



Mountain Song Community School Communications Policy

1. Purpose

MSCS seeks to create a respectful and civil school environment in which every member of the community is treated with dignity and respect. We promote an environment of trust in which members of the Mountain Song (MS) Community may interact openly and safely. This policy establishes the principles and procedures that members of the MSCS Board of Directors (“Board”), Executive Leadership Team (ELT), staff, parents, students, and other community stakeholders (collectively referred to as the “MS Community”) shall follow in their interactions with one another. The result of following these principles and procedures will be a positive, appreciative, and constructive school environment that supports effective, holistic education for our students.

For the purpose of this policy, “communications” refers to any form of sharing information between members of the community, including, but not limited to: verbal exchanges in person, via telephone, or via electronic collaboration applications (e.g., video conferencing); written exchanges via email, social media, text messaging, or letters; and gestures or other non-verbal physical demonstrations.

2. Consequences

Any member of the MS Community who fails to follow the guidance provided by this policy may be subject to the procedures outlined in the Grievance Policy, or to disciplinary action, such as removal from a committee, expulsion, or other actions suggested by the Charter School Institute (CSI) or Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The School reserves the right to terminate any communication that overtly violates this policy, particularly those that become hostile, inflammatory, or threatening.

3. General Guidelines for Interpersonal Communication Between Members of the MS Community

- a. Members of the MS Community are expected to adhere to the Mountain Song Values of *Integrity, Respect, and Honoring the Invisible Essence in Each Person* when communicating with one another.
- b. Members of the MS Community are expected to:
 - i. Assume and speak the best about each other
 - ii. Avoid gossip, slander, rumor, and pressure tactics
 - iii. Respect all members of the MS Community: students, families, parents, teachers, staff, Board members, and volunteers

- c. Members of the MS Community shall stand behind their words. Unattributed or anonymous communications, or communications attributed to a group (rather than individual names) is discouraged.
- d. Members of the MS Community shall take ownership of, and be responsible, for their words. Explanations such as “I said this because they said that” or “I said that because I was angry” are not reasons for, and do not justify, violating guidance provided in this policy.
- e. Positions, opinions, and feedback may be shared (within the guidelines of this policy) by members of the MS Community without fear of adverse effects (e.g., retribution, retaliation, revenge). Communications should be received openly, constructively, and in good faith. Retaliatory or vengeful responses (which include verbal or written communication, or physical action) to a communication are prohibited. Consequences as described in this policy are not considered retaliatory or vengeful. If there is a question whether a response is retaliatory or vengeful, the Grievance process shall be followed to determine whether or not the response is appropriate.
 - Example 1: A student makes a negative comment about a teacher’s attire and the teacher responds by assigning extra homework to the student. This is retaliatory and is prohibited.
 - Example 2: A student shares something concerning self-harm and the teacher notifies the dean of students. This is an appropriate response to the communication and is not retaliatory.
- f. Anger understandably arises in situations with strong emotional connections, and a school environment of parents, children, and teachers is one such situation. Anger itself is not bad, but choices made from a position of anger sometimes produce negative or undesirable effects or consequences. Members shall strive to recognize their own anger and anger in others, be understanding of the circumstances that lead to the anger, and make constructive, positive choices.
- g. Coarse, vulgar, or inappropriate language is unacceptable.
- h. Harassing, discriminatory, provoking, or trolling language directed towards any community member is prohibited.
- i. Threats of any kind are prohibited. Threatening language or actions may result in significant consequences. For Board Members, disciplinary actions may include removal from the Board. For ELT and Staff, consequences may include verbal warning, written warning, suspension, or termination of employment. For students, consequences may include suspension or expulsion. For parents and community members, consequences may include prohibition from school property. The School reserves the right to terminate any communication that becomes hostile or inflammatory. The consequences listed in this paragraph are representative and are not exhaustive.
- j. Mountain Song is obligated by law to protect the privacy and confidentiality of certain kinds of information. Unauthorized access to, and/or the communication of any information owned by or under the control of the school, may constitute a breach of confidentiality and/or the right of protection from the unauthorized disclosure of private personal information. Any member of the community aware of such abuse is strongly encouraged to report it to the ELT. Appropriate action may be taken against any

members of the community in breach of their duty of confidentiality or privacy of personal information.

- k. The guidelines provided in this policy apply to all communication forms: verbal, written, demonstration, and online social media. Please see Staff Social Media Policy for additional information concerning social media.
- l. Disagreements between members should follow the official procedures outlined in the Grievance Policy.

4. Guidelines for Interactions between Specific Parties

4.1 Parents and ELT/Faculty/Staff

- a. Members of the MS community shall respect the right of students to learn and educators to provide effective education – meaning that members shall not interfere with class instruction.
- b. Communication between parents and staff shall follow the channels of communication stipulated in the Grievance policy. Staff shall endeavor to respond to communications within 48 business hours (two business days) of receipt. Although the response time may vary according to the nature of the query made, staff shall at least acknowledge receipt of the query within 48 business hours (two business days), unless the query is received on a weekend (which starts at 4:00 p.m. on Friday) or holiday, in which case staff shall respond within 48 business hours from the beginning of the next official work day.
- c. Communication between parents and staff shall be conducted at a time and in a manner that allows reasonable and proper discussion of the issues under consideration.
- d. Classroom teachers should establish regular communication channels and communication frequencies with parents of their students.

