

Archdiocesan Catholic Schools Information

***Policies and Guidance of the Catholic Education Office* Related to the Use of the Internet and Electronic Communications**

The development of digital communications technology offers a valuable tool for the education of youth. It can also be used to achieve the mission of the Church through Catholic schools and other ministries. The Internet and other forms of electronic communication have also presented challenges for educators, who must ensure that it is used appropriately and that it does not violate the dignity, privacy, and safety of others in their school communities.

With the cooperation and support of the attorney for the Archdiocese of St. Louis, the Catholic Education Office has actively addressed this area. Policy guidance has been developed for school administrators to assist them in providing for the safe and appropriate use of technology by students, educators, and others associated with Catholic schools.

Since 2005, several statements of policy guidance and procedures have been written on this topic and disseminated to all school administrators. These documents have been incorporated into the *Administrative Manual for Elementary Education*, the *Administrative Manual for Secondary Education*, and the *Administrative Manual for Parish Religious Education*.

Following is the title, administrative manual numerical designation, and a brief summary of the statements of policy guidance and procedures related to use of communications technology.

- **Use of Internet Resources (5202.7)**

This advises school administrators to take steps to ensure that students and staff make appropriate use of the Internet in keeping with the principles that guide our schools and current applicable laws.

- **Monitoring Internet Activities (5202.71)**

This advises school administrators to development and implement clearly written local policies and procedures for use of the Internet. It directs them to communicate those policies and procedures to teachers, students, parents, and any others who make use of a school's Internet access capabilities. It states that administrators "...should establish an expectation of adherence to these policies and procedures."

It specifies that these local policies should address: (1) Internet safety and protecting individual identity; (2) copyright protections and individual responsibilities; (3) appropriate uses of communications technology; and, (4) inappropriate conduct and disciplinary consequences.

It further states that schools should employ an "Acceptable Use Policy" (AUP) and software filtering as means for directing and monitoring Internet activities and providing for Internet safety. The guidance includes nine components that should be included in an AUP and made specific to the school's Internet resources and capabilities.

- **Internet and Electronic Communications Conduct (4303.4)**

This policy identifies a safe environment for all members of the school community as a hallmark of a Catholic school. It addresses unacceptable uses of the Internet that are contrary to mission of a Catholic school and jeopardize a safe environment.

This policy guidance applies to “communications or depictions through e-mail, text messages, [or](#) web site postings, [whether they occur through the school's equipment or connectivity resources or through private communications.](#)” [The statement identifies three categories of unacceptable electronic communications. Procedures are specified and steps are outlined that school administrators should take to implement this policy and respond to confirmed or alleged violations.](#)

[Note: Components of this policy guidance are also included in 5202.71 previously referenced.](#)

- **Mailing Lists (4402.5)**

This specifies limitations on making personally identifying information or photos of students or parents available on school websites, to ensure privacy and safety of those in the school community.

- **Media and the School (4402.3)**

This identifies procedures for protecting the privacy of students when the news media may have access to school property. A sample parental release form is provided, with recommendations about its use.

This policy guidance supplements that of the Archdiocesan Office of Communications regarding personally identifying content and photos intended for placement on websites of Archdiocesan agencies and parishes.

Additional Guidance

The Catholic Education Office has developed informal guidance on specific topics related to the Internet, school websites, personally identifying information, and privacy. These documents utilize a question and answer format. They are presented to new principals during orientation sessions. They have also been disseminated and discussed at several legal issues workshops conducted in recent years by members of the Catholic Education Office staff and the attorney for the Archdiocese.

The topics include of the documents include:

- Confidentiality
- Use in the Internet for School Records
- Acceptable Use of the Internet
- School Websites
- Student Photos and Information on School Websites

Policy guidance is currently being finalized that addresses electronic communications with students and other youth by employees and volunteers of Archdiocesan and parish schools and agencies. This will address communication through e-mail, telephone, text messaging, social networking websites, and the like. It is being developed by the Catholic Education Office in collaboration with the attorney for the Archdiocese, the Archdiocesan Child Safety Committee, and other agencies that have youth as their primary clients.