

Ling King, District Technology Coordinator
San Leandro Unified School District
835 E. 14th Street, Suite 200
San Leandro, CA 94577

CC: Diana J. Prola, President, SLUSD School Board, Mike McLaughlin, Ed.D., Superintendent

RE: Student Acceptable Use Policy

Dear Mr. King,

As a teacher who is pursuing a Masters Degree in Distance Education, I believe such programs are essential to the interests of our mission to provide maximum opportunity to our students. As was noted in Berge and Muilenberg(2001), lack of an acceptable use policy, or effective implementation thereof, is a serious barrier to adopting Distance Education. What follows is my critique and suggestions of the current AUP, especially in regards to effectively pursuing Distance Education for our students.

First of all, what is Distance Education and why is it essential to maximizing our students' educational opportunities? There are three levels of distance education, and all provide different benefits to our students. There are online courses, which are entirely delivered online. These provide access to education to students who are mobility challenged, are not able to be on campus due to discipline/safety issues, or require educational opportunities that the expertise of the local staff cannot provide, such as certain AP, languages, or skill-based classes, such as music theory. The second level is blended courses, where 1/3 to 3/4 of the class is based on online content. These type of classes can be used to maximally distribute limited resources among several classes, provide differentiated instruction to heterogeneous classes, or allow pursuit of student-centered investigation- and experiential- based learning. The last level are classes where less than 1/4 of instruction and content is delivered online, which are called Web-facilitated classes. These can provide resources that can significantly enhance student experiences, such as flipped classrooms, where information for a class-based discussion is delivered electronically outside of class, allow students to discuss with peers or mentors from around the globe, or maintain online blogs to encourage independent creative thoughts about the subject matter that can be accessed and augmented by fellow students. Obviously, these are limited examples, but allow you to see the bountiful possibilities of the implementation of Distance Education by providing access to ideas or information which would otherwise be denied our students.

Upon reading the districts AUP, which is attached, I found it has several strengths which I feel will contribute to the implementation of Distance Education(DE) in Oakland Public Schools. These include a prohibition on damaging computers, personal, or network files. We need to protect these limited resources for all students. Also it is wise to prohibit cyber-bullying as is contained in the third point about harassment. Students need a safe environment to participate fully in DE free from existential or physical threat. ([Ragan, mnsu.edu](http://Ragan.mnsu.edu)) Finally, the assignment of a personal password-protected account to each student, and preventing others from accessing that account is critical, as students need to trust the integrity of what they do online.

However, there are several flaws or omissions that pose a serious problem to DE. I am referring to document "Mandatory Forms, San Leandro USD, pp. 3-16. The first and most serious is explicitly stating that a loss of technology privileges would result from breaking these rules. Use of technology in education is essential for students to pursue education. I can understand the district's need to protect themselves from liability, but would you have a rule where the student loses their ability to have a math textbook, or ever attend English class? The internet is an essential part of modern education, and cannot in good faith be permanently taken away. This is an outdated concept. Second, the absolute prohibition on sharing of personal information is also not relevant to today's world. While obviously we need to protect our students from harassment or abuse online, part of the purpose of DE is for the students to engage in open expression online. Yes, not revealing addresses or social security numbers to stranger online is prudent, but an absolute ban is unwarranted. In this age of Social Media, online communities have become common. Any information they are allowed to share with a classroom visitor should be used at discretion online. The specific prohibition on "social networks" on school computers is not in line with modern standards of blended learning. Lastly, anything that is forbidden online should be consistent with other violations laid out in the student handbook. A threatening note delivered online should have consequences equivalent to such a threat delivered on paper.

Above I outlined the necessity of DE in today's educational policy. Because of this, I recommend the following policies for the promotion of DE in Oakland Public Schools:

- All rules of good citizenship which apply in your classroom also apply online.
- While freedom of expression online is encouraged, it has the same limitations as a normal classroom. While you are using the district's network, the same rules apply to behavior as in the classroom.
- Academic and legal integrity apply online as in the normal classroom. Use of obscenity, misuse of copyrights, or cheating will be subject to the same violations as the classroom.
- The absolute prohibition and blocking of all social networks should be changed to allow access to these valuable collaborative tools.

Thank You,

Kenneth Styner

A Concerned Citizen

Ref: <http://www.sanleandro.k12.ca.us/cms/lib07/CA01001252/Centricity/shared/forms/English%20Mandatory%20Signing%20forms%20Final%207-29-15.pdf>