

## **POLICY RELATED TO PUPIL SERVICES**

### **Burrillville School Department Social Media Policy**

#### **Purpose**

The Burrillville School Department (“Department”) recognizes the increasingly important role that technology plays in the educational process as well as in the personal lives of students, their families, faculty, and staff. Communication and online discourse through technology, including the use of email, chat, blogging, social networking, social media, text messaging, and the like empowers educators and students in the scope of their respective interactions. The Burrillville School Department respects the importance of this open exchange and any learning related to enhancing the educational environment.

Within this context, it is important that all participants feel free to express appropriate thoughts and ideas in a manner that does not disrupt the educational process, create unnecessary distractions, or adversely impact the interpersonal relationships between students, faculty and staff. This Policy is intended to foster a thoughtful, responsible use of social networking and related technological communication tools that will minimize risk and be appropriately professional and respectful. Further, the purpose of this Policy is to protect and maintain professionalism in the workplace for all School Personnel and to avoid, wherever possible, the appearance of impropriety in School Personnel-Student and School Personnel-School Personnel relationships.

#### **Best Practice Guidelines**

Because technology and social networking services are dynamic and evolve quickly by nature, the Burrillville School Department has assembled “best practice” guidelines to help School personnel use these communication tools effectively, protect professional and personal relationships, safeguard student information, and follow district policies.

The keys to success in using social networking, social media, and other communication tools are for; School Personnel and Students to be transparent and honest about their identities when using these communication tools; be thoughtful prior to composing a message or post; be respectful of the people and issues involved in any communication.

#### **Be Transparent**

School Personnel should always be honest and transparent about their identity. If they are representing the Burrillville School Department using an online service, social network or communication tool, it should be clearly stated. If they choose to post about the Department or their School on their personal time, they should identify themselves as a Burrillville faculty or staff member.

#### **Be Accurate**

Make sure of all the facts before preparing a post. Cite and link sources whenever possible. It’s better to research and verify information with a source first than to have to post a correction or retraction later.

### **Respect Copyright**

Understanding copyright and fair use laws in regard to posting or publishing protected content is the responsibility of School Personnel. It is good practice to reference sources by linking to them in any corresponding posts or messages.

### **Use Good Ethical and Professional Judgment**

School Personnel should always consider the professional image they wish to convey on behalf of the Burrillville School Department when using communication tools and social networks. Students should also consider the image and reputation they wish to convey when using these services and tools.

### **Understand Online Privacy**

It's important for everyone to understand that there is no such thing as a completely private online service or social network. Posts, messages, and comments that appear to be private can easily be copied and forwarded by other users. Most posted information is archived by online services and may be able to be found using search engines many years into the future. An easy analogy is to consider any information posted or sent via the Internet as similar to a post card sent via the postal service. The information is visible to many people at numerous points during its travels.

### **Maintain Confidentiality**

Do not post confidential or proprietary information about the Burrillville School Department, its students, its faculty or staff. Do not use online tools or social networks to discuss situations that identify specific individuals. Consider the privacy of students and School Personnel and avoid posting identifiable information, photos, or videos without permission.

### **Respect Burrillville School Department Time and Property**

Burrillville School Department technology equipment and School Personnel work time are to be used for Department related business. Maintaining personal sites should be done on employees' own time using non-Burrillville equipment and systems.

### **Review Your Profiles**

Most social networks and social media services create a "profile" for each member that lists a wide variety of information about the member. It's crucial that School Personnel and students that use any of these services regularly review their various profiles and make sure the profiles don't contain any information that is inappropriate, should not be public, or conflicts with their professional and ethical judgment.

### **Monitor Comments and Responses**

Many social networks and social media services support discussion through comments—commenting builds community, strengthens credibility, and encourages discourse. However, School Personnel should configure the services within their social networks, social media services or blogs so that comments and responses must be reviewed and approved before they

appear (i.e. turn on comment moderation). This can help to prevent inappropriate comments and responses from being published.

### **Keep Records of Communications**

If School Personnel are using social networking sites, social media services, text messaging, or other communication tools to conduct School Department business, it is strongly recommended that records are kept of these communications. These records can help protect School Personnel in the event of a complaint or a reported incident.

### **Policy Guidelines**

No student, employee, faculty or staff member of the Burrillville School Department ("School Personnel") shall post, forward, or otherwise disseminate any data, documents, photos, images, videos, or other information using any technology medium, including, but not limited to, social networking websites or services, which might result in a disruption of classroom activity or the educational process. Fraternization, including, but not limited to, stalking, sexual harassment, and other objectively inappropriate behavior enabled by a position of authority, via the Internet, instant messaging, text messaging, or otherwise between School Personnel and students (whether by mobile telephone, computer, or other communication medium) is prohibited. Students are prohibited from engaging in stalking, sexual harassment, bullying, and other objectively inappropriate behavior among and/or between fellow Students, via the Internet, instant messaging, text messaging, or otherwise (whether by mobile telephone, computer, or other communication medium).

Any violation of this policy by School Personnel will be subject to those disciplinary sanctions included in the Collective Bargaining Agreement applicable to said Personnel. Any violation of this policy by Students will be subject to those disciplinary sanctions included in the Student Handbook.

Nothing in this policy prohibits School Personnel or students from using educational websites and services or the Burrillville School Department's websites and services. These sites are used solely for educational purposes.

### **In-Service Training**

In addition, to this policy, all School Personnel are encouraged to attend an in-service training on *Internet Safety for Students, Teachers, and Administrators*. The purpose of this Policy is to protect and maintain professionalism in the workplace for all School Personnel and avoid, wherever possible, the appearance of impropriety in School Personnel-Student relationships.

### **References**

- "Should Your Library Have a Social Media Policy?", School Library Journal, 10/1/2009.  
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- "Social Networking Guidelines for School Employees", Blogg-Ed Indetermination, 2/12/2009,  
<http://taffee.edublogs.org/2009/02/12/social-networking-guidelines-for-school-employees/>
- "Tips for Writing Your First Social Media Policy", Nonprofit Technology Network, 2/17/2010,  
<http://www.nten.org/blog/2010/02/17/tips-writing-your-first-social-media-policy>

“Scituate School Department Policy on Social Networking and Text Messaging”, Policy #6080  
“Coventry Public Schools Social Media Policy”, Policy #6150

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