

Should Teachers Be “Friends” With Students? Proposed NJ Bill Would Regulate Electronic Communications

by Donald Scarinci

Communication between a child and a teacher over the internet tends to make parents and school administrators uncomfortable. As social media like Facebook continues to become a common form of communication, laws regulating it are inevitable.

In New Jersey, Senator M. Teresa Ruiz has taken the lead in addressing the use of new technology in the schools by proposing legislation requiring a clear statement of school policy on the subject. There are currently no formal restrictions against [electronic communications between students and school employees](#) in New Jersey.

Senator Ruiz’s bill, [S1458](#), is a non-invasive approach to creating a safety net for students, teachers and parents without placing government restrictions on the internet’s brand of free speech. Her bill requires school districts to adopt policies concerning electronic communications between employees and students but does not mandate any state imposed bans.

While the press is full of [stories about educators](#) in some states crossing the line by soliciting students for nude photographs or inappropriate discussions, exchanging Facebook posts and email messages can help teachers and students and advance learning.

As aptly noted in the statement accompanying S1458, “While electronic technology can sometimes serve as a useful educational tool, it is highly important to make certain that these same technologies are not used by teachers or other school employees as a means to foster inappropriate private interactions with students or to post inappropriate content that is accessible for students to view. Requiring school districts to adopt policies concerning electronic communications between employees and students would ensure that all school districts are addressing this important student safety issue.”

Senator Ruiz’s proposed bill would require each school district to adopt a written policy concerning electronic communications between school employees and students enrolled in the district. The policy must include, at a minimum, provisions designed to prevent improper communications between school employees and students made via e-mail, cellular phones, social networking websites, and other Internet-based social media.