

The Internet is an electronic communication network that provides vast, diverse, and unique resources. Our goal in providing this service to teachers, staff, and students is to promote educational excellence in the Thomas County Schools by facilitating resource sharing, innovation, and communication.

In the schools, student access to and use of the Internet will be under teacher direction and monitored as any other classroom activity. However, it is impossible to control all materials on a global network and an industrious user may discover inappropriate information. The school system cannot prevent the possibility that some users may access material that is not consistent with the educational mission, goals, and policies of the school system. It is the belief of the board that the Internet's advantages far outweigh its disadvantages. The Thomas County Board of Education views information gathered from the Internet in the same manner as reference materials identified by the schools. Specifically, the system supports resources that will enhance the learning environment with directed guidance from the faculty and staff. Exploration of resources is encouraged.

As required by the Children's Internet Protection Act, Thomas County Schools has an Internet filtering system in place to protect the students in our schools. The filtering system blocks unacceptable sites that fall into the following categories: violence, pornography, drugs, chat, free email, hate/discrimination, etc.

All students in Thomas County Schools will receive age-appropriate instruction regarding safe and appropriate online behavior including, but not limited to, electronic interactions with others on social networking sites and in chat rooms; behaviors that may constitute cyber bullying; and how to respond when subjected to cyber bullying.

1) Guidelines for Internet usage:

- Internet use must be in support of education and research consistent with classroom curriculum.
- Use of the Internet must be consistent with the rules appropriate to any network being used or accessed.
- Unauthorized use of copyrighted material is prohibited.
- Threatening or obscene materials are prohibited.
- Distribution of material protected by trade secret is prohibited.
- Product advertisement and political lobbying are prohibited.
- Commercial activities are not acceptable.
- Non-instructional games are prohibited on school computers.
- Staff and students shall not download software from home or unauthorized programs from the Internet.
- The use of proxy sites to access Internet sites which are blocked by Thomas County Schools' is prohibited.

- Nothing should be posted on the Internet that would not be appropriate for parents, teachers, students, etc. to read. The Internet is a public forum. Any blog post or social networking post, including photographs, which are posted on the Internet are there permanently. Any post that is deleted may be cached in a search engine, school system server, or Internet archive and cause embarrassment years later.
- Faculty and staff should refrain from the use of personal social networking sites including, but not limited to, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or Tumblr, during working hours.
- Faculty and staff should not post pictures of students or school activities to their personal social networking sites.

2) Privileges

- Access to the Internet is not a right, but a privilege.
- Unacceptable and/or inappropriate usage will result in cancellation of network account.
- Administration will deem what is inappropriate use and the administration's decision is final.
- Administration reserves the right to regulate any particular use of these computing resources.
- An administrator, faculty member, or staff member may request the denial, revocation, or suspension of specific user(s) account(s).

3) Netiquette

- Use of profanity, vulgarities, or other inappropriate language is prohibited.
- Users should not reveal their or anyone else's personal information including, but not limited to, home address, phone number, credit card number, social security number, or student identification number.
- The network should not be used in a way that would disrupt the use of the network by others.
- Users should not be abusive in electronic communications.
- Illegal activities are strictly forbidden.
- The computers should be used in a timely manner, so that others may have an opportunity to utilize computer resources.

4) Security

- Security problems should be reported to the system administrator immediately.
- Account passwords should be kept confidential.
- Users should only use the network via the account assigned to them.
- Users must not interfere with or disrupt network users, services, traffic, or equipment (Disruptions include, but are not limited to, distribution of unsolicited advertising, downloading and/or streaming music or videos that slow the network, propagation of computer viruses, and using a network to make unauthorized entry to any other machine accessible via a network.).

- Attempts to log on as another user will result in cancellation of privileges.
- Any user identified as a security risk or having a history of problems with other computer systems may be denied access.

5) Vandalism/Harassment

- Vandalism is defined as any malicious attempt to harm or destroy data of another user, the Internet or other networks. This includes, but is not limited to, creating and/or uploading computer viruses.
- Vandalism also includes the attempt to harm or destroy computer hardware and unauthorized installation of software.
- Vandalism and/or harassment will result in the cancellation or revocation of the offender's privileges and disciplinary action will result.

