

# **ST. TAMMANY PARISH SCHOOL BOARD**

## **POLICY ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS**

The St. Tammany Parish School Board is committed to the safety of its students, faculty, staff and visitors. The Board and its employees must hold themselves to the highest moral and ethical standards. Interactions between employees, parents and students should be cooperative and respectful. This Policy is intended to comply with all applicable State and Federal laws, including the most recent action taken in Act 214 by the 2009 Louisiana Legislative Session, Louisiana Revised Statute 17:81(Q).

The St. Tammany Parish School Board acknowledges that technology has advanced to the point that many telecommunication devices are easily accessible and allow swift communication. Electronic Communication is defined as a message/interaction through System-provided and personal devices which provide direct communication, including, but not limited to, voice or text-based telecommunication devices and computers, and other venues that facilitate indirect contact/cyber-interaction using an intermediate method, including, but not limited to, internet-based social networks.

The Superintendent shall be responsible for establishing the mandated written procedures and guidelines that will provide a protocol for the management and administration of the components of this Policy. The procedures and guidelines are to introduce procedures to ensure that the staff, students and parents are informed. These procedures and guidelines shall be in compliance with law and provide continuity and consistency.

The procedures and guidelines are intended to promote the appropriate student-staff interaction by consistently implementing a planned management strategy. This Policy is not intended to limit or impede the use of technology as a meaningful teaching tool. Such procedures and guidelines, as adopted, shall be made available each year to all System employees, parents and students. Nothing in this Policy shall be construed to deny any employee of his right to due process under the law. The St. Tammany Parish School Board shall not be civilly liable for any electronic communication by an employee with a student that is prohibited as provided in this Policy and the Superintendent's procedures and guidelines.

# **ST. TAMMANY PARISH SCHOOL BOARD**

## **SUPERINTENDENT’S PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS**

### **PURPOSE**

The Superintendent’s Procedures and Guidelines establish the mandated written procedures that will provide a protocol for the management and administration of the components of the St. Tammany Parish School Board’s policy relating to employee electronic communication with students. More specifically, the guidelines introduce procedures to ensure that the staff and parents are informed regarding the expectations with respect to its employees relative to electronic communication by an employee with a student enrolled at that school. Interactions between employees, parents and students should be cooperative and respectful. The School System’s approved electronic communications system shall be utilized to promote educational excellence.

Technology has advanced to the point that many telecommunication devices are easily accessible and allow swift communication. These devices provide direct communication, including, but not limited to, voice or text-based telecommunication devices, computers and those that facilitate indirect communication using an intermediate method, including but not limited to internet-based social networks. Documentation of the components of these procedures and guidelines shall be maintained by the Superintendent or her designee.

The St. Tammany Parish School Board prohibits any type of close personal relationship between a school employee and a student that may be reasonably perceived as unprofessional, such as excessive personal attention outside of school, or dating. School employees shall not entertain students, socialize with students, or spend an excess amount of time with students in such a manner as to reasonably create the impression to other students, their parents, or the public that an improper relationship exists. These guidelines are intended to promote the appropriate student-staff interaction by consistently implementing a planned management strategy. This is not intended to limit or impede the use of technology as a meaningful teaching tool. Such procedures and guidelines shall be made available each year to all School System employees, parents and students. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to deny any employee of his right to due process under the law.

### **DEFINITIONS**

Electronic Communication – a message/interaction through System provided and personal devices which provide direct communication, including but not limited to voice or text-based telecommunication devices and computers, and other venues that facilitate indirect contact/cyber-interaction using an intermediate method, including but not limited to internet-based social networks.

Educational Services – constitutes provision of direct and indirect classroom instruction as well as extracurricular activities provided by St. Tammany Parish School Board.

Violations of the Policy and Procedures and Guidelines include, but not limited to:

- employee failure to report an instance of communication using a non-School System electronic communication system with a student at that school;
- utilizing the School System or personal electronic communication system with a student at that school for non-educational purposes; and
- contacting a student when the parents have opted out of individual communication with employees.

