Guidelines for Communicating with Students and Families

We know that teachers and staff are missing their students and wanting to stay connected during the extended school closure due to the Coronavirus. Maintaining relationships — with our students, parents, and each other — is a big part of our jobs as educators. As we adjust to working in new ways, we’ve outlined some tips and best practices to help guide your communication efforts. These suggestions are also provided to help ensure interactions with students and families remain equitable, thoughtful, safe and compliant.

Messaging
- Be sure your communication is school-related. At the same time, be sure to convey your support, warmth, and care for your students’ well-being. Keep in mind that many of our students and parents may be struggling (with illness, finances, family stress, isolation, or other issues). Your school connections offer a stable support system and positive relationships that can help them cope and get through this challenging time.
- The best practice is to use district systems for communication methods when appropriate, such as: work email, school websites, Schoology, Microsoft Teams, and Zoom.

Email
- While working remotely, staff are encouraged to use email to communicate with families and students.
- Use your ____@svsd410.org email to connect with students and parents. Do not use your private email addresses or personal text messaging – to avoid them being subject to a public records request.
- If you need to email a secondary student, use their school email address (provided to all SVSD middle and high school students).
- Check district email regularly.
- Limit “reply-all” responses to times when it really matters.
- When sending a large group communication, consider putting the distribution list in the Bcc line, to prevent the group being picked up in a “reply all” response.
- Using the Bcc line also makes the recipient list unviewable to others, thus protecting the confidentiality of those included and keeping their personal email addresses private.

Phone Calls, Texting
- The district is exploring how to leverage the Mitel phone system to place calls through district numbers, but this is not currently accessible for all at this time.
- If you choose to use a personal phone or other device to connect with colleagues, students, and families please keep these things in mind:
  o Refrain from phone calls or texts directly to students’ cell phone numbers. Instead, use home numbers or numbers that parents or guardians have listed in Skyward.
In addition to *67 to keep your phone number private, most cell phone users can access their settings to block their number to people they call.

- **Android or iOS:** [https://www.komando.com/tech-tips/block-cellphone-number/362047/](https://www.komando.com/tech-tips/block-cellphone-number/362047/)
- **Apple:** Settings>Phone > Show My Caller ID, [toggle button off] or hide your caller ID on all outgoing calls ([depending on OS](https://www.komando.com/tech-tips/block-cellphone-number/362047/)). (Not available for some carriers, i.e. Verizon)

- If you are a staff member who may have to make multiple calls (counselor, mental health specialist, etc.) or are in a unique situation, web-based Google Voice is an alternative to having to block your personal number. See [Google Voice](https://www.google.com/voice) instructions.

**Virtual Meetings**

- No matter what kind of conference or meeting you’re in, some simple reminders can really make a difference:
  - Keep your microphone muted, unless you’re the one talking. (Tip: pressing the space bar in a Zoom meeting engages the mic when you want to speak.)
  - Be conscious of what’s in the view of the camera.
    - Always present a professional appearance, comparable to an in-person meeting.
    - Know how and when to mute your video/camera.
  - Use the chat box to share comments.
  - For more tips, read [Virtual Meeting etiquette](https://www.google.com/voice).

- For any virtual meeting session between a teacher and their classroom, the teacher should strive to ensure no disadvantage to students and families who cannot or choose not to engage.
- For live virtual meeting sessions staff should strive for an equitable and open invitation to the class at a predetermined time.
- Live virtual meeting sessions with only a staff member and an individual student (e.g., counselors re-engaging seniors) should be audio-only, with the cameras disabled. The “screen share” feature is permissible to review pertinent documents and/or presentations.

**Social Media Considerations**

- Just about every post created has an opportunity to be seen by families in our community. Make it respectful, resourceful and mindful of the potential impact. We are all working during this time of school closure. We miss our students and can’t wait to see them. This isn’t an unexpected vacation, or a break for us. This is a hard time for many.
- Staff should avoid making personal social media posts during work hours.
- Staff should not post content on personal accounts that includes identifiable information about students.
- Parent communications are better conducted personally and not via Social Media.
- Consider using your school’s social media pages to share information, photos, videos, and messages of encouragement, not instruction. Here are some ideas.
- The district-approved school social media pages are archived and compliant with public records. Contact your building principal and/or social media manager to coordinate posts to your school’s accounts.
- **Do not** use your personal social media accounts to connect with students. The use of personal social accounts to communicate with students is subject to the Public Records Act.
Related Policies/Procedures
Please note that the SVSD Board Policies apply when working from home online. While we recognize that the things we do day-to-day don’t always transfer easily to the virtual world, the following guidelines provide staff strategies for safe and appropriate student support:

- Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Boundaries ([5253 policy/procedure](#))
- Electronic Resources and Internet Safety (2022 procedure)
- Social Networking Guidelines for Staff

Personal Devices
When possible, avoid using your personal cell phone, tablet, or computer for work-related purposes unless you use your school district email, Google account and Google apps. If you do use your personal device, any work-related records that are created are subject to disclosure under the Public Records Act.

Tech Support
- **Need Help?** Please submit a Help Ticket at [https://help.svsd410.org/](https://help.svsd410.org/) for all requests for tech support.

Working Hours
- Have a designated space to work and ‘get ready for work’ daily.
- Set up a schedule for your day--plan your goals and tentative timelines.
- Don’t forget to get up and move! Most of us spend our hours on our feet, constantly moving around. Keep yourself healthy during this change.

Separate Work Life from Home Life
- Don’t constantly monitor your cell phone to see if people are getting back to you; set boundaries between your work and home life.
- Be conscious of using your google drive/district login for work-related activities and conversations only.
  - You can easily set up your own personal google login and tools for staying connected with friends creatively.

Thank you for the difference you continue to make in our students’ lives!