

STAFF PERSONNEL

Series 500

Policy Title . . . SOCIAL MEDIA

Code No. 547.0

The District recognizes the importance of online social media networks as communications and e-learning tools. Social media will be managed and guided by the attached administrative regulation, other school board policies and the Employee Handbook.

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STAFF PERSONNEL

SERIES 500

ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS

SOCIAL MEDIA

Code No. R-547.0

DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, “social media” means any facility for online publication and commentary, including without limitation to blogs, wiki's, social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube.

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to govern employee contributions and engagement in social media. The District recognizes the value of teacher inquiry, investigation, and innovation using new technology tools to enhance the learning experience. The District also recognizes that students, parents and community utilize this form of media to receive information, connect and respond on a daily basis and the District's obligation to teach and ensure responsible, safe use of these technologies. This policy addresses employees' use of publicly available social media networks including: personal websites, web logs (blogs), wikis, social networks, online forums, virtual worlds, and any other social media. The District takes no position on employees' decision to participate in the use of social media networks for personal use on personal time.

II. USAGE

The District will use social media to promote and generate the community's online input to affect policy-making decisions. The District's digital communications efforts will provide students, parents and staff with informative online discourse. Online news stories, imagery, videos and other resources are shared to inform people about board decisions and actions, as well as classroom innovation, student and teacher successes and challenges, school and department meetings, policies and activities. Staff members are encouraged to share current and credible research and events involving child development and education. Participatory media is a venue for District leaders to present information and share stories, allowing others to discuss and share it.

III. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The District recognizes the importance of online social media networks as a communication and e-learning tool. Public social media networks, outside of those sponsored by the District, may not be used for classroom instruction or school-sponsored activities without the prior authorization of the Superintendent, or designee, and parental consent for student participation on social networks. The District may use these tools and other communication technologies in fulfilling its responsibility for effectively communicating with the general public. The line between professional and personal relationships is blurred within a social media context. When employees choose to join or engage with District students, families or fellow employees in a social media context that exists outside those approved by the District, they are advised to maintain their professionalism as District employees and have responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks, including requirements for mandated reporting.

The use of these media for personal use during District time is prohibited. In addition, employees must avoid posting any information or engaging in communications that violate state or federal laws or District policies. The District's faculty/staff are subject to district policy to the extent they identify themselves as a District employee. Publication and commentary on social media carries similar obligations to any other kind of publication or commentary.

This policy is intended to supplement, not replace, other district policies. Although online conduct involves the use of a relatively new medium, it remains subject to all applicable district policies. For example, district policies governing sexual misconduct, sexual and other unlawful harassment, harassment or misconduct toward students, telecommunications access, staff ethics, confidentiality and anti-discrimination apply to online conduct with the same force and effect as they apply to conduct in any other context.

This policy is in addition to, and complements, any existing or future policies from the District regarding the use of technology, computers, e-mail and the internet.

IV. REQUIREMENTS

All employees are expected to serve as positive ambassadors for our schools and to remember they are role models to students in this community. Because readers of social media networks may view the employee as a representative of the schools and the District, the District requires employees to observe the following rules when referring to the District, its schools, students, programs, activities, employees, volunteers and communities on any social media networks.

A. Employees may have students as "friends," "fans" and "followers" on official District and school sites and social media accounts. It is against district policy for teachers, directors and supervisors to "follow" or "friend" students on employee's personal social media sites, unless otherwise approved. The reason for the prohibition is to prevent accusations of favoritism in regard to grading or disciplinary matters or suspicions of relationships that go beyond their official school capacity. For employees other than teachers, directors and supervisors, "friending" students is strongly discouraged. Likewise, supervisors are strongly discouraged from "friending" subordinates or accepting friend requests from subordinates on personal accounts in order to avoid the accusation of favoritism.

B. Employees must be respectful and professional in all communications (by word, image or other means). Employees shall not use obscene, profane or vulgar language on any social media network or engage in communications or conduct that is harassing, threatening, bullying, libelous, or defamatory or that discusses or encourages any illegal activity or the inappropriate use of alcohol, use of illegal drugs, sexual behavior, sexual harassment, or bullying. Employees shall not post information that is purposefully inaccurate or subject to defamation laws. However, social media administrators should not delete opinions about district activities simply because they are negative or adverse to policies. To the contrary, such opinions should be seen as opportunities to engage the community in a meaningful dialogue, listen intently to input and correct misleading or inaccurate information. The community must feel encouraged to openly communicate within district-approved social media. Arbitrary censorship of material that meets the standards of this policy is prohibited.

