

## **Employees Using Social Media to Represent the District**

### **Background**

The Board of Directors recognizes that the role of technology in the modern workplace is continually expanding and now includes social media communication tools that facilitate interactive information sharing and collaboration. Many of these social media sites have large, loyal user bases and are increasingly important outreach and communication tools for teachers, administrators and school districts.

Social media describes the online technologies, tools and practices that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives. Social media postings may include many different media formats, including written text, images, audio and video. Examples of social media sites include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or blogs.

Social networking can improve communication between schools, staff, students, families and the community at-large, and often reaches new and different populations from traditional media. Social media may be used for many purposes in an educational environment; examples include quick dissemination of time-sensitive information (e.g., emergency information, travel disruptions or changes, or District facility closures) and marketing/promotion of events or programs to the widest possible audience or a targeted audience, such as students in a specific class or club.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish standards and responsibilities for the use of social media by employees who represent the District, schools, school groups, teams or clubs, or individuals within schools or programs.

### **Coverage**

The policy covers all District employees who are representing the District, a school, a school group, team or club, or themselves in their official District capacity through professional electronic social media sites. It does not apply to student-led sites on which a District employee is not participating; nor does it apply to peripheral groups such as PTAs or booster clubs. In the event a District employee oversees the site and/or posts to it in their professional capacity, the policy and procedures apply.

### **Standards**

District employees should use social media to represent the District, schools, school groups, teams or clubs, or individuals within schools or programs (collectively “professional electronic social media sites”) like a classroom and professional workplace. The same standards of professional conduct that are expected in traditional District settings are expected on professional electronic social media sites.

All use of professional electronic social media sites by schools and staff should be consistent with applicable state, federal and local laws, regulations and policies. These include: information technology security policies; acceptable use policies; the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA); nondiscrimination policies; copyright and trademark laws; and applicable public records retention policies and schedules.

**Development of Procedures**

The Superintendent or designee shall develop procedures that recognize the importance of professional electronic social media sites as a communication tool for teachers, students, families and other staff. The procedures shall be written to ensure that District and professional electronic social media sites are appropriately used, secured and managed. The procedures shall be designed to protect students, employees and the District, as well as ensure consistency across schools and the District in the use of professional electronic social media.

## **Employee Use of Social Media to Represent the District**

Before creating or using a professional electronic media site, a District employee must consider the following in determining whether the use of social media is appropriate:

1. Who is the target audience for social media communications?
2. What information is the District, school, group or individual attempting to communicate?
3. Which social media tools are the best to distribute the information?
4. Who is responsible for managing and monitoring the social media tools/accounts?  
Will this person represent the District or school appropriately?

### **Responsibilities**

Employees should be thoughtful and professional about how they present the District, their school, school group, team or club, or individuals within schools or programs through the professional use of electronic social media sites. Employees must consider these issues:

1. **Confidentiality.** Employees should not post or release proprietary, confidential or protected personally identifiable information, or District intellectual property on professional electronic social media sites.
2. **Privacy.** As in other venues, employees must follow the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and must not post a student's image (including photos and/or video) or other protected personally identifiable information without ensuring the student's guardian has authorized the release of that information.
3. **Site Monitoring.** Sites should be monitored for inappropriate posts or comments; such posts should be removed. Sites should be kept updated. If a site is abandoned, it should be taken down.

### **Creating and Administering Accounts**

District employees wishing to create a professional electronic social media site representing the District, their school, school group, team or club, or individuals within schools or programs should first notify their school principal or department director and the District Office. The purpose of this notification is for the District, school and department administrators to be aware of such sites and the communications taking place on these sites. The school or department administrator and the District Office shall be given administrative rights and/or passwords to the site at any time, upon request, and reserve the right to remove inappropriate content or otherwise make necessary changes to the site.

### **Best Practices to Mitigate Security Risks**

When creating social media accounts that require individual identification, District employees must use their actual name, not pseudonyms. Employees should be mindful of these associated issues:

1. Do not assume privacy. Only post information you are comfortable disclosing.

2. Use different passwords for different accounts (such as social media and existing work accounts). Using the same password for all accounts increases the chance of the accounts being compromised.
3. Do not duplicate user IDs and passwords across multiple social media sites.
4. Use your school District e-mail to open social media sites, not a private e-mail address.

### **Content of Posts and Comments**

Professional electronic social media sites should be limited to instructional, educational or extra-curricular activity matters. District employees should treat professional electronic media sites and communication like a classroom and professional workplace. The same standards of civility, decorum and professional conduct that apply to District professional settings are expected on professional electronic social media sites. Employees using social media to communicate on behalf of the District, a school, a school group, team or club, or individuals within schools or programs or themselves in their official District capacity, should be mindful that any statements made are being made in their professional capacity.

Employees may not use professional electronic social networking sites affiliated with the District for political purposes or to engage in private business activities. They should also refrain from posting statements, photographs, video or audio that could reasonably be perceived as:

1. Sexually suggestive, malicious, obscene, profane, threatening or intimidating;
2. Constituting harassment or bullying;
3. Supportive of illegal activity;
4. Violating copyright or trademark laws;
5. Contributing to a hostile educational or work environment on the basis of race, religion, creed, color, national origin, age, honorably-discharged veteran, or military status, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, marital status, disability or any other status protected by law; and/or
6. Information that may tend to compromise the safety or security of the public or public systems.

Employees should always consider whether it is appropriate to post an opinion or discuss areas outside of one's expertise. If there is any question or hesitation regarding the content of a potential comment or post, the employee should not post. It is also not appropriate to engage in online arguments or use a social media site to settle a disagreement with students, parent/guardians, staff or community members.

The District reserves the right to restrict a District employee from representing the District on professional electronic media sites if they have violated this procedure or any applicable law. Employees may appeal this decision to the Superintendent or his/her designee. Employees

should be mindful that inappropriate usage of social media may be grounds for disciplinary action.

**Records Retention**

Communications through professional electronic social media sites are public records and should be managed as such. All comments or posts made to professional electronic social media sites are public, not private. This means that all posts become part of the public record and may be subject to disclosure under Washington's Public Records Act (RCW 42.56). Social media account holders using professional electronic social media sites must retain those records to the extent required by law and adhere to the retention schedule set by the Washington State Archives.

Account administrators who receive messages through a private message service offered by the social media site should advise users to contact them at their District e-mail address. Private messages that account administrators receive should be treated as constituent e-mails and therefore, as public records. Account administrators or another authorized staff member should reply to such messages using their District e-mail account. Users should set all privacy settings to public.