

Social networks and other media provide an important avenue for professional communication and collaboration within the school community. Similarly, personal social media can provide valuable channels outside of the work environment for individuals to share knowledge, express creativity, and communicate with others who share common interests.

Because of the unique role of school employees in the community, employees must maintain the same standards of decorum online as is expected in their face-to-face communications. Employees must conduct themselves in a manner that does not disrupt the educational process or the efficiency of school system operations when engaging in the use of social media. All social media messages and materials that are available to members of the school community or to the public at large must reflect the professional image applicable to the employee's position and must not impair the employee's capacity to maintain the respect of students and parents or guardians or impair the employee's ability to serve as a role model for children.

Employees are expected to maintain professional relationships with students at all times when using social media, as required by policies 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations, and 7300, Staff Responsibilities. Employees must also comply with the standards established in policy 7335, Employee Use of Social Media. This administrative regulation is established to support these board policy requirements.

For purposes of this regulation, "employee" includes employees, volunteers, and student teachers. It also includes contractors who are providing services in the instructional program. The terms "social media," "school-controlled social media," and "personal social media" are defined in policy 7335, Employee Use of Social Media

The Human Resources Director or designee shall post a copy of this regulation in a conspicuous place or take other measures reasonably intended to inform persons subject to this regulation of the standards and guidelines for using social media.

I. PROFESSIONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

A. Policy Standards for Professional Use of Social Media

Through policy 7335, Employee Use of Social Media, the board of education has expressed its support for the use of social media tools to enhance instruction, support the learning environment, and improve communication and collaboration as part of 21st century learning

In addition to the standards for employee use of social media established in policy 7335, Employee Use of Social Media, school-controlled social media must be used in accordance with policies 3220, Technology in the Educational Program, and 3225/4312/7320, Technology Responsible Use.

B. Additional Requirements for Professional Use of Social Media

Employees must comply with the following additional requirements when using social media for professional purposes.

1. Employees should use only school-controlled social media for classroom instruction and school-sponsored activities and for otherwise communicating directly with students. Social media networks, applications, tools, or activities that are integrated with school-controlled social media and/or explicitly approved by the principal and the superintendent or technology director are considered school-controlled for purposes of this requirement. Employees must establish and use a professional account, not a personal one, to access such social media
2. All communications with students through social media must be school related and within the scope of the employee's professional responsibilities.
3. Parental consent is required for student participation on school-controlled social networks.
4. Any websites, blogs, wikis, or other forms of social media created by an employee in the course of fulfilling his or her job responsibilities are the property of the school system and may be monitored by school officials.
5. Employees must observe professional standards and appropriate interactions when engaging in online communities, including when interacting with students, colleagues, and/or other members of the school community through social media. Conduct that is prohibited in the face-to-face instructional environment is also prohibited online. Online communication between employees and individual students must be transparent and accessible to supervisors.
6. Employees who engage in social media interactions with students are responsible for responding to any observed inappropriate student behavior or activity on the social media in accordance with board policies and administrative regulations.
7. Any employee who has reason to suspect that a student is engaging in or is the victim of illegal conduct online should report this conduct to the student's principal and must make any reports required by law, including, as required, reports to law enforcement and/or the Department of Social Services (DSS).
8. Employees must ensure that their supervisors have access to the site

passwords and content of their interactions on social media sites.

9. Employees may not use professional social media accounts and resources for participating in the political process or for other purposes not directly related to job responsibilities or to communicating with colleagues.
10. Employees who create or use professional social media accounts in any manner to fulfill their job responsibilities shall disclose the existence of and their participation in such social media sites/accounts annually or as otherwise required by the superintendent or designee.
11. Employees remain subject to all board policies and administrative regulations when using social media to fulfill their job responsibilities.

C. Consequences Related to the Professional Use of Social Media

An employee who fails to comply with the requirements of this section may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.

II. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The school system takes no position on an employee's use of personal social media for non-school-related use on personal time. However, employees are reminded that the use of social networking sites, blogs, or other forms of social media may blur the line between personal and professional roles. As in other forms of speech, employees do not have the right to engage in speech on personal social media that impedes the employee's duties in the workplace or that interferes with the regular operations of the school.

A. Requirements for Personal Use of Social Media

In addition to the standards for use of social media established in policy 7335, Employee Use of Social Media, employees must observe the following requirements when using personal social media.

1. Do not access personal social media accounts for non-school business during work hours or instructional time.
2. Do not use public social media networks or applications for classroom instruction or school-sponsored activities without the express prior authorization of the principal and the superintendent or technology director.
3. Do not communicate with students through personal social media or other electronic resources unless expressly allowed by policy 7335, Employee Use of Social Media, and/or policy 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations. Where allowed, all such communications should be non-school related.

4. Create appropriate privacy settings on each personal account to prevent student access to any portions of the account not accessible to the public.
5. Do not accept or initiate friend requests with students of the school system unless otherwise permitted by policy 7335, Employee Use of Social Media.
6. Do not post confidential student information or pictures of any students on any electronic medium, including on a personal website.
7. Ensure that all information and communications on personal social media accounts demonstrate a high standard of personal character, conduct, and professionalism, and good ethical judgment.
8. Do not post or transmit any information or engage in any communication on personal social media that:
 - a. violates local, state, or federal laws, school system policies, or the privacy rights of students, alumni, parents, or other employees;
 - b. violates the Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators (applicable to licensed personnel);
 - c. uses profane, pornographic, obscene, indecent, lewd, vulgar, or sexually offensive language, pictures, or graphics, or that is otherwise likely to disrupt the educational environment of the school;
 - d. is inconsistent with the employee's ability to discharge his or her job duties; or
 - e. conveys the impression of speaking on behalf of the school system or in any official capacity without explicit prior authorization.
9. Observe professional standards when referring on social media to the school system or its schools, students, programs, activities, employees, volunteers, or communities.

B. Additional Recommended Guidelines for Personal Use of Social Media

Employees participating in social media should anticipate that community members and others will likely consider them associated with the school system even when using personal social media. Therefore, the following additional guidelines are recommended for personal use of social media.

1. Be respectful in all communications by word, image, or other means.
2. Carefully monitor personal social media sites if visitors can post to the site and, if necessary, remove anything that is inappropriate or that gives the appearance of inappropriate conduct by the employee.
3. Regardless of privacy settings, assume that all information shared on social media is public information.
4. Consider if content posted would be appropriate for discussion at a public meeting of the board of education, in the classroom, on the athletic field, or at official school events. Content that would be inappropriate for employees to discuss in those venues may be equally inappropriate for employees to post on social media.

III. CONSEQUENCES RELATED TO THE PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- A.** Failure to comply with the requirement in subsection II.A may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal.
- B.** Failure to comply with the recommendations in subsection II.B may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal if the employee's conduct impedes his or her duties in the workplace or interferes with the regular operations of the school.

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