

NSW Department of Education

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Last updated
05/09/2024

Policy statement

- [Our culture](#)

Implementation date
21/03/2024

Reference number
PD-2024-0485-10-V01.0.1

Publicly available
Yes

Policy cluster
People

Expectations for digital communication procedure

Direction and guidance on the department's expectations on managing work-related communication and digital technologies outside of school operating hours. Limiting non-emergency communication intrusions sent to employees in their personal downtime helps protect against burnout and support a healthy work-life balance.

Audience

Teachers (applicability), all department employees (audience)

Changes since previous update

Version	Date	Description of changes	Approved by
V01.0.1	05/09/2024	Under the 2023 Policy and procedure review program, document moved from Digital devices, services and information - staff use policy to Our culture policy. No change to intent.	Chief People Officer
V01.0.0	21/03/2024	New procedure	Deputy Secretary, Chief People Officer
		Ongoing union consultation is occurring and amendments may be made from time to time.	

About the policy

Policy requirements

This procedure relates to the [Our culture policy](#) and sets out the principles for creating a supportive and balanced work culture.

Digital downtime principles are designed to work alongside and complementary to the department's industrial and employment conditions and work, health and safety commitments, policies and procedures.

This supports the department's [Plan for Education](#) to maintain employee health and wellbeing.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Emergency communications	<p>Include notifications of misadventure, natural disasters, utility emergencies impacting school operations, and serious student or employee health, safety and wellbeing issues.</p> <p>Emergency communications also extend to urgent issues impacting an employee's salary payment or conditions, including urgent leave and staffing matters.</p>
Psychosocial hazards	<p>Hazards that arise from or in relation aspects of work that may cause psychological and physical harm, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the design or management of work the working environment machinery and equipment in a workplace workplace interactions or behaviours.

Roles and responsibilities

Employees:

- adjust individual work-related communication practices to protect and respect their own and their colleagues' rest periods, in line with the digital communication principles.

Principals and people leaders:

- establish, promote and maintain communication expectations and practices for teachers, parents, carers and communities, in line with the digital communication principles.

The department:

- actively promotes and protects employees from digital communication interruptions outside of school operating hours
- takes active steps to limit digital communication sent out of school operating hours to emergency communication only
- ensures leaders, including school executive leaders take appropriate action to implement the digital communication principles, practices and culture and all teachers and leaders are committed to implementing the expectations for digital communication.

What needs to be done

The department uses a principles-driven approach to support expectations for digital communication. This will both empower and enable teams to adapt their work and communication practices to fit with their operations and assist our employees to 'switch off' and better balance their professional and personal lives.

The blurring of lines between work and home has been exacerbated by the use of email, mobile devices, social media and various computer applications (apps), which can create more convenience but can also cause significant intrusion into what was previously personal time.

Supporting employees to maintain a healthy balance between professional engagement and personal renewal is essential for long-term career satisfaction, continued creativity, effectiveness and ongoing health of individual and the profession. It is essential to attracting and retaining teachers to the profession. Empowering and facilitating employees to disconnect from digital technologies in rest periods is important to help maintain health and wellbeing and protect against burnout and other psychosocial hazards of always being connected to work.

The families and carers of students also face similar challenges in managing work, caring responsibilities and engaging with their children's education. The department recognises that communicating and engaging with parents is critical to effective partnerships and that this necessitates clear parameters in the current world we live and work in. Parents and carers often have no alternative but to contact the school outside of school operating hours.

As professionals, teachers can choose to work outside of school hours if they wish to do so. This policy requires that communications with colleagues outside of school hours be by agreement and that teachers not be compelled to answer non-urgent queries during that time, including from parents.

Digital communication principles are designed to work alongside and be complementary to the department's industrial and employment conditions and work, health and safety commitments, policies and procedures.

Digital communication principles

1. Safeguard employee wellbeing

Individuals, leaders and teams, including educational support teams must:

- take active steps to ensure their personal, team and community communication practices support employee wellbeing and follow the digital communication principles
- ensure teachers know that it's time to 'switch off' from work-related communications outside of school operating hours to help maintain a healthy work-life balance and protect against the psychosocial hazards of always being connected to work.

2. Demonstrate leadership in promoting expectations for digital communication

The department, executive directors, directors educational leadership, principals, and other executive and school leaders should not send non-urgent emails or other messages outside of school operating hours.

Principals and managers must:

- lead the way, show what is possible and visibly demonstrate how they disconnect from working
- enable, encourage and support a guilt-free disconnection for their employees outside of school operating hours
- work with their teams (or for schools) to consult with their teachers when making decisions related to setting clear communication expectations and embedding supportive ways of working.
- Principals must promote, communicate and provide clear boundaries for school communities around respectful and considerate communication. This includes promoting to parents, carers and communities the department's commitment to protecting employees from digital communication interruptions outside of school operating hours, acknowledging parents' needs to communicate with their child's schools, principals and teachers at appropriate times for them. Schools will indicate a preferred channel of communication for school communities so that important messages aren't overlooked and the volume of messages can be streamlined.

3. Context matters

Employees may need to be contacted outside of regular working hours to assist with critical situations or emergencies.

'School operating hours' may be different for different contexts, positions, roles and employee types across the department.

4. Promote respectful workplaces and communities

Employees must:

- contribute to a culture of considerate communication and understand the importance of respecting their own and their colleagues' time to switch off
- where they choose to work outside of school operating hours, they must respect their colleagues' rest time, and alter their communication to limit communication intrusions on their colleagues unless there is an emergency or a prior agreement
- where colleagues, parents and members of the community send non-emergency communication to employees outside of their school operating hours, employees are encouraged and supported to not respond until they resume their school working hours.

Supporting tools, resources and related information

Supporting tools and resources

- [Expectations for Digital Communications resources](#) (staff only)
- [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#) (staff only)

Related information

- The department's [Plan for Education](#) to maintain employee health and wellbeing.
- [NSW Government Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work](#)[External link](#)
- [School Community Charter](#) (PDF 1.41 MB).

Policy contact

Contact

Executive Director, Human Resources Operations
HR.Operations@det.nsw.edu.au

Monitoring the policy

The Executive Director, Human Resources Operations monitors the implementation of these standards, regularly reviews their contents to ensure relevance and accuracy, and updates them as needed.



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