

SECTION: OPERATIONS

TITLE: PUBLIC COMMUNICATION  
BY EMPLOYEES

ADOPTED: January 24, 2010

REVISED: February 21, 2011

# HIGHLANDS SCHOOL DISTRICT

## 816. PUBLIC COMMUNICATION BY EMPLOYEES

### 1. Purpose

In a technologically advancing world, employees, especially those within the public education system, must embrace the benefits offered by such technology to improve its program without becoming detrimental to the program philosophy or reputation. Inasmuch, the use of social networking web sites, blogging web sites, web-camera capabilities and host sites, instant messaging, text and/or picture messaging, and e-mail messaging should accurately reflect a positive, responsible image of a Highlands School District employee. Employees are expected to appropriately balance First Amendment rights and to maintain an effective and credible reputation as an educator. This policy also applies to support staff, administrators, classified staff, and Athletic Department staff.

### 2. Guidelines

District employees are not permitted to use third party e-mail systems (such as Yahoo or AOL) in their capacity as representatives of Highlands School District. All e-mail sent by employees in their capacity as representatives of the Highlands School District must be sent from Board authorized e-mail systems, with Board authorized return addresses. Such e-mails are subject to retention in accordance with the Board's Acceptable Use of Internet and Computer Resources Policy.

Employees should note that all social media users are liable for what they post on their own site and on the sites of others. Employees should be honest about their identity. Anonymous postings are able to be traced back to authors in cases involving legal procedures. Posting or viewing of inappropriate, defamatory, libelous, or obscene material (as identified by law), may result in disciplinary action.

This Board regulation prohibits frequent personal communication with current students (via phone, e-mail, letters, notes, text messaging, social networking sites and/or other electronic communications) unrelated to course work or official school matters. Exceptions may be made at the discretion of the Superintendent or his/her designee in circumstances where a student is a relative or existing close personal acquaintance of an employee. The district offers various opportunities and methods for employee, student and parent communications, including e-mail addresses, web

site pages and sections on the [www.GoldenRams.com](http://www.GoldenRams.com) web site, school telephone numbers, and academic progress applications, including Progress Book. Employees who are bound by a code of professional conduct pursuant to their license, certification or position within the district must conduct themselves in accordance with the same when utilizing social media.

Employees who identify themselves with their school district online must make sure that the content associated with them is consistent with their work at the district. Personal web sites and blogs should include a disclaimer that says the employee's views are their own and do not reflect those of the Highlands School District.

Employees must at all times adhere to confidentiality obligations imposed by law, including the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Employees must comply with all copyright laws and must reference or cite all sources as required by law. Under no circumstances shall the employee use district name(s), logos, mascots or images without express written consent and in accordance with district policy. The use of images or names of students on personal blog or social networking sites is absolutely prohibited. Employees shall refrain from discussing confidential district matters (e.g. litigation or employee/student discipline) on social media sites.

Employees shall not use the district's name to promote or endorse any product, cause or political party or candidate.

Employees should remember that online postings often are archived and searchable, and thus, any postings should be carefully considered. This should also be considered when approving "comments" to be viewable on your social networking web site.

Employees should remember that as a staff member of Highlands School District, students and community members expect that the employee is to maintain a professional manner in order to be a role model for students at all times.

Violation of this regulation may result in discipline as appropriate, up to and including termination, in accordance with all applicable district disciplinary policies and procedures. The district does not arbitrarily monitor employee use of public online media; however, it may take appropriate responsive action when it becomes aware of, or suspects, online conduct that adversely affects the educational process or violates applicable codes of professional conduct. Online postings may subject the employee to disciplinary action if deemed a violation of this regulation or any applicable law, including applicable codes of professional conduct.

	<p>The Superintendent or his/her designee shall annually advise staff members of the guidelines contained in this administrative regulation.</p>
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