

Florida teachers warned not to 'friend' students online

MIAMI (AFP) – A Florida school district has told teachers not to be "friends" with students on social networking sites and to be very careful in using electronic communication to avoid legal and workplace problems.

Lee County school officials issued the guidelines Monday at the start of the 2010-2011 school year, warning teachers not to communicate with students via Internet sites.

"It is inappropriate for employees to communicate, regardless of the reason, with current students enrolled in the district on any public social networking website," the guidelines said.

"This includes becoming 'friends' or allowing [students access](#) to personal web pages for communication reasons," it said.

Robert Dodig, who is in charge of the county's legal affairs office, said, "Too many people may not realize what they do in their private life online can come back to cause issues in their professional life, especially in public education."

Social networks like Facebook, Twitter and MySpace are increasingly being used by students and institutions, and many educators have used the sites to organize activities, the guidelines noted.

Teachers were instructed to let their supervisors know if they are using a social networking site for reasons related to their work, and educators were asked to think twice before posting information or photographs.

"Never post information about students -- even something as innocent as a student's name -- as [student information](#) is considered private and confidential," it said.

Authorities said they were not trying to restrict teachers's use of social networks, so much as to protect the teachers when they do.