ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The Cuyahoga Falls City School District [CFCS] 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 employees and students that we set for ourselves here in the CFCS.

The expectations outlined below are designed for the purpose of:

A.   Protecting the students, staff and district;

B.   Raising awareness of acceptable ways to use electronic communication tools when communicating with employees/students; and

C.   Raising awareness of the positive and negative outcomes that may result in using these tools.

Electronic communication should always be transparent, accessible and professional as defined below:

A.   Transparent Communication – All electronic communication between employees and students should be transparent. As a public school district, we are expected to maintain openness, visibility and accountability with regard to all communications.

B.   Accessible Communication – 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.

C.   Professional Communication – All electronic communication should be written as a professional representing the CFCS. This includes word choices, tone, grammar and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of the CFCS. 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 that you are choosing are very appropriate; moreover, encouraged.

Acceptable Electronic Communication Methods

Building Newsletters
District Website
District eNewsletter
                        Blogs – learning.cfalls.summit.k12.oh.us
                        Student Blogs – students.cfalls.summit..k12.oh.us
                        Email
Google Partner Page
Honeywell Instant Alert
Moodle
ProgressBook

Less Acceptable Communication Methods

Text Messaging – Nearly every student has a cell phone today and use of text messaging is high. 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." Employees should be aware that text messaging between an employee and a student can easily be misinterpreted by a parent. If an employee plans to use texting for immediate and urgent contact with students, he/she 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 Communication Methods

Non-district email accounts – CFCS employees should never use personal email accounts to communicate with students about school matters.

Inappropriate Communication

Employees or students must report to a school administrator any communication that may be construed as inappropriate.

Using Social Media to Communicate to Student or Employee Groups

A Facebook Fan Page or Twitter Feed, can be appropriate as a supplemental method of communicating electronically with student groups if it is set up correctly. Facebook 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. Use your "@cfalls.summit.k12.oh.us" email address to register as the contact for the page so that any feedback or comments are sent to the district, not to a personal email address. It is required to use

the district's Facebook Fan Page Terms of Use. Please contact the CFCS Communications Department for information and instruction.

If you decide to establish a fan page or a twitter feed, be sure to notify employees and/or 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 Twitter account, Facebook page or even access to any social media websites, you must consider this when posting. The CFCS cannot require employees/students to have any social media accounts like Facebook or Twitter, as this should be a family and/or personal decision. Therefore, you must make any information posted accessible by alternate means.

Please note that employees and students do not have access to social media websites when they are using the district's network.

Important Reminders About Using Social Media Sites for Personal Purposes

•   Students and 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, you open your content to a much larger group of people. **Staff members should never "friend" students who are currently enrolled in the CFCS, 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 published, pictures posted, or dialogue, whether in Facebook, Twitter, a blog, a discussion thread or other website, should never compromise the professionalism, integrity and ethics in your role as a CFCS employee/student. A good question you should ask 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.

•   Use common sense and discretion when using social media tools. Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libelous toward the CFCS. Exercise caution regarding colorful language, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions and derogatory remarks or characterizations.

•   Weigh whether a particular posting puts your effectiveness as an employee/student at risk. Keep in mind that while you are an employee/student at the CFCS, you are always a *representative* of the district/school, even at home and online.

- Do not discuss students or coworkers, publicly criticize school policies or personnel, or share confidential information. Don't assume that anything online is private.

- Remember that postings on the Internet are available to anyone and everyone, are all but impossible to delete, are traceable back to the author and will exist and be retrievable virtually forever.

- Be particularly vigilant not to expose confidential information. Exposing such information is a violation of policy and state law and violations carry serious consequences.

- Never provide links to questionable materials or websites – especially those that are indecent, defamatory or extreme.

- Respect all copyright, intellectual property and proprietary rights laws. Do not plagiarize or use unauthorized images, written content, music or video.

- If you post to external websites on the CFCS -related subjects and are not formally representing the district, use a disclaimer stating that your thoughts and opinions are your own and do not necessarily represent those of the CFCS.

- Social media outlets are not appropriate forums for addressing employment, personnel or other human-resource issues.

- Remember, ultimately what you write is your responsibility.

- If you make a mistake, be upfront, admit it and quickly correct it.

Employees or students should contact their building principal or district administration with any questions regarding this policy.

Adopted: May 20, 2014