



To Mrs. Saslaw, Dr. Wright, and Members of the Board:

The Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development represents over two thousand public school teachers, administrators, and higher education faculty with a mission to advance excellence in teaching, learning, and leadership. In September of 2010, our organization adopted a position statement on Teaching, Learning, and Leading for a Changing World in which we advocate for *high quality instructional programs that include the use of advanced technologies to access and facilitate learning.*

Recently, the VASCD Board reviewed the Board of Education's [Proposed Guidelines for the Prevention of Sexual Misconduct & Abuse in Virginia Public Schools](#) dated November 18, 2010 and the revisions to the policy dated January 13, 2011. While VASCD agrees with the overall intention of these guidelines to prevent inappropriate conduct between employees and students in VA public schools, we are concerned by the limitations placed on social media communications and do not feel the revisions go far enough to address these concerns; moreover, we submit these guidelines are in conflict with goals established in the 2010-15 Educational Technology Plan for Virginia and disagree with assumptions that social media communications and one-on-one conversations between teachers and students, if allowed, will be sexual in nature. We do not support the notion that digital conversations or one-on-one interactions between students and teachers should be prohibited to avoid the few inappropriate exchanges that might potentially occur. Instead of denying the social context of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, any inappropriate use of technology must be addressed individually based on existing legal and policy guidelines.

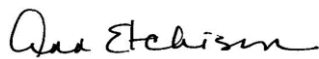
VASCD members can cite numerous examples of schools where Facebook, Twitter, iPod applications, Wikispaces, text messaging, and other forms of social media are being used constructively as a means for students to communicate with each other, their teachers, and the community beyond the classroom. In fact, these 21<sup>st</sup> century forms of communication appeal to the learning styles of the vast majority of public school students and involve the development of skills that are critical to their future success in college and the workforce. As VASCD's 2010 position statement reads, "Students should apply knowledge and skills to novel situations and authentic problems, demonstrating creativity, innovation, self-reflection, and flexibility in thinking." The acquisition and use of these important skills routinely involves the use of social media technologies for today's students.

We appreciate the additional language regarding accounts, systems, and platforms, but remain concerned that students and teachers still have access to outside platforms for instructionally appropriate communications while working at home, while traveling, or on snow days. In fact, one very interesting aspect of the communications revolution and growth of social media is the asynchronous nature of learning. There are dedicated professionals willing to provide instruction and feedback to students during non-school hours and are able to do so because of social media tools.

Similarly, the proposed guideline that teachers “may not use personal communications devices to ‘text’ students and are prohibited from interacting one-on-one with students through personal online social-networking sites” fails to acknowledge the reality of how today’s students interact with both peers and adults. The medium is not the issue; in fact, teachers are the very people who are in a position to model for students the ways in which adults use social media to communicate in appropriate, timely, powerful ways. Without these models, where will our students learn these essential skills? Examples of effective and appropriate use of social media tools exist in schools and classrooms throughout the Commonwealth.

We acknowledge the challenges associated with establishing well intentioned policies designed to prevent inappropriate forms of contact in a world where communications practices are changing rapidly. However, we ask you to revisit the language of this policy so that teachers seeking to build appropriate relationships with students and join today’s new forms of communication won’t be sent back to twentieth century learning environments because of the potential actions of a few with ill intent. If you would like the input of our association in this effort, we would be more than willing to work with you.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Etchison". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ann Etchison, Virginia ASCD Executive Director  
On Behalf of the Virginia ASCD Board of Directors