

**DRAFT BOARD POLICY FOR REVIEW**  
**San Mateo County Community College District**  
12/1/2020  
V3

**Subject:** Use of District Communications Systems  
**Date:** December 2020

[Replaces BP 2.35 and 2.36]

**Communications Systems**

District communications systems include many platforms and technologies. This policy is intended to encourage best practices in communication, including limiting the number of messages being sent to any one person per day; using the appropriate technology for the need; review and oversight of communications for quality and consistency with the goals of the Colleges and the District; and overall effectiveness of communications.

Because technology and communications platforms change frequently, this policy is intended to be applied to all the tools being used to communicate District business. This includes legacy and new technologies such as paper mail; printed flyers and posters; analog and digital telephones; email and SMS systems; websites; emergency messaging systems; enterprise systems such as learning management (LMS) systems, customer relationship management (CRM) systems, enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, or other employee or student engagement systems; work group platforms such as Basecamp and Slack; social media; and any other systems or technologies that come into use as official District communications systems to conduct District business.

**Values**

The District provides a range of communications systems to support its educational mission. District communications tools—whether paper, voice, digital, or delivered via other modes—are intended to be used by employees and students to communicate and coordinate freely, efficiently, and responsibly with each other to conduct District business and education. Whatever the platform or tool being used, the following values and expectations will guide District policy:

*Dignity and Respect:* District communications should be respectful and appropriate to the class, project, task, or group. Disrespectful, threatening or harassing communication is not tolerated.

*Equity and Access:* District communications systems should support effective communication to all students and employees regardless of physical ability, race, gender, socio-economic status, or other circumstance. Employees should take into

consideration the most equitable and effective way to communicate with students regardless of their access to technology.

*Transparency:* District employees and students should communicate in a way that is appropriate to the public educational setting we are in. District communications are subject to public scrutiny and should be able to stand that test.

*Security:* District communications systems must be secure from hacking or outside interference, safe to use, and must not compromise student or employee data.

## **Categories of District-approved Communication**

### Category 1: One-to-One or One-to-Few Communication

Employees may use common communications systems such as telephone, email, web applications, and text messaging to conduct routine District-related business with other individual employees or limited groups of employees who conduct District business together. These limited groups include supervisors messaging to their staff, messages between groups of employees who serve together on committees, or messages between groups of employees who work on tasks or projects together. Similarly, an employee may communicate with individual students, or with small groups of students, with whom that employee works directly.

This category includes communications up to 50 people.

More specialized tools such as customer relationship management software may be used with approval of the employee's supervisor.

### Category 2: Limited Mass Communication to Specific Member Groups and Cohorts

District mass communications systems should be used to facilitate communication within classes, committees, work and task groups, departments, divisions, student support programs, learning communities, and other identifiable groups of employees or students. This category also includes employees communicating with groups of students with whom that employee works indirectly. Examples of these groups include:

- Faculty, staff, administrator, student or College committees
- Student support programs with identified membership or cohorts such as Promise Scholars Program, EOPS, Disability Resource Centers, Veterans Resource Centers; multicultural centers and similar programs
- Units with a business need for mass communication such as instructional departments and divisions; Admissions; Financial Aid; Transfer Services; Career Services and similar offices

This category includes communications with up to 200 people at a time. Approved District tools for limited mass communications to specific groups are listed at [SET UP NEW COMMS PRACTICES URL].

Mass communication tools used for these groups may include email lists, email listservs, email newsletters, text messages and text messaging platforms, social media, customer relationship management systems such as Salesforce, and other similar systems the District may acquire in the future.

### Category 3: Campus, District, and Public Mass Communication

Mass communication to faculty, staff, administrators, students, or the public is restricted to the of the College Presidents and/or the District Chancellor, or their designees. Any mass communication to faculty, staff, administrators, students, or the public is subject to approval and oversight of the President/Chancellor/designee, and will be distributed by the President/Chancellor/designee. The designee is typically the marketing director/public information officer at each college and sometimes includes vice presidents, vice chancellors or other approved designees.

This category also includes the use of email distribution lists, listservs, and other lists of employees or students typically generated by ITS. These lists are only to be used by the Chancellor, Presidents, or their designees.

Mass communications to large numbers of employees or students is limited in order to ensure mass communications represent the official voice of the College or the District, and to prevent inappropriate or excessive messages being delivered to employees or students via District-owned communications platforms.

### **Mass Mailings and U.S. Mail**

Mass mailings are mailings going out simultaneously to more than 100 recipients, including postcards, promotional flyers, form letters, and recruitment letters. Mass mailings must be approved by the College President, District Chancellor, or their designee (typically the College marketing director).

