1. Purpose
The Board adopts this policy to establish procedures for staff and student interaction and communication in and out of the school setting, in person, and via correspondence including but not limited to telephone, email, “texting,” and the Internet.

2. Definition
Staff, as defined in this policy, includes all individuals approved by the Board of School Directors as a volunteer, or paid/contracted employee and are, therefore, required to adhere to all of the Policies and Guidelines of the Spring-Ford Area School Board of Directors.

Unprofessional Relationship, as defined in this policy, includes, but is not limited to, staff fraternizing or communicating with students as if staff members and students were peers. The sending, sharing or posting of inappropriate content by an employee to a student is prohibited.

Inappropriate content, as defined in this policy, includes any content unrelated to homework, class-work, district approved extracurricular activities or interscholastic athletic programs, or a letter of reference for a higher education application, scholarship opportunity, or career opportunity.

Social Media, as defined in this policy includes forms of electronic communication (as Web sites for social networking and microblogging) through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content (as videos).

3. Delegation of Responsibility
Each staff member shall be responsible to make their best efforts to maintain a professional relationship with students and families.

Each year during new employee orientation as well as annually as a part of a scheduled in-service program, a review of this policy is required for all staff members.
Staff members must adhere to the following guidelines, which are consistent with the school’s workplace standards on harassment, student relationships, conduct, professional communication, and confidentiality.

1. A staff member must not violate any of the district’s policies, including its policies concerning discrimination, harassment, and acceptable use of technology.

2. A staff member must uphold the district’s value of respect for the individual and avoid making defamatory statements about any member of the school community.

3. A staff member may not disclose any confidential information of the district or confidential information obtained during the course of his/her employment, about any individuals or organizations, including students and/or their families.

4. Staff members must be aware that they have a personal responsibility and, hence, are potentially personally liable for the legality, accuracy, and confidentiality of their statements.

5. Staff members are prohibited from establishing unprofessional relationships or engaging in communication with students that are unprofessional and therefore inappropriate or about inappropriate content. To that end, this policy strictly limits staff members from emailing with students via the staff members’ own personal email and/or communicating with students through the staff members’ personal social media accounts.

6. This policy specifically exempts staff communication directly to a student’s personal email address or cell phone in the direct and specific context of extracurricular events a student may be involved in with the staff member. However, prior to a teacher, coach, club or activity advisor communicating with students either by emailing students at the students’ personal email address or by texting students to their personal cell phone, parents shall be placed on yearly notice of this exception. Should the parent desire that the student not be contacted directly under this exception, the parent shall notify the building principal in which the activity takes place. When possible, parents/guardians should be copied on emails to student’s personal email accounts and text messages to student’s personal cell phones.

Examples of unprofessional communication consistent with this policy shall include, but are not limited to:

a. Staff members communicating with students as if staff members and students were peers, such as writing personal letters, making personal
comments, sending personal emails and/or texting students.

b. Calling students on cell phones or allowing students to make personal calls to them unrelated to homework, class work and school district-sponsored or sanctioned student activities.

c. Sending, sharing, posting, taking or giving lewd or inappropriate pictures, depictions, comments or graphics to students.

d. Discussing or revealing to students personal or confidential information that is inappropriate in regard to the staff-student relationship, or inviting students to do the same (other than professional counseling by a school counselor).

e. Engaging in flirtatious behavior or dialogue of a sexual nature, whether in person, by phone, via the Internet or in writing, including electronic communications.

Staff members engaging in inappropriate communication with students will be investigated by school officials and, if warranted, will be disciplined, up to and including termination. Depending upon the severity of the offense, the school district may notify the proper authorities, including the Pennsylvania Department of Education, local police and child welfare agencies for further investigation.

References:

School Code – 24 P.S. Sec. 510, 514

Professional Educator Discipline Act – 24 P.S. Sec. 2070.1a et seq.

Code of Professional Practice and Conduct for Educators – 22 PA Code Sec. 235.1 et seq.