Coach-to-Student Digital Communication Laws: What Schools Should Review

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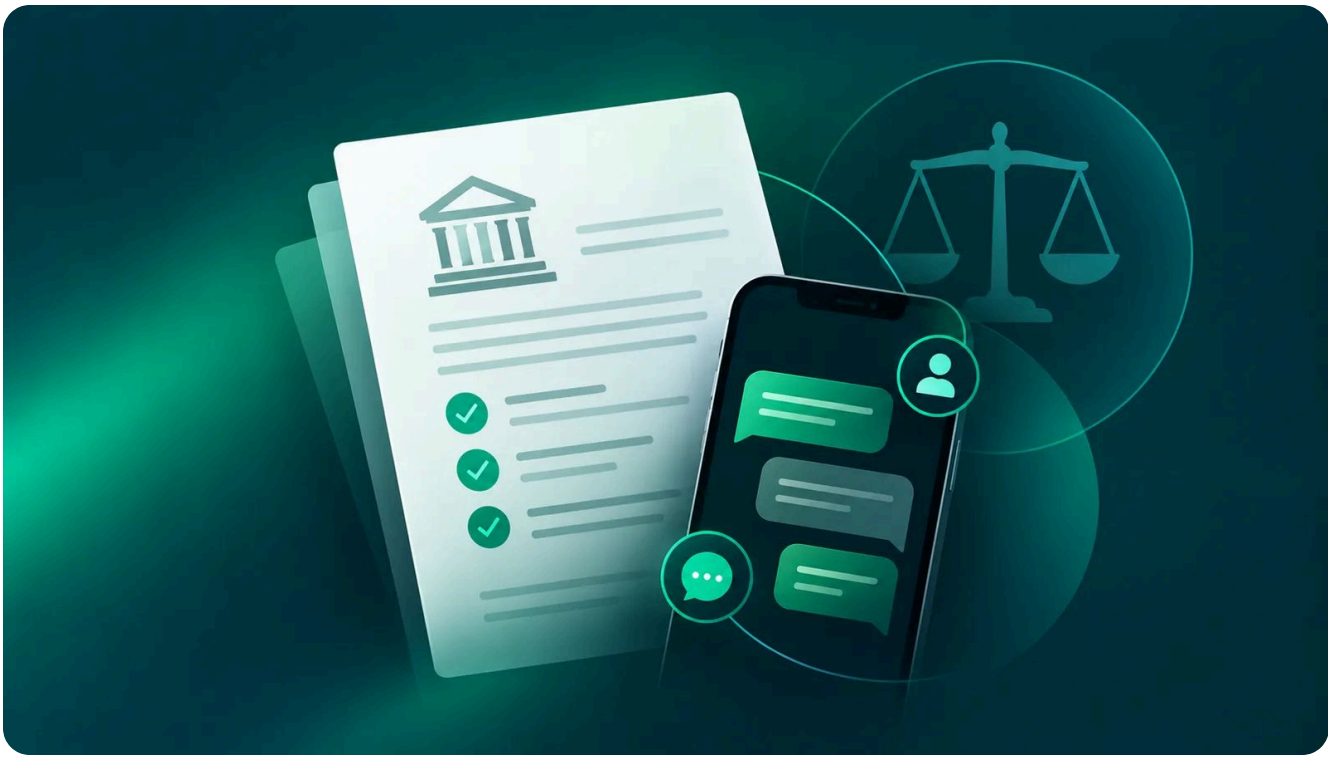

Is a coach legally permitted to text a student-athlete directly? Does including a parent meet communication requirements? Who determines which messaging platforms are acceptable?

The answers depend on more than a school's communication policy. State laws, educator conduct standards and local requirements can impose different rules on how coaches communicate with students. For athletic directors, understanding where these rules originate and which ones apply is essential to maintaining communication compliance.

Understanding the Different Layers of Communication Requirements

Not every communication restriction carries the same legal weight. State laws and educator conduct standards may establish requirements governing professional boundaries, inappropriate electronic communication and mandatory reporting. School districts can adopt additional policies,

such as requiring approved messaging platforms, limiting private conversations or specifying when parents should be included.

Kentucky illustrates how state legislation shapes district-level decisions. Under Senate Bill 181, enacted in 2025, public school districts are required to designate traceable communication systems for electronic interactions between covered school personnel and students. The law, amended by House Bill 67 in 2026, also addresses parental consent for certain private communications outside designated systems, along with reporting procedures and specified exceptions. Districts determine which qualifying platforms to designate and remain responsible for implementing the applicable requirements.

Professional guidance can also inform local policies. The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS), for example, promotes transparency, ethical conduct and the use of school-approved communication channels.

These distinctions matter when evaluating potential violations. A breach of school policy doesn't automatically mean a coach has broken the law, but certain conduct may violate applicable regulations or professional standards and result in disciplinary or regulatory action.

Four Communication Policy Questions Worth Reviewing

Athletic directors should be able to determine how their school's requirements address several common situations:

1. Personal texting and direct messages. Are coaches permitted to communicate individually with student-athletes? If so, under what circumstances? Do restrictions apply to personal phone numbers or social media accounts?

2. Parent inclusion and transparency. Do district policies require a parent, guardian or another school official to be copied on certain messages? Are there exceptions for routine logistical communications?

3. Approved platforms and communication records. Which systems are authorized, and what expectations apply to preserving messages or documenting potentially inappropriate interactions?

4. Reporting and escalation. What should a coach do after receiving a concerning message from a student? Who must be alerted, and when might mandatory reporting obligations apply?

These questions don't have universal answers. Practices permitted in one district may be restricted in another, making it important for athletic directors to verify applicable requirements and align their communication procedures accordingly.

When Communication Policies Need Another Look

Changes in state regulations aren't the only reason to revisit communication policies. New messaging applications, staff turnover and questions about existing rules can also signal when adjustments are needed.

Athletic departments should periodically assess whether their policies reflect current legal requirements, clearly define permitted communication practices and establish workable procedures for reporting concerns and maintaining records. Reviews should also confirm coaches are using district-approved communication systems.

Coordinating with district leadership and appropriate legal or compliance personnel can help schools interpret shifting requirements, address inconsistencies and determine when policy updates or additional staff guidance are necessary.

Turning Regulatory Complexity Into Clarity

For athletic directors, knowing which communication rules apply is only part of the equation. The next step is determining how those requirements affect coaching practices, district policies and administrative responsibilities.

Compliably helps schools navigate evolving communication requirements and reinforce expectations for appropriate coach-to-student interactions through compliance education, staff training and digital communication monitoring.

Not sure whether your athletic department's communication practices meet applicable requirements? **Contact the Compliably team** to discuss your compliance challenges and learn how we can help.

Read this article online at **compliably.com/resources/coach-to-student-digital-communication-laws**