## **PROTOCOL**

1. All electronic communication by an employee with a student enrolled in that school must be relative to the educational services provided to the student and shall be delivered by means provided by or otherwise made available by the School System for this purpose. School Board employees are prohibited from using any System electronic communication with a student for a purpose not related to educational services except for communication with the employee's immediate family if such communication is otherwise authorized.
2. The occurrence of any electronic communication made by an employee with a student enrolled at that school using means other than ones provided by or made available by the School System shall be reported by the employee. This report shall be given to the site administrator verbally or by email prior to reassuming regular duties, but no later than 24 hours after the occurrence or knowledge of the occurrence, except as otherwise provided in these guidelines. A Reporting Form (Appendix A) should be completed by the end of the work day.
3. If an employee is attending an education related trip, function or event with students at which electronic communication with students is reasonably necessary for coordination at the trip, function or event, for the safety of students, or for some other reasonable purpose and the electronic communication will or may occur over a period of time not to exceed seven (7) days, then the employee may obtain written permission from the Principal, in advance of the trip, function or event, to communicate with students via electronic communication. In order to exercise this option, a parent's written permission to communicate with a student shall be obtained in advance of the trip, function or event. Approved School System electronic communication methods are School System email, school sponsored teacher websites, school websites, school provided phones and other electronic communication that is approved by the Superintendent or her designee. Records of any reported communication shall be maintained by the site administrators for a period of at least one year.
4. It is the duty of each School System employee to comply with the Policy and Superintendent's Procedures and Guidelines regarding electronic communication.

Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action, and in extreme circumstances may constitute willful neglect of duty. The Board and School System prohibit retaliation by anyone associated with the School System against one who files a report of an alleged violation. This prohibition extends to the alleged violator of this policy and/or third parties who, directly or indirectly, retaliate against an individual reporting a violation.

5. Any violations or suspected violations of this Policy or Procedures and Guidelines should be reported to the site administrator verbally or by email. The Board through its designees will promptly, thoroughly and fairly investigate reports of an alleged failure by a school employee or student to comply with the Policy and Superintendent's Procedures and Guidelines regarding electronic communication. Appropriate action shall be taken that is consistent with the results of the investigation and the legal requirements afforded by law, e.g. tenure law, collective bargaining agreement and/or Student Code of Conduct.
6. All persons associated with the School System shall uphold the law. Any alleged violation of the Board's Policy or these procedures and guidelines involving a school employee that may also be a violation of state or federal law shall be reported to the proper authorities. Some acts are considered criminal and may be subject to prosecution. The Board and School System will fully cooperate with law enforcement agencies and the District Attorney in investigating and prosecuting such criminal offenses.
7. All School System employees shall be informed during the year of implementation and upon entering into System service about the Policy and Superintendent's Procedures and Guidelines regarding electronic communication including the possible consequences for a failure to comply with the Policy and Superintendent. The Policy and Superintendent's Procedures and Guidelines shall be posted on the School System website for reference.
8. A Systemwide letter will be disseminated to parents via the students informing them of the Policy and Procedures and Guidelines regarding electronic communication by employees with students enrolled at that school during the first semester of the 2009-2010 school year. Thereafter, parents and students will be notified as part of the *Discipline Handbook for Parents and Students* and the School System website.
9. The parents have the option to submit written documentation to the site administrator reflecting their desire for their child not to be contacted individually through electronic communication from any school employee at the school where their child is enrolled, group electronic communication excepted.
10. Violations of the Policy shall be addressed by site administrators in compliance with the provisions of discipline in the collective bargaining agreements. Violations that involve repeated or improper contact with students shall result in consequences that may range from a warning up to a recommendation for termination depending upon the severity of the violation.

11. These procedures and guidelines discourage employee electronic communication with students at all System schools and improper interaction shall be handled following applicable laws and policies. However, the law clearly prohibits electronic communication by an employee at a school to a student enrolled at that school, unless proper reporting procedures are followed in compliance with law and policy.

