

## **Social Media Guidelines**

### **A. Introduction/Purpose**

1. Social media technology can serve as a powerful tool to enhance education, communication, and learning. This technology can provide both educational and professional benefits, including preparing students to succeed in their educational and career endeavors.
2. The District is committed to ensuring that all staff and students who utilize social media technology for professional purposes, do so in a safe and responsible manner. The District strives to create professional social media environments that mirror the academically supportive environments of our schools.
3. This social media policy provides guidance regarding recommended practices for professional social media communication between District employees and students.

### **B. Definition of Social Media**

Social media is defined as any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication, including, but not limited to, social media, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, Instagram, Linked In, and Flickr.<sup>1</sup>

1. Professional social media is a work-related social media activity that is either school based (e.g., a principal establishing a Facebook page for his/her school or a teacher establishing an educational blog to serve a legitimate educational purpose for his/her class), or non-school-based (e.g., District office establishing a Facebook page to facilitate the office's administration).
2. Personal social media use is a non-work-related social media activity (e.g., an administrative employee establishing a Facebook page or a Twitter account for his/her own personal use).

### **C. Applicability**

This policy applies to all District employees.

### **D. Professional Social Media Use**

1. Maintenance of Separate Professional and Personal E-mail Accounts.  
District employees who decide to engage in professional social media activities should not use their personal email address for professional social media activities. The professional social media presence should utilize a professional email address and should be completely separate from any personal social media presence maintained by the District employee.

<sup>1</sup> This policy does not address the professional use of third-party collaboration tools for purposes other than social media.

## 2. Communication with Students

District employees who work with students and communicate<sup>2</sup> with students through professional social media sites should follow these guidelines:

- a. Professional social media sites<sup>3</sup> that are school-based should be designed to address reasonable instructional, educational or extra-curricular program matters;<sup>4</sup>
- b. Each school year, student's parents<sup>5</sup> will be notified about the professional social media activities their children will be invited to participate in. We will inform parents of the purpose and nature of each professional social media account their children will access and will instruct parents to contact the school with any questions or concerns;
- c. District employees will be required to obtain their supervisor's approval before setting up a professional social media presence;
- d. Supervisors and their designees are responsible for maintaining a list of all professional social media accounts within their particular school or office; and
- e. Professional social media sites should include language identifying the sites as professional social media sites. For example, the professional sites can identify the District and the particular school, department or particular grade that is utilizing the site.

## 3. Guidance Regarding Professional Social Media Sites

- a. All District employees should treat professional social media space and communication like a classroom and/or a professional workplace. The same standards expected in District professional settings are expected on professional social media sites. If a particular type of behavior is inappropriate in the classroom or a professional workplace, then that behavior is also inappropriate on the professional social media site;
- b. All District employees should exercise caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using professional social media sites.
- c. All District employees should use privacy settings to control access to their professional social media sites to ensure that professional social media communications only reach the employees' intended audience. However, employees should be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the internet can easily become public. As a result, employees have an individualized responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site being utilized.

<sup>2</sup> The term "communicates", as used in this policy, refers to activity, including, but not limited to "friending", "following," "commenting," liking," and "posting messages" using social media sites.

<sup>3</sup> The term "site and "sites" refer to an online social media account or usage.

<sup>4</sup> On school-based professional social media sites that involve students, District employees should use the sites for professional purposes. District employees are not to review any personal social media accounts created by their students.

<sup>5</sup>The parent means the student's parent or guardian, or any person in a parental or custodial relationship to the student. This includes: birth or adoptive parent, step-parent, legally appointed guardian, and foster parent.

- d. Professional social media communication should be in compliance with existing district policies and applicable federal and state laws, including, but not limited to, prohibitions on the disclosure of confidential information and prohibitions on the use of harassing, obscene, discriminatory, defamatory or threatening language.
  - e. No personally identifiable student information may be posted by District employees on professional social media sites.
  - f. A parent/guardian may annually sign a Restriction of Directory Information form prohibiting student photographs from being posted on social media sites.
4. Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites
- a. Employees using professional social media have no expectation of privacy with regard to their use of such media;
  - b. If District employees decide to create a professional social media site and they are notified of questionable communications or behavior on their site, they are required to contact the appropriate authorities as well as their supervisor for assistance;<sup>6</sup>
  - c. District supervisors reserve the right to remove, disable, and provide feedback regarding professional social media sites that do not adhere to district policy, the law, or that do not reasonable align with this policy;
  - d. To assist in monitoring, as a recommended practice to the extent possible, the default setting for comments on professional social media sites should be turned off. If the default setting for comments is turned on, the comments on the site must be monitored on a daily basis;
  - e. When establishing professional social media sites, supervisors and employees should consider the intended audience for the site and consider the level of privacy assigned to the site, specifically, whether the site should be a private network (for example, it is limited to a particular class or particular grade within a school) or a public network (for example, anyone within the school or larger group within the district community can participate). It is recommended practice for professional social media sites to be private networks, unless there is a specific
  - f. Educational need for the site to be a public network.
5. Press Inquiries
- Any press inquiries received via professional social media sites should be promptly referred to the District administrative office.

