Expectations for Communicating Electronically with Students

The Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy (IMSA) acknowledges that today's students are highly engaged in electronic communication with friends, family, and broader social networks. In line with [IMSA policy GECS](#), this document outlines the guidelines for school employees to maintain professional boundaries while communicating with students. This policy applies to all school employees, including teachers, coaches, administrators, and other staff members.

As educators, we use tools like email, G-Chats, websites, blogs, text messaging, and various social media platforms, to communicate both personally and professionally. While these forms of communication are dynamic, mobile, and quick to reach audiences, they may not always align with the professional standards we uphold at IMSA for communicating with students.

The expectations outlined in this document are designed to:

1. **Protect the students, staff, and the Academy.**
2. **Raise awareness of acceptable ways to use electronic communication tools when communicating with students.**
3. **Raise awareness of the positive and negative outcomes that may result in using these tools with students.**

A good question staff members should ask themselves before posting or communicating with students 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 or communicate it. Contrary to what some people think, email and social networking sites are very public places. The rest of the document outlines more guidelines on what are and are not acceptable forms of communication.

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. **Transparent** – ALL electronic communication between staff and students should be transparent. As a state agency, we are expected to maintain openness, visibility, and accountability with regard to all communications.
2. **Accessible** - ALL electronic communication between staff and students should be considered a matter of record, part of the Academy archives, and/or may be accessible by others.
3. **Professional** – ALL electronic communication from staff to students should be written as a professional representing IMSA. This includes word choices, tone, grammar, and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of the Academy. Always choose words that are courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike in manner.

Acceptable Methods of Communications

PowerSchool - Teachers are able to communicate directly with students and parents regarding information related to real-time grades, attendance, comments, assignments, and much more through PowerSchool.

IMSA Google Suite (Email, Chat, Doc's, etc) - The use of IMSA G Suite is an appropriate way to communicate directly with students and parents. IMSA email provides a record of the communication. For this reason, only the Academy-provided email (your @imsa.edu address) should be used. Please refer to IMSA's Use of Information Technology System policy for best practice guidelines. (*Staff members experiencing difficulty receiving emails from students and parents via their IMSA 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 ITS Department.*)

IMSA Zoom - Students, staff, and faculty have access to Academy-provided Zoom video conferencing accounts. Login credentials are the same as the Academy-provided email accounts. Zoom accounts may be used for a variety of purposes, such as meeting with students virtually, or providing students remote access to a synchronous course session while off-campus.

Learning Management Systems & Instructional Technologies - IMSA's Learning Management System (LMS) is Canvas. Canvas allows for effective online learning by providing features such as online discussions, delivery of assessments, and sharing of documents, all in a secure, password-protected environment accessible and controlled by the Academy. Additional instructional technologies, such as the Google Workspace for Education apps (Google Docs, etc.) are also acceptable when used through Academy-provided accounts.

Student Management System (REACH) - REACH is a software system that aims to streamline processes and enhance the student experience for students, families, staff, and faculty. REACH allows a pathway for different departments to communicate, in real time, regarding student support. Employees can use their IMSA credentials to access this communication tool.

Less Acceptable Communication Methods

Text Messaging - While texting is a quick and convenient way to communicate, a simple message can sometimes lead to an extended conversation that may drift "off-topic." **Staff members should avoid using texting as the primary means of communication as the messages could easily be misinterpreted.** If a teacher, coach, or sponsor intends to use texting for urgent or immediate contact with students or team members, supervisor approval must be given prior and, they should be transparent about this practice and ensure it follows the TAP guidelines. At the beginning of the academic year or season, they must inform parents that they may use texting for communication.

Some staff members are issued a work phone due to the nature of their position. Work phones should only be used for tasks and communications related to school operations, student management, and parent communications in emergency situations. Work phone numbers are meant for internal use only between Academy personnel. At times, when a work phone must be used to contact students, it must follow the TAP guidelines.

Unacceptable Communications Methods

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

Online Games and Related Activities – While many people enjoy a variety of gaming systems (Playstation, 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.

Personal Social Media Accounts - Maintaining professional boundaries on social media is crucial for school employees. School employees are not permitted to use their personal social media accounts to interact with current students. **Staff members should never "friend" students who are currently enrolled at IMSA, or accept student "friend requests."** The wall between the role of a public educator and personal friendships with students should always be visible and strongly communicated.

Staff members who are presently using social media accounts to communicate with friends, family, and their personal networks should ensure that their accounts are set to "private." Please see specific platforms for appropriate guidance.

Using Social Media Groups, Forums, and Pages

Sometimes, it is preferred to create spaces to communicate with students and parents. If this is the case, it is recommended that employees use G Chat for this purpose. Supervisor approval must be given if there is a need to use a channel outside of the preferred communication options, such as a Facebook group, Discord channel, Slack message etc. Employees should create a user account separate from any personal account. Employees should use their "@imsa.edu" email address so that any messages or comments on the page are sent to the Academy, not to any personal email addresses.

All messages sent through these channels should follow the TAP guidelines. Employees must notify the parents of the site they are using to communicate information to students, and that these externally hosted sites may contain commercial advertising that is not endorsed by the Academy. It is also required to share login credentials with a supervisor to help increase transparency.

It is the employee's responsibility to monitor these channels to ensure that no external, non-IMSA affiliated individuals enter the chat, and that the chat maintains a professional, courteous, and inclusive environment for all users.

Important Reminders for Employees who use Social Media Sites for Personal Purposes

Posts on personal accounts that can be seen by students, parents, colleagues, and community members, whether related to work or not, can potentially impact someone's professional reputation. Any content staff members publish, pictures they post, or dialogue they maintain, whether on social media, a blog, a discussion thread, or other websites, should never compromise the professionalism, integrity, and ethics of their role as an IMSA professional. Again, it is

recommended that staff members set personal social media accounts to "private" and use discretion and professionalism on social media.

Staff members should contact their supervisor with any questions.