C. Employees should not use their District e-mail address for communications on public social media networks that have not been approved by the District. Employees must make clear that any views expressed are the employee's alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the District. Employees may not act as a spokesperson for the District or post comments as a representative of the District, except as authorized by the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee. When authorized as a spokesperson for the District, employees must disclose their employment relationship with the District.

Employees may not disclose information on any social media network that is confidential or proprietary to the District, its students, or employees or that is protected by data privacy laws. Employees may not use or post the District logo on any social media network without permission from the Superintendent, or designee.

1. Employees shall not post images on any social media network of co-workers without the co-workers' consent.
2. Employees may not post images of students on any social media network of students whose parents have "opted out" of public display of photographs, except for images of students taken in the public arena, such as at sporting events or fine arts public performances.
3. Employees may not post any nonpublic images of the District premises and property, including floor plans.

D. The District recognizes that student groups or members of the public may create social media representing students or groups within the District. When employees, including coaches/advisors, choose to join or engage with these social networking groups, they do so as an employee of the District. Employees have responsibility for maintaining appropriate employee-student relationships at all times and have responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks. This includes acting to protect the safety of minors online. Employees shall annually disclose to the District the existence of and their participation in such networks.

E. Employees who participate in social media networks may decide to include information about their work with the District as part of their personal profile, as it would relate to a typical social conversation. This may include:

1. Work information included in a personal profile, to include District name, job title, and job duties.
2. Status updates regarding an employee's own job promotion.
3. Personal participation in sponsored events, including volunteer activities.

Employees may not post on personal sites District personnel, financial or copyright information or any items deemed privileged and/or protected under applicable federal and state laws. Employees cannot post on personal blogs or social media sites photographs of other employees, clients, vendors or suppliers, nor post photographs of employees engaged in District business or at District events.

F. All social media accounts that represent the District, schools, officially sanctioned clubs, teams or employees serving in their official capacities (i.e. teacher sites, projects, activities, etc.), must register with the Director of Technology. All registered accounts must include at least one (preferably two) designated administrators of the site to monitor and ensure compliance with this policy.

G. An employee who is responsible for a social media network posting that fails to comply with the rules and guidelines set forth in this policy may be subject to discipline, up to, and including termination. Employees will be held responsible for the disclosure, whether purposeful or inadvertent, of confidential or private information, information that violates the privacy rights or other rights of a third party, or the content of anything posted on any social media network.

H. Anything posted on an employee's website, web log or other Internet content for which the employee is responsible will be subject to all District policies, rules, regulations, and guidelines. The District is free to view and monitor an employee's website or web log at any time without consent or previous approval. Where applicable, employees may be asked to disclose to the District the existence of and to provide the District with access to an employee's website, web log or other personal social media network as part of an employment selection, review, promotion, or disciplinary process.

V. ENFORCEMENT

Policy violations will be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination for cause in accordance with District policies.

SOCIAL MEDIA BEST PRACTICES

If you're an employee contributing to blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds, or any other kind of social media both on and off the District network—these guidelines are for you. We expect all who participate in social media to understand and follow these guidelines. Failure to do so could put you at risk. These guidelines will continually evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge. What you write is ultimately your responsibility. If it seems inappropriate, use caution. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit 'send.' Take time to review these guidelines and try to figure out what's bothering you and fix it. If you're still unsure, you might want to discuss it with your supervisor.

Respect Copyright Laws

It is critical that you show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others, including but not limited to images found on Google and the like. You should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work, and always attribute such work to the original author/source. It is good practice to link to others' work rather than reproduce it. Respect and protect your audience and partners, the public in general, and District staff and community. Don't be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, offensive comments, defamatory comments and the like), but the not-so-obvious of stating anything that can be misconstrued as being mean, distasteful or simply, rude to others.

Ensure the Safety of Students

When employees, especially coaches/advisors, choose to join or engage with these social networking groups, they do so as an employee of the District and have responsibility for monitoring content and addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks. This includes acting to protect the safety of minors online. Employees shall annually disclose to their supervisor the existence and participation in such networks.

Prohibit Cyber-Bullying

The District strictly prohibits any form of bullying on social media accounts and will enforce rules as defined in the anti-bullying enforcement policy for digital or "Cyber-bullying" the same as with physical or verbal bullying.

Protect Confidential Information & Don't Tell Secrets

You must make sure you do not disclose or use confidential information. It's perfectly acceptable to talk about your work and have a dialog with the community, but it's not okay to publish confidential information. Confidential information includes things such as student information, grades, disciplinary action or any other confidential information that would allow anyone to identify individuals. We must protect and respect the privacy of our students, staff, parents, and school community.