## **E. Personal Social Media Use**

### **1. Communication with Students**

In order to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students, District employees should not communicate<sup>7</sup> with students who are currently enrolled in district schools on personal social media sites. This provision is subject to the following exceptions: (a) communication with relatives and (b) if an emergency situation requires such communication, in which case the District employee should notify his/her supervisor of the contact as soon as possible.

<sup>6</sup> Existing District reporting requirements must be followed. Depending on the circumstances, the appropriate authorities may include, but are not limited to the school principal, the District administrative office, the OSPI, OPP, CPS, and/ or the local police department.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of such communications include, but are not limited to, “friending,” “following,” “commenting,” “liking,” and posting messages.

## 2. Guidance Regarding Personal Social Media Sites

District employees should exercise caution and common sense when using personal social media sites:

- a. District employees should not “tag” photos of other District employees, District volunteers, District contractors or District vendors without the prior permission of the individuals being tagged;
- b. The posting or disclosure of personally identifiable student information or confidential information via personal social media sites, in violation of this policy is prohibited; and
- c. District employees should not use the District’s logo in any postings and should not link to the District’s website or post District material on any personal social media sites without the written permission of a District administrator.

## **F. Applicability of District Policies and Other Laws**

1. Users of professional social media sites are responsible for complying with all applicable federal, state and local laws, including, but not limited to the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and intellectual property laws.
2. All existing District policies, regulations and laws that cover employee conduct may be applicable in the social media environment.
3. District employees who are mandated reporters<sup>8</sup> are required to abide by the same reporting responsibilities in a social media context.

## **G. Additional Inquiries**

This policy is meant to provide general guidance and does not cover every potential social media situation. Should any questions arise, please contact your supervisor.

### **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ’s)**

What if District employees are already using social media for either professional or personal purposes?

- Professional social media use: District employees currently using social media for professional purposes should examine whether their use aligns with the Social Media Policy. Any use not consistent with the policy should be altered or amended within a reasonable period of time. We will answer any questions or address any concerns during training and feedback sessions. If employees have linked their social media site to a personal email address, they should transition the site to a professional email address.
- Personal social media use: District employees who use social media for personal purposes should take steps to remove current students, subject to the exceptions

listed in the policy, for those sites. Additionally, employees should review all of the Social Media Policies to ensure familiarity with the recommended practices.

<sup>8</sup> Various District policies and state and federal law impose reporting requirements on District employees for issues such as child abuse, child maltreatment, school-related incidents and crimes, corporal punishment, verbal abuse, unlawful discrimination or harassment by District employees, student-to-student sexual harassment, and student-to-student bias-based harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying. Please note that all previous reporting requirements continue to be in force and will apply to behavior occurring within a social media context.

What should District employees who want to develop professional social media for their classroom, school, or office do?

- Employees should review the Social Media Policy periodically to ensure that they are familiar with their contents and are aware of any updates.
- Employees should research and familiarize themselves with the social media site they intend to utilize.

Who monitors professional social media sites and how frequently are they monitored?

- Employees who decide to establish professional social media sites will review their specific site on a regular basis.

Does this Policy apply to students?

- This policy does not directly address student-to-student communication via social media. The Student Code of Conduct for each school, District discipline policies and acceptable use rules, set forth expected standards of behavior with respect to student communication. These documents, collectively, establish the range of disciplinary options and guidance interventions that can be used when students engage in misconduct involving social media.

How should District employees respond to “friend” requests by current students on their personal social media sites and accounts?

- If District employees receive a request from a current District student to connect or communicate through a personal social media site, they should refuse the request. The following language is one suggested response: “Please do not be offended if I do not accept or respond to your request. As a District employee, the Social Media Policy does not permit interactions with current students on personal social media sites. If you do want to connect, please contact me through the school (or class) page at [www.lynden.wednet.edu](http://www.lynden.wednet.edu).”

May District employees using social media for personal use communicate with other District colleagues?

- This policy does not address communication between employees on personal social media sites.

Why is it a recommended practice to have separate professional and personal social media sites and email addresses?

- The reason for this distinction is to ensure separation between personal and professional spheres of online communication for District employees. In this context, this separation is intended to clarify that professional social media and personal social media are different. Professional social media is work-related and may involve employee-to-student communication. Personal social media is not work-related, and subject to certain exceptions noted in the Policy, does not involve employee-to-student communication.

Will parents be notified regarding their children's social media use for school-related activities?

- Yes. The goal is that District schools will notify parents if their child is invited to participate in professional social media activities and we will provide information describing the professional social media sites that will be available to their child. Parents who have questions or concerns about their children's use of social media for school purposes should contact the school for more information.

What should supervisors and their designees, who are responsible for monitoring professional social media, do when they discover or receive a report of inappropriate activity?

- A supervisor who discovers or receives a report of inappropriate or questionable content posted on a professional social media site should contact the appropriate authorities for assistance, in accordance with existing District reporting requirements. Depending on the circumstances, the appropriate authorities may include, but are not limited to: the school principal, the District administrative office, OSPI/OPP, and/or the local police department. There may also exist an individual mandatory reporting obligation for involved professional school personnel.
- In addition, if other members of a school community find inappropriate material on a professional social media site, they are encouraged to report it to a District supervisor.

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