

Community High School District 128

Expectations for Communicating Electronically with Students

Community High School District 128 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 D128.

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 D128 professional community are expected to 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 transparent.** – 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 regards to all communications.
2. **The communication is accessible.** - 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 professional.** – ALL electronic communication from staff to student should be written as a professional representing District 128. This includes word choices, tone, grammar and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a D128 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 very likely that the methods of communicating with students that you are choosing are very appropriate; moreover, encouraged.

Acceptable Communications Methods

PowerSchool - With the implementation of this new student information system for 2010-11, teachers will be 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.

District 128 Email - Use of District email is always a very 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 @d128.org address) should be used. Please refer to the D128 Email Standards for best practice guidelines in its use. *(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 IT 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 Communications 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." **That said, 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 immediate and urgent contact with students/team members, they must be transparent about such use. He/she must make parents aware at the beginning of the school year or season that he/she may use texting.

Unacceptable Communications Methods

Non-District Email Accounts – District 128 employees should never use personal email accounts to communicate with students about school matters. Coaches not employed by District 128 during the school day must also follow this expectation.

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?

A Facebook Fan Page, not a Facebook Group, can 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 thus indexed and easier to find. Be sure to follow the same District guidelines for publishing content to any website, in that photos of students are not posted in conjunction with their names or other personally identifiable information. 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. Use your “@d128.org” 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’ll 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 even access to Facebook, you must consider this when posting to your page. District 128 cannot require students to have Facebook accounts, as this should be a family decision. 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 settings 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 never “friend” students who are currently enrolled in District 128, 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 D128 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. Contrary to what some people think, email and social networking sites are very public places.

Staff members should contact their building principal, director of communications, or director of technology with any questions.