



Human Resources
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MEMORANDUM

TO: WCPSS Principals, Senior Directors, Superintendents Leadership Team

FROM: Jacqueline B. Ellis

RE: Social Media Guidelines

DATE: June 20, 2017

As we reach the close of this school year and the opening of our year round schools for 2017-2018, I want to address an issue of growing importance in our school system: social media activity on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.

No doubt many of you are aware of some of the risks that activity on social media may pose to our students. Incidents of cyber-bullying, threats of violence, and Internet sexual predators have become all too common in recent years, and schools nationwide have witnessed a sharp increase in disciplinary actions based on information posted by students on websites or transmitted through other electronic media. I encourage all of you to familiarize yourself with how these technologies work and the dangers they may pose to our students. Please see WCPSS Board Policy 3226/4205, *Internet Safety*. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children has produced a series of documents for educators on Internet safety, available at <http://www.missingkids.org/safety> Please share any particular concerns you may have about an individual student's Internet activities with the appropriate school-based administrators.

Less obvious, perhaps, is the public nature of electronic postings and comments by ***school employees*** on social media and the likelihood that students, parents, and other members of the community may be aware of this activity. Information posted electronically is neither "personal" nor "private." To the contrary, unless the user takes active steps to keep such postings private, the information is potentially available to billions of people. Moreover, even information posted "privately" on password-protected social media sites can be hacked or voluntarily disseminated by those with access, and thus may indirectly come to the attention of students, parents, and other school employees.

Social media can be a great tool for teachers. It can be used to communicate classroom expectations, homework, announcements, and celebrations. However, it should not be used as the only communication tool for students and parents. Please continue using other methods (websites, newsletters, etc.) to distribute appropriate and relevant information. Social media can also be used to engage students in learning, but students should not be required to create accounts on social media sites. Teachers may provide links to sites or embed social feeds within websites, wikis, blogs, and other media tools.

These sites can serve a purpose in educating our students and can be useful in the educational environment. However, we must use caution and adhere to the suggested guidelines listed below. If you wish to utilize such

sites, take the time to research appropriate methods for their use in school, consult with your school principal, and establish ways to maintain the safety and security of the information you post.

Although it is impossible for a brief letter to establish a comprehensive set of guidelines for acceptable use of social media, here is some basic advice:

- Do not access personal social networking sites from school computers, on school networks, or during work hours. Reference Board Policy 3225/4312/7320 *Technology Responsible Use and Old Policy 2313/3013/4013 R & P, Employee Acceptable Use of Electronic Resources*, and the associated Regulations & Procedures for more details about the appropriate use of school system electronic resources.
- Do not “friend” students. Unlike traditional forms of communication, postings on social networking sites are transmitted simultaneously to large numbers of people. When you “friend” a student, that student will have automatic access to many postings by you and others, some of which may not be appropriate for students. In addition, all employees are expected to maintain a high degree of professionalism in their interactions with students and their parents. Treating students as “friends” is unprofessional and may interfere with WCPSS’ educational mission.
- Think before you post, tweet etc. Remember that anything you post electronically can be shared with others and may be seen by students, parents, and other members of the community. Remember also that posts or comments may be archived instantly or disseminated by others before you have the chance to “take it back.”
- Do not post any material that would be inappropriate for school-aged children and do not allow any such material to be posted by others who have access to your site. Remember also that you are ultimately responsible for anything that appears on websites you control or maintain.
- Do not use school system-owned technologies to bully, harass, or sexually harass coworkers or students. These duties apply in cyberspace no less than in the classroom or work environment. Reference Board Policies 1710/4021/7230 *Prohibition Against Discrimination, Harassment, And Bullying*, and 1720/4015/7225 *Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying Complaint Process* for details.
- Take steps to ensure that your social networking site is as private as possible, including the use of secure passwords, and do not allow students or their parents to gain access to your site. Do not assume, however, that anything you post on the Internet will always remain “private.”
- Do not post comments of any kind on the websites of students or any minor, either within or outside of the school system.
- Do not post confidential information about yourself, your coworkers, or students on any Internet site. The disclosure of information about students, in particular, may violate state and federal confidentiality laws, even if the intent is to praise or encourage the students.
- Do not post anything that could lead others to believe that your personal website, or anything on it, is sponsored or endorsed by the school system.
- Do not make any comments to others in cyberspace that you would not make face-to-face. In particular, do not demean, harass, insult, or intimidate others.



WAKE COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

Remember that under Board Policy 2305/3005/4005, *the Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct*, and the associated Regulations & Procedures, you are expected to serve as an example and role model to students, and conduct yourself in a manner that protects your integrity and/or reputation, and that of the school system at all times.

A tool called the Privacy Matrix has been created to assist schools and teachers in making sound choices on the use of social media as it pertains to student information. The Privacy Matrix can be found on the WCPSS Intranet under Information Security. Navigate to the Intranet (internal home page), click on Information Security, and then choose the Privacy Matrix link.

<http://www2.wcpss.net/departments/technology/is/downloads/privacy-matrix.pdf>

In closing, please understand that this list of precautions is not exhaustive and that ultimately it is the responsibility of each individual employee to ensure his or her compliance with the law and school board policy. I hope that this letter is useful as we all confront the challenges posed by new technologies such as social networking websites. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding staff-related issues in relation to this topic, please contact a member of the Employee Relations team in the Human Resources Department.

<http://www2.wcpss.net/departments/hr/employee-relations/index.htm>