6) Email and Other Electronic Communication

- Email accounts are provided for employees and may be provided for students.
- Email accounts are provided for professional and academic purposes. Email accounts should not be used for personal gain, personal business activities, or to solicit for non-school system business. Broadcasting of unsolicited messages is prohibited.
- All school-related business should be sent via the email account provided by Thomas County Schools. Personal email accounts should not be used for school-related business.
- All electronic communication created, sent, or received via the Thomas County Schools email system is property of Thomas County Schools. Employees shall not have any expectation of privacy regarding this information. The Board reserves the right, as deemed necessary, to access, read, review, monitor, and copy all messages and files on its computer system without notice. Thomas County Schools reserves the right to disclose text, video, audio, or image files to law enforcement agencies without the employee's consent.
- Student related messages should be guarded and protected in compliance with FERPA in order to protect the privacy of students. Employees must abide by copyright laws, ethics rules, and applicable state and federal laws.
- Email messages should only contain professional and appropriate language. Employees shall not send abusive, harassing, intimidating, threatening, discriminatory, or otherwise offensive messages.
- Thomas County Schools has a SPAM filter in place to prevent inappropriate email messages, viruses, malware, etc. However, this does not guarantee that this type of email messages will not make it through and those who make use of electronic communication will occasionally receive messages that are found offensive or annoying. When this happens, the employee should delete the messages. The Thomas County School System is not responsible for the items employees may view via links to other web pages if the employee chooses to open and read these messages.

- Student email accounts should only be provided for specific educational purposes through a safe email provider such as Gaggle.net. These service providers allow teachers to monitor the students' accounts, as well as control who the students may send/receive email to/from. The email accounts may even be locked as to allow communication with school employees only. Student use of email should be set up through the district level technology office.

7) Electronic or Mobile Devices

- The use of mobile devices will only be allowed in specific areas or classes per the direction of school staff.
- Devices are to be used only for school-related or school-approved activities. Games are not allowed.
- Teachers and staff reserve the right to check devices for inappropriate use or inappropriate material.
- The Thomas County School System is not responsible for lost or damaged devices.
- Cell phones/camera phones are to be turned off and not used during any testing or examination period. During the testing session cell phones/camera phones are to be stored in a case, book bag, knapsack, or purse, and may not be placed on the table, desktop, or individual's lap. Staff members have the right to confiscate devices during testing.
- Students should not use their own 3G or 4G connection to the Internet. Students shall access the Internet via Thomas County Schools' wireless network only while on school grounds in order to insure their Internet connection is filtered through Thomas County Schools' filtering system as required by the Children's Internet Protection Act. Teachers and staff reserve the right to check an electronic or mobile device for proper connection. Students who do not follow this guideline will lose the right to use their own electronic or mobile device while at school.
- Students may only access the Internet during class sessions for instructor authorized, class-related purposes. It should be noted that the school controls the Internet connectivity in classrooms and may elect to "turn-off" the wireless network during class time or restrict student passwords for wireless connections.
- Students with disabilities or exceptional needs may require electronic devices for day-to-day functioning in the academic setting or for testing purposes. The use of devices should be coordinated with the classroom teacher or staff member, and the classroom teacher or staff member will monitor such use.
- Electronic or mobile devices should not be used to video or take pictures of disruptive behavior such as fights or other class/school disruptions. The sharing or posting of such videos or pictures or any other inappropriate videos or pictures is prohibited. This activity is a violation of privacy under FERPA.

8) Penalties

- Any user violating these provisions, applicable state and federal laws, or posted classroom and district rules is subject to the loss of network privileges and other system disciplinary options, including criminal prosecution
- School and system administrators will make the final determination as to what constitutes unacceptable use and their decision is final

Disclaimers

The Thomas County School System makes no warranties of any kind, whether expressed or implied, for the service it is providing. The Thomas County School System will not be responsible for any damages a user may suffer, including loss of data, non-deliveries, misdeliveries, or service interruptions caused by negligence or errors or omissions. The use of any information obtained via the Internet is at your own risk. The system will not be responsible for the accuracy or quality of information obtained through the Internet connection.

Georgia Code

O.C.G.A. 16-09-0090	Georgia Computer Systems Protection Act
O.C.G.A. 16-09-0091	Computer Related Crime
O.C.G.A. 16-09-0092	Definitions
O.C.G.A. 16-09-0093	Computer crimes defined
O.C.G.A. 16-09-0093.1	Misleading transmittal
O.C.G.A. 16-09-0094	Violations
O.C.G.A. 39-05-0003	Immunity
O.C.G.A. 39-05-0002	Subscriber's control of minor's use of internet
O.C.G.A. 39-05-0004	Internet safety report of certain information
O.C.G.A. 16-11-0037.1	Dissemination of information relating to terroristic acts

Description

US Code

20 USC 6777	Internet Safety
47 USC 254(h)	Universal Service
15 USC 6501	Children's Online Privacy Protection Act - Definitions
15 USC 6502	Children's Online Privacy Protection Act - Collection and use of personal information from and about children on the Internet
15 USC 6503	Children's Online Privacy Protection Act - Safe harbors
15 USC 6504	Children's Online Privacy Protection Act - Actions by states
15 USC 6505	Children's Online Privacy Protection Act - Administration and Applicability

Description

These references are not intended to be part of the policy itself, nor do they indicate the basis or authority for the board to enact this policy. Instead, they are provided as additional resources for those interested in the subject matter of the policy.