

Drawing the Ethical Line Between Work and Play

Missouri recently announced a ban on student/teacher Facebook friendships. The ban restricts teacher and students from becoming “friends” but allows teachers to set up a fan page which students can “Like” if they choose.

Why the sudden ban? Missouri is taking strides to decrease inappropriate contact between students and teachers and taking whatever measures necessary to do so.

Schools felt a sense of urgency to put an abrupt stop to any student/teacher Facebook friendships that may exist. Why? If inappropriate contact is being made and the prosecutors can prove the school was aware, they can be held liable.

Senate Bill 54 going in effect August 28th and states:

“By January 1, 2012, every school district must develop a written policy concerning teacher-student communication and employee-student communications. Each policy must include appropriate oral and nonverbal personal communication, which may be combined with sexual harassment policies, and appropriate use of electronic media as described in the act, including social networking sites. Teachers cannot establish, maintain, or use a work-related website unless it is available to school administrators and the child's legal custodian, physical custodian, or legal guardian. Teachers also cannot have a nonwork-related website that allows exclusive access with a current or former student. Former student is defined as any person who was at one time a student at the school at which the teacher is employed and who is eighteen years of age or less and who has not graduated.”

The bill, also known as the “Amy Hestir Student Protection Act” is named after a Missouri woman who was assaulted by a teacher. Currently, details on *how* the law will be enforced aren't clear which leads to a lot of “What If” questions.

How will schools enforce this law? How will courts punish the offenders? How will courts punish the schools?