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Teachers Forge Facebook Friendships With Students

The rise of social networking sites has school districts across the country looking into how teachers relate with their students online.

The Sioux Falls school district has adopted restrictions on teachers befriending students on sites such as Facebook. But other districts aren't ready yet to completely sever that line of communication.

The Sioux Falls School District has revised its network and computer systems policy concerning social networking sites. The new policy now states that "Staff shall not invite or accept current District students, except for the staff person's relatives, into any personal social networking sites."

But the Sioux Falls Catholic School District doesn't have such restrictions in place. Instead, administrators say they expect teachers to always behave professionally when online with their students.

Teachers at O'Gorman High School use social networking sites like Facebook as a virtual extension of their classroom.

Principal Kyle Groos said, "It has already gone far past the classroom walls, the 4 walls are no longer contained."

Facebook can be a valuable educational tool where teachers post homework assignments and online discussions about a subject in school.

O'Gorman relies upon a professional code of conduct to ensure that Internet interaction between its staff and students is kept strictly business.

"When you walk out the door on a Friday night, you don't keep that at the doorstep, that's following you 24-7," said Groos.

Groos says because teachers are aware of their professional responsibilities 24-7, Sioux Falls Catholic schools shouldn't need to add restrictions guarding against improper online relationships.

"We are entrusted with a parent's most precious gift and that's their child and we want to make sure that we don't do anything to break that trust," said Groos.

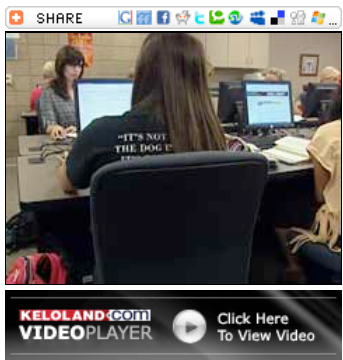
Even with the rapid spread of technology, Groos says those advances should never outpace ethics.

"The curve of technology is out there like a racehorse, and we're trying to keep up with it."

The friendships forged through Facebook last beyond graduation. Groos says O'Gorman teachers often keep in touch with alumni for input on how to improve their class assignments.

Perry Groten

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