

**WOONSOCKET EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
P2-23 - SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION POLICY
AND GUIDELINES**

A. Introduction/Purpose

1. Electronic and 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 Woonsocket Education Department ("Department") students to succeed in their educational and career endeavors.
2. The Superintendent is committed to ensuring that all Department employees who utilize social media technology for professional purposes described below, including staff and students, do so in a safe and responsible manner. The Department strives to create professional social media environments that mirror the academically supportive environments of our schools.
3. These Social Media Guidelines ("Guidelines") provide guidance regarding recommended practices for professional social media communication between Department employees, as well as social media communication between Department employees and students.
4. In recognition of the public and pervasive nature of social media communications, as well as the fact that in this digital era, the lines between professional and personal endeavors are sometimes blurred, these Guidelines also address recommended practices for use of personal social media by Department staff.

B. Definition of Social Media

"Social media" means an electronic service or account, or electronic content, including, but not limited to, videos, still photographs, blogs, video blogs, podcasts, instant and text messages, email, online service or accounts, or Internet website profiles or locations.

Social media includes social networks, blogs, Internet websites, Internet forums, and wikis. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google+, and Snapchat.

1. **Professional social media** is a work-related social media activity that is either school-based (e.g., a Department principal establishing a Facebook page for his/her school or a teacher establishing a blog for his/her class), or non-school-based (e.g., a Department office establishing a Facebook page to facilitate implementation of an administrative task).
2. **Personal social media** use is a non-work-related social media activity (e.g., a Department educator or administrative employee establishing a Facebook page or a Twitter account for his/her own personal use).

C. Applicability

These Guidelines apply to all Department employees.

D. Professional Social Media Use

1. Maintaining Separate Professional and Personal E-mail Accounts Department

Employees who decide to engage in professional social media activities should maintain separate professional and personal e-mail addresses. As such, Department employees should not use their personal e-mail address for professional social media activities; rather, employees should use a professional e-mail address that is completely separate from any personal social media they maintain. Regular and continuous use of a personal e-mail address for professional purposes, including social media use, may result in Department considering the e-mail address, and the corresponding use of that address, as a professional account.

2. Communication with Department Students

Department employees who work with students and communicate with students through professional social media sites should follow these guidelines:

- a. Professional social media sites that are school-based should be designed to address reasonable instructional, educational, or extra-curricular program matters;
- b. Each school year, Department employees shall notify parents about the professional social media activities in which their children may participate.

3. Guidance Regarding Professional Social Media Sites

- a. Department employees must treat professional social media space and communication as they would a classroom and/or a professional workplace. The same standards expected in Department 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. Department employees must exercise caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using professional social media sites.
- c. When establishing professional social media sites, supervisors and employees must 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 (i.e., access limited to a particular class or particular grade within a school) or a public network (i.e., allowing access to anyone within the school or individuals outside of the Department). It is recommended practice for professional social media sites to be private networks, unless there is a specific educational need for the site to be a public network.
- d. To the extent possible, based on the social media site in use, Department supervisors or their designees should be given separate administrator rights providing limited access to the professional social media accounts established by Department employees.
- e. Department employees must obtain approval from their supervisor, using a registration form, before setting up a professional social media presence. The Department will provide supervisors with a sample registration form.

- f. If a professional social media site undergoes a significant change (for example, a Facebook page being used to share questions about reading assignments will now be used to share ideas with a class at a school in another country), the Department employee should consider whether to obtain a revised registry form and provide renewed parental notification. As needed, schools can continue to inform families about newly created social media sites.
- g. Supervisors and their designees are responsible for maintaining a list of all professional social media accounts within their particular school or office.
- h. Professional social media sites must include language identifying the sites as professional social media to differentiate them from personal sites. For example, the professional sites can identify the particular district school, department, or grade that is utilizing the site.
- i. Central offices that wish to create a social media presence should work with the office supervisor(s) and also consult with the Superintendent's Office prior to creating a social media presence.
- j. Professional social media sites that are non-school-based should have a reasonable relationship to the mission and function of the Department office creating the site.
- k. Department employees should use privacy settings to control access to their professional social media sites with the objective that professional social media communications only reach the intended audience. However, Department employees should be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the Internet can easily become public. Furthermore, social media sites can change their current default privacy settings and other functions. As a result, each employee has a responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site being utilized.
- l. Professional social media communication must be in compliance with existing Department policies and applicable 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.
- m. No personally identifiable student information, as defined in 34 CFR § 99.3 may be posted by Department employees on professional social media sites that are open beyond the classroom. If images of students are to be posted online there must be a media consent form on file at the school for each child featured.
- n. Department students who participate in professional social media sites may not be permitted to post photographs or videos featuring other students without the approval of the teacher or other Department employee responsible for the site.
- o. Department employees should not post photos of other Department employees on professional social media sites without prior permission of the photographed employee.

4. Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites

a. Department supervisors, or their designees, are responsible for monitoring and providing feedback regarding their employees' professional social media sites. The monitoring responsibilities include reviewing the professional social media sites on a regular basis. If Department employees decide to create a professional social media site and they learn of or discover questionable communications or behavior on their site, they should remove the material or contact their supervisor or law enforcement, as warranted.

b. Department supervisors (i.e., principal, assistant principal, superintendent) reserve the right to remove postings and/or disable professional social media sites that do not adhere to the law or Department policies, or do not reasonably align with these Guidelines. Department employees should examine the default settings for comments on professional social media sites and in general use more restrictive custom settings. The Department employee creating the site should intentionally move to more public settings as dictated by need. If the default setting for comments is turned on, allowing any user to post a comment without review, the comments on the site should be monitored regularly.

c. Employees using professional social media have no expectation of privacy with regard to their use of such media. Department supervisors, or their designees, will regularly monitor professional social media sites to protect the school community.

d. Department supervisors should maintain a detailed log of all reported non-compliant communications as well as any violations that are otherwise brought to the supervisor's attention. Such reports of non-compliant communications should be immediately shared with the Department employee so that the Department employee may take corrective action, if necessary and if possible

E. Personal Social Media Use

1. Communication with Department Students

In order to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students, Department employees should not communicate with students who are currently enrolled in Woonsocket schools on personal social media sites. Department employees' communication with Department students via personal social media is subject to the following exceptions:

(a) communication with relatives and (b) if an emergency situation requires such communication, in which case the Department employee should notify his/her supervisor of the contact as soon as possible.

2. Guidance Regarding Personal Social Media Sites

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

- a. As a recommended practice, Department employees are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites. However, be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the Internet can easily become public. Furthermore, social media sites can change their current default privacy settings and other functions. As a result, employees are responsible for understanding the rules of the social media site being utilized.
- b. It is not recommended that Department employees “tag” photos of other Department employees, volunteers, contractors or vendors without the prior permission of the individuals being tagged.
- c. Personal social media use, including off-hours use, has the potential to result in disruption at school and/or the workplace, and can be in violation of Department policies and state or federal law.
- d. The posting or disclosure of personally identifiable student information or confidential information via personal social media sites, in violation of Department policy and federal law, is prohibited.
- e. Department employees should not use the Department’s logo or make representations that their personal social media sites speak in an official Department capacity.

Additional Inquiries

This document is meant to provide general guidance and does not cover every potential social media situation. Should any questions arise, please your Department supervisor or the Superintendent’s Office at (401) 767-4608.

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