Materials from outside organizations that are properly addressed and stamped and delivered to the District site by the U.S. Postal Service will be delivered to employees. If material from an outside organization is delivered to a District mail location without the proper postage and cancellation, the organization will be contacted and asked to retrieve the material, or the material will be destroyed.

### **Frequency**

In communication Categories 2 and 3, care should be taken not to overload students or employees with too many communications in a day or week.

In general, best practices for communications frequency are:

- No more than one College-wide or District-wide message per day
- No more than three College-wide or District-wide messages per week
- Consolidate messages into fewer emails by combining multiple events or similar categories (beginning of semester, grading guidelines, etc.) into a single message.

- Exceptions can be approved by College marketing director/public information officer

### **Required Employee Communications**

The District communicates essential information to employees via several communications systems. Employees are expected to monitor these communications to the best of their ability and may not opt-out or “unsubscribe” from communications sent to District-provided addresses, email addresses, phone numbers, or other District-provided communications systems.

District-provided email addresses and personal cell phone numbers for employees are automatically enrolled in the District’s emergency notification system for their own safety. Employees may login to the District emergency communications system to change their communications preferences.

### **Required Student Communications**

The District communicates essential information to students via several communications systems, typically via U.S. mail, District-provided email, or the student’s personal telephone number. These essential communications may include important information related to the student’s enrollment, financial aid, attendance, grading, emergency communications, and many other types of information critical to student success. Students are expected to monitor these communications to the best of their ability and may not opt-out or “unsubscribe” from communications sent to District-provided addresses and email addresses.

Students who do not want their personal email addresses or phone numbers used can opt out by contacting the Records Officer at the College (See District Rules and Regulations Policy 7.28). Students may not opt-out of receiving official District communications at their District-provided email address.

District-provided email addresses and personal cell phone numbers of students are automatically enrolled in the District’s emergency notification system for their own safety. Students may login to the District emergency communications system to change their communications preferences.

### **Communicating with Prospective Students and Other External Audiences**

The District communicates regularly with prospective students, and the general public, using mass communications tools, mailings, media relations, paid advertising, and other platforms. These communications are overseen by the marketing and outreach offices at each college and require frequent communications that can range from one-to-one interactions to targeted message to certain groups, to mass communications reaching thousands of people. These communications use a variety of platforms and operate

Because prospective students do not yet have a business relationship with the District, communications should adhere to best practices for clearly communicating how to subscribe, unsubscribe, and customize communications preferences wherever possible. All District

communications must comply with applicable communications laws such as the Federal CAN-SPAM Act, the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA), and other applicable laws.

District communications to prospective students and the public should include clear instructions for opting-in, opting-out, and privacy guidelines.

### **Exemption for Student Academic Communications**

The restrictions on frequency, quantity and senders in this policy shall not apply to communications related to student enrollment status or academic status such as letters of admission, registration information, counseling appointments, financial aid information, grades, or other communications needed for a student to make progress toward their educational goal.

### **Union Use**

The exclusive representatives of employees may have access to District-provided email and individual mailboxes of the internal campus mail system to communicate with employees regarding Union business, and recognized student organizations may have access to the internal campus mail system to communicate with staff regarding approved student activities, subject to the following regulations:

- a. In compliance with Federal Private Express Statutes, neither District personnel nor District resources may be used to deliver the material via the internal mail system to employees; i.e., a representative of the exclusive representative or of the student organization must deliver the material directly to the employee mailboxes at each District site.
- b. Materials distributed by recognized student organizations must comply with College time, place and manner regulations.

### **Commercial Use**

District communications systems may not be used to promote or sell a commercial good or service. In some cases, the President, Chancellor, or their designee (usually the College PIO) may approve the distribution of a limited commercial message to employees or students such as a special offer or exclusive opportunity to SMCCCD employees or students. Such exceptions may only be made by the President, Chancellor, or their designee. Under no circumstances should District-provided employee or student contact information (names, mailing addresses, email addresses, phone numbers) be provided to a commercial third party.

### **Political Use**

District communications systems may not be used to promote a particular political candidate, legislation, political position, or to campaign or lobby. All employee and student communications via District communications systems must comply with District Rules and Regulations Section 2.30, Policy on Political Activity, and all other Federal, State or local regulations regarding public employees and political campaigns.

### **Exceptions and Changes**

The Chancellor, College Presidents, and College marketing directors/public information officers may make changes to the guidelines in this policy or grant exceptions or exemptions for special circumstances.

**For Further Reference**

The San Mateo County Community College District has posted a list of approved tools for communications (the District whitelist), as well as guidelines for best practices in internal and external communications.

URL: [smccd.edu/communications](http://smccd.edu/communications)