Students, parents, and colleagues should not be cited or obviously referenced without their approval. For example, ask permission before posting someone's picture in a social network or publishing a conversation that was meant to be private. It is acceptable to discuss general details about projects, lessons, or events and to use non-identifying pseudonyms for an individual (e.g., Teacher A) so long as the information provided does not make it easy for someone to identify the individual or violate any privacy laws. Furthermore, public social networking sites are not the place to conduct school business with students or parents.

Protect Your Own Privacy

Be smart about protecting yourself and your privacy. What you publish will be around for a long time, so be cautious about disclosing personal details. Privacy settings on social media platforms should be set to allow anyone to see profile information similar to what would be on the District's website. Other privacy settings that might allow others to post information or see information that is personal should be set to limit access. Be mindful of posting information that you would not want the public to see.

Expressing Your Ideas & Thoughts

Always express ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. Make sure your communications are in good taste. Do not denigrate or insult others. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory. Remember that our communities reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view.

Be sensitive about linking to content. Redirecting to another site may imply an endorsement of its content. Perception can be reality. In online networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as a District employee, you are creating perceptions about your expertise and about the District by community members, parents, students, and the general public; and you are creating perceptions about yourself with your colleagues and managers. Are you adding value? Communication associated with our District should help fellow educators, parents, students, and co-workers. It should be thought-provoking and build a sense of community and engagement. If it helps people improve knowledge or skills, do their jobs, solve problems, or understand education better-then it's adding value. Keep the conversation informative and educational for all. Be sure that all content is consistent with your work and with the District's beliefs and professional standards.

Keep your cool. One of the aims of social media is to create dialogue, and people will not always agree on an issue. When confronted with a difference of opinion, stay cool. Express your points in a clear, logical way. Be accurate. Don't pick fights or look for an argument. Sometimes, it's best to ignore a comment and not give it credibility by acknowledging it with a response. Usually it goes away by the next day. If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear that you have done so. If someone accuses you of posting something improper deal with it quickly, and/or ask for additional assistance.

Be Honest and Transparent

Do not blog anonymously, using pseudonyms or false screen names. We believe in transparency and honesty. Use your real name, be clear who you are, and identify that you work for the District. Nothing gains you notice in social media more than honesty - or dishonesty. Do not say anything that is dishonest, untrue, or misleading. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out.

If you publish to a site outside the District's network, please use a disclaimer to state in clear terms that the views expressed are the employee's alone and that they do not necessarily reflect the views of the District. Also remember that the use of a disclaimer may not necessarily keep you out of trouble.

Authenticity Matters

Official photography should not be edited ("Photo shopped") to misrepresent a situation or otherwise violate the public's trust. All photographs and videos should include a caption that answers who, what, when, where and why. Avoid posting content without providing a reason for sharing it. When using or posting online material with direct or paraphrased quotes, thoughts, ideas, photos or videos, always include attribution. Provide a link to the original material if applicable.

Quality Matters

Use a spell-checker. Use proper grammar and proofread materials carefully before posting. If you're not design-oriented, ask someone who is whether your blog looks decent, and take their advice on how to improve it. The speed of being able to publish your thoughts is both a great feature and a great downfall of social media. The time to edit or reflect must be self-imposed. If something does not feel right, either let it sit and look at it again before publishing it, or ask someone else to look at it first. Avoid clichés, excessive capitalization (sometimes perceived as shouting) and fragmented sentences.

Don't Forget Your Day Job

You should make sure that your online activities do not interfere with your job. District technologies are provided for educational use. Use of social media for personal use during District time or on District equipment is prohibited. Make sure that blogging or otherwise does not interfere with your job or use of other commitments to the District.

Connections

It is against district policy for teachers to “follow”, “friend”, or otherwise, students for which they instruct on their personal sites. We should encourage connections on district and school-sanctioned sites.

Help Students Use Social Media to Empower, Not Just Connect

With more and more employers and educational institutions looking at prospective candidates online, it is important that we help educate and instruct on best practices for our students using the various social media channels. Connecting with a purpose requires thought and discipline - as connecting with the wrong people could lead to improper associations. Teachers and administrators should be teaching students how to leverage your connections, associations and your level of engagement as a way to strengthen your individual brand online, so that it increases your chances of being seen in a positive light for potential employers, colleges or universities – as character becomes more and more a consideration for enrollment or hiring in today's workforce. Having our students and teachers ready and adaptable to 21st Century communications is a must.

Review Periodically

Your new policy or guidelines should be a living document and should be revisited often. Social media products change. Your culture will change. Policies will change. Your team needs to look at this document, at least annually, to determine whether it is working and whether any adjustments need to be made accordingly.