology and digital communications software and applications under the supervision of the school or for which the school has formal or informal arrangements with outside providers.

The Principal/Chief School Administrator shall investigate and act upon all reported or observed violations of this policy and address them in a timely and appropriate manner according to school and archdiocesan policy, applicable state or Federal laws, and accepted administrative practice.

(For additional guidance see the following policies in the Administrative Manual: #5202.7 “Use of Internet Resources;” #5202.71 “Monitoring Internet Activities,” #4303.4 “Internet and Electronic Communications Conduct”).