4.2 Board and School Community

The Board shall communicate to the community at least once per month during the school year. These communications may cover the topics of finances, governance, and academics. The communication may be incorporated into part of the weekly school newsletter or as a separate communication from the Board.

School-issued Board Member email addresses shall be posted publicly on the school website. Any community member may email any or all Board Members with questions or comments regarding the school's mission, vision, governance, or finances. However, no Board Member has the authority to act individually on behalf of the Board, but may express, describe, or present Board approved positions and decisions. How the Board decides to respond to a communication, or address a specific issue, will depend on whether the matter falls within the Board's role. Unattributed/anonymous communications to the Board may be read/considered by Board members but will not be presented or discussed in public Board meetings, and responses will not be provided (such communications are exempt from the 48 business hours rule.)

Each Board Member is free to provide a personal point of view and interact as an individual, but discussions, opinions, views, statements, and explanations of any kind, whether verbal or written, expressed by any individual Board Member should be considered to be the personal opinion of the Board Member, may not be representative of the Board, and are not binding on the Board or MSCS. Any interaction with individual Board Members is simply informative and exploratory

conversation. When a Board Member is speaking as an individual, expressing their personal opinions with a perspective that may differ from the voice of the Board, this must be fully disclosed, e.g., "This is my personal view and not necessarily the view of the Board or School." Bear in mind that it is important that the Board maintains "one voice" regarding Board decisions and positions when speaking with the public.

Speaking with one or more Board Members does not constitute bringing an issue to the Board. Bringing an issue to the Board must be done formally in writing addressed to the Board President, or the entire Board.

All communication from individual Board Members and the Board shall consider individual rights of privacy and comply with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)¹ and all other applicable laws and statutes, and be in accord with the Board Member Agreement

If an email (or other communication) is sent to one or more Board Members, and the email (or communication) is about Board or School business, it shall be treated as if it were sent to the entire Board; the Board recipient(s) shall forward the communication to any Board member that did not receive it. The Board President (or designee of the Board President) shall be the point of contact and will respond to the sender within 48 business hours of receipt of original email and carbon-copy ("cc") the rest of the board. The initial response may just be an acknowledgement of receipt if the content of the communication requires discussion by the Board during a Board meeting.

If a question or comment received is regarding a specific operational matter, the query will be redirected to the ELT in accordance with our Grievance Policy as applicable. If a Board Member receives a complaint regarding a staff member, the Board Members shall direct the person who made the complaint to that staff member or ELT if appropriate. If the resolution process outlined above has already been attempted, the Board Member shall follow up with the ELT to confirm the resolution process has been attempted and to gain a clearer picture of their perspective of the situation before deciding whether further action is necessary on the part of the Board. (re: Grievance Policy)

4.3 Members of Board (Board Internal Communication)

Board communication via email must be limited in the following ways to ensure compliance with the Sunshine Law:

- a. Logistical emails regarding coordination of time and dates of meetings, etc. may be cc'd to the entire Board and discussed between any number of members.
- b. All other email communications involving school business must be limited to no more than 2 Board Members.
- c. A Board Member shall blind-carbon-copy ("bcc") all Board Members (to prevent reply all) to ask questions of the group or provide information or perspectives, however no Board Member shall respond to more than the single original sender.

4.4 Members of MS Community and Media (or other External Party)

Response to media inquiries should be handled as soon as possible to build positive relationships with the press as well as to avoid the media making assumptions based on an unreturned call. To

¹ <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

aid in this, the front office staff and anyone with the potential to answer incoming phone calls (e.g., Registrar) should be trained to take a message and ask reporters what their deadline is and the nature of the call. At that point, the message should be given to the ELT immediately. **In addition, sensitive/potential legal matters should be discussed via phone or in person and should never be communicated via email, text, social media, etc.**

All media inquiries should be directed to the ELT and Board President or Designee. No other MSCS employees or volunteers are authorized to speak on behalf of the school without prior written approval by the ELT or Board of Directors. If a member of the MS Community receives a media inquiry that requires a comment on behalf of the school, the member shall direct the reporter to contact the ELT. In the event of a crisis or negative media attention the rapid response team described above, and ELT should immediately gather to discuss messaging.

Should a reporter arrive at the school without advanced notice, the front office staff should notify the ELT immediately and direct the reporter to wait at the perimeter of the facility off school property for the safety of students and staff. The ELT is responsible for notifying the Board President immediately and then gathering information about the story from the reporter.

Approved media spokespersons include the following based on the topic of the story:

- Board President, or designee, if the Board President is not available
- ELT

5. Urgent Matters / Matters Requiring a Quick Response

The ELT shall respond to any on-premises emergencies that require immediate attention, such as those involving the safety of students or staff, using their professional and resources available (e.g., fire extinguishers). The ELT shall notify the school community as soon as feasible on the nature of the emergency and the actions taken.

In cases of urgent matters that don't require immediate, on-premises attention but do require an expedited response involving the Board, a "rapid response team" consisting of a minimum of two Board Officers (or if officers are not available, at least one officer and one other voting Board Members) and at least one member of the ELT will immediately confer on how the matter will be communicated to the public. Their response will not be considered the Board's view or decision unless a majority of the Board has considered and endorsed or approved it. MSCS's legal counsel shall be consulted as necessary.