



GUIDELINES FOR USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING WEB SITES AND/OR BLOGS

Introduction

Blogs, social networks and Web sites such as *Facebook*, *Flickr*, *LinkedIn*, *MySpace*, *Second Life*, *Twitter*, *Wikipedia*, *YouTube*, Internet dating sites and other emerging sites are exciting new channels for you to share knowledge, express your creativity and connect with others who share your interests.

While some employees are familiar with social media channels, others are new to this area. The following "best practice" guidelines are being provided to help you effectively use these forums, protect your personal and professional reputation and follow state and/or District rules and policies. They have been developed from respected online and industry sources.

District/Professional Use

First and foremost, it's vital that when participating in Internet social media in a professional capacity that you are honest about who you are, you're thoughtful before you post and you respect the purpose of the community where you are posting. For business/District related use of such resources, remember:

- If you are participating on a social networking site and/or blog for District-related business, it **must** be done with the approval of your supervisor.
- Accessing inappropriate Web sites during work hours or using your District E-mail or resources inappropriately can result in disciplinary action.
- You must identify yourself and your position with the District – always use your name (never create an alias and never be anonymous.)
 - Misidentifying yourself or providing false information may result in disciplinary action.
- The leeschools.net address attached to your name and/or E-mail implies that you are acting on behalf of the District and as such, you are expected to conduct yourself as a professional.

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- When using a District E-mail address and/or equipment to participate in any social media or professional social networking activity (such as LinkedIn and others), your actions are public and employees will be held fully responsible for any and all activities.
 - Any information shared via social networking sites and/or blogs regarding the business of the District, whether using personal or District equipment, is considered public record.
- Do not post confidential or proprietary information about the District, its students, alumni or employees. Use good ethical judgment and follow state and/or District rules and policies and federal requirements.
- By their very nature, social media Web sites and blogs are not private. Internet search engines can find information years after it was originally posted. Comments can be forwarded or copied and archival systems save information even if you delete a post.
- If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it may not be the time to share your thoughts in a post – you should delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed.
- Please thoroughly spell and grammar check your content before you post. Citizens expect that education employees set a good example when they write and speak in public. Content never disappears entirely once it is posted, so it's important you correct any errors as soon as you can. Since transparency is important, admit your mistake, apologize if necessary, correct it and move on.
- Remember that you are writing for publication, even if it's just for a social networking Web site. Refrain from making unsubstantiated statements and avoid careless comments, such as "research shows" unless you also provide full citations of the research.

Social Networking Sites & Blogs for Personal Use

The personal use of social networking sites or blogs creates the risk of affecting your professional career whether you want it to or not. To that end, it is vital that you conduct yourself in such a way that it doesn't adversely affect your position with the District. Below are suggested guidelines to follow when using social networking sites and/or blogs for personal use:

- If you participate in a social networking site for personal use, you may identify yourself as an employee of the District. If you do, you must state that you are expressing your own opinion, not that of the District.
 - If you identify yourself as a District employee, remember, your actions will reflect not only on you but on the District as well.
 - If you identify yourself as a District employee, readers will associate you with the District, even with the disclaimer that your views are your own.

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- Never pretend to be someone else and post information about the District. Tracking tools enable supposedly anonymous posts to be traced back to their authors.
- Do not use the District's Official Seal or individual school logos, athletic logos, mascots or any other such graphic representations or images – including photographs – during your personal online activities (Web site, blogs, etc.) or on any personal sites.
- If you post information or comments that are not related to the District, your activities may still result in professional and/or personal repercussions. Such actions include, but are not limited to:
 - Posting of photographs, regardless of the content, which could be considered offensive to other parties and be a violation of state and/or District rules and policies;
 - Posting of information that is considered to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene (as defined by the courts) may be a violation of state and/or District rules and policies.
- You do not have control of what others may post on social networking sites; therefore, be aware that your conduct in your private life may affect your professional life.
 - Be vigilant about what others post about you or on your page and, if necessary, take steps to remove comments that pose a risk to you or the District.
- It could be viewed as inappropriate for District employees to communicate with current students enrolled in the District on any public social networking site (Facebook, MySpace, etc.). This includes becoming “friends” or allowing students to access your personal page to communicate.
 - Employees should refrain from creating “personal” Web pages, etc. that permit social interaction with current students enrolled in the District. This does not include “professional” Web pages that may be used for work related reasons (homework blogs, school sports teams, etc.) All postings on work related Web pages that are related to District business are public record and must be maintained as required by law. Employees are encouraged to consult with their school- or department-based Webmaster to create a Web page related to their activity that can be made a part of their location's own Web page.
 - Employees should notify parents of their intention to use this media to communicate with the student and the intended purpose of such communications. All ethical expectations for appropriate employee/student relationships should be followed.

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- Employees should refrain from providing their personal E-mail address to students currently enrolled in the District.
 - Employees should only provide their official District E-mail address (this address can be accessed via computers at work, at home and on personal digital assistants and smartphones) as a way to communicate with students or parents regarding District and/or school related business.
- During the work day, employees should refrain from participating on any social networking Web site for personal reasons, even from personal equipment (i.e. their own Blackberry, iPhone, laptop, netbook, etc.)
 - Employees should avoid posting personal comments – on their page or someone else’s page – no matter whose equipment it is during lunch time and/or breaks since such activities will leave time-stamps that could be misinterpreted by others.

The very nature of the Internet and social networking sites are that they are ever-changing. The above guidelines are intended to provide direction if you choose to use social networking sites and/or blogs for either personal or professional reasons.

While the use of these sites is becoming commonplace, it is important that you remember to conduct yourself in an appropriate manner to avoid any unintended situations that could adversely affect your professional standing with the District. These guidelines are not intended to restrict your participation but rather to provide some protection if you choose to engage in online activities.

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