

Hawthorn District 73 Guidelines for Communicating Electronically with Students, Parents and Community members.

Hawthorn District 73 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 expect here at Hawthorn.

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 Hawthorn District 73 professional community are expected to adhere to when communicating with students, parents and community members electronically. The Hawthorn District 73 professional community includes Teachers, Administrators, Staff and members of the Board of Education.

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, students, parents and community members 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, students, parents and community members 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 Hawthorn. This includes word choices, tone, grammar and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a Hawthorn education 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

District Email - Use of District email is always a very appropriate way to communicate directly with parents and community members. District email provides the staff member with a record of the communication. Unless pre-approved by administration, staff members should refrain from using district email for personal business. For this reason, only the district-provided email system (your @Hawthorn73.org address) should be used for all communications related to the Hawthorn School District.

Hawthorn does not routinely provide students with email addresses. Some teachers have set up secure email access to communicate with students or allow students to communicate with teachers or students in other classrooms or schools. This is accomplished through a student oriented and protected email service such as ePals.

*Please note that all district email records are subject to **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)** requests and can be disclosed and made public upon request.*

School and Teacher Websites and Blogs - The use of these District-provided tools is strongly encouraged. Their accessibility is ubiquitous and their content is highly transparent. We encourage all teachers to use their classroom web sites and/or Blogs as their primary internet based communication with parents and others outside of the classroom.

Other classroom on-line resources - Additional classroom resources such as password protected Blogs, course management tools like Moodle, and other similar systems that provide on-line learning opportunities are currently being investigated and piloted. Administrator approval is required in order for teachers to use these tools with students and they must be deployed in a secure, password protected environment. Use of on-line resources with students must also be openly communicated with parents and expectations for using these on-line resources must be clear. Accommodations for students who may not have internet access at home should be considered when on-line tools are expected to be used outside the regular school day.

Less Acceptable Communications Methods

Text Messaging - Many students have a cell phones today and the use of text messaging is rising sharply, even in the primary grade levels. This form of communication is typically between two individuals and is typically 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 – Hawthorn district employees and board of education members should never use personal email accounts to communicate with students, parents or community members about any school related matters.

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 Social Networking Sites

At this time, Hawthorn District 73 does not recommend or sanction the use of Facebook, MySpace, or any other social network site for classroom or student use. Given most of our students are under the age restriction requirements for these types of sites, it is not an appropriate or effective method of communicating or collaborating with our students.

Important Reminders for Employees who use Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, or other social networking sites for personal purposes

Staff members who are presently using social networking sites 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, parents or community members who are currently enrolled in or affiliated in some way with District 73, nor should you accept their “friend requests.” The wall between the role of a public educator and personal friendships with students and parents 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 an educator. Care should be taken when making comments related to your affiliation with Hawthorn District 73 on any personal social network site. 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, Manager of Technology Services or District Administration with any questions.