

Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union	Code: WSESU1
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Social Media Policy

A. Introduction/Purpose

Social media technology can serve as a powerful tool to enhance education, communication, and learning. Through teleconferencing software and the use of interactive websites, the learning environment, previously sequestered in the safety of the classroom has, in some senses, merged with the online community as a whole. In acknowledgment of the increased exposure of both staff and students, the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Board and Administration aim to ensure that all stakeholders who utilize social media technology for professional purposes described below, including staff and students, do so in a safe and responsible manner.

This Social Media Policy provides guidance regarding recommended practices for professional social media communication between Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives, as well as social media communication between Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives and students.

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, this policy also addresses recommended practices for use of personal social media by Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives.

Please refer to the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Student and Staff Acceptable Use Policies for additional guidance.

B. Definition of Social Media

Social media is defined as any form of online teleconferencing or electronic publication or presence that allows interactive communication, including, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, Internet websites, Internet forums, and wikis. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to Zoom, Google Classroom, Seesaw, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, Flickr, Instagram, and SnapChat.

1. Professional social media is a work-related social media activity that is either school-based (e.g., a 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 Facebook group for parents of WSESU athletes).
2. Personal social media use is a non-work-related social media activity (e.g., an employee or coach establishing a Facebook page or a Twitter account for his/her own personal use).

C. Applicability

These Guidelines apply to all school staff, whether paid or unpaid, including coaches, volunteers, teachers, support staff and administration (hereinafter called school representatives). This policy does not apply to student-to-student communication on social media. For more guidance on student-to-student social media, refer to the student handbook and Bullying, Harassment, and Hazing policies.

D. Professional Social Media Use

1. **Maintaining Separate Professional and Personal Email Accounts**
Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives who decide to engage in professional social media activities should maintain separate professional and personal email addresses. As such, Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives should not use their personal email address for professional social media activities, rather, representatives should use a professional email address that is completely separate from any personal social media they maintain. Regular and continuous use of a personal email address for professional purposes, including social media use, may result in the school considering the email address, and the corresponding use of that address, as a professional account.
2. **Guidance Regarding Professional Social Media Sites**
 - a. Professional social media sites that are school-based should be designed to address and utilized for instructional, educational, or extra-curricular program matters;
 - b. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives should treat professional social media space and communication like a classroom and/or a professional workplace. The same standards expected in school 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;

- c. When establishing professional social media sites, supervisors and employees should 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 (for example, it is limited to a particular class or particular grade within a school) or a public network (for example, anyone within the school, a larger group within the school community can participate or individuals outside of the school). 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 being used, Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union supervisors (i.e., principal/designee, superintendent) or their designees should be given separate administrator rights (i.e. their own password to access the site or group) providing limited access to the professional social media accounts established by Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives.
- e. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives should obtain their supervisor's approval before setting up a professional social media presence. This approval shall not be unreasonably withheld.
- 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), consider whether a revised approval is needed.
- g. Supervisors and their designees are responsible for maintaining a list of all professional social media accounts within their school or office.
- h. Professional school social media sites should include language identifying them as school sites to differentiate from personal sites. For example, the professional sites can identify the school, department, or particular grade that is utilizing the site.
- i. Professional social media sites that are non-school-based should have a reasonable relationship to the mission and function of the school creating the site.
- j. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives 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, Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives 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.
- k. Professional social media communication must be in compliance with existing Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union 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.

- l. No personally identifiable student information may be posted by Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives on professional social media sites that are open beyond the classroom, which may include, for example, a “buddy” class in another country. 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. For questions about what is identifiable information refer to the Hatch Amendment and the student handbook.
- m. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union 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 Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union employee responsible for the site.
- n. It is not recommended that Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives post photos of other school representatives on professional social media sites without prior permission of the photographed individual.

4. Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites

- a. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union administrators, or their designees, are responsible for monitoring and providing feedback regarding their employees’ and school representatives’ professional social media sites. The monitoring responsibilities include reviewing the professional social media sites on a regular basis. If administrators discover questionable communications or behavior on professional social media sites, they are required to contact the appropriate authorities for assistance. For example, if there is evidence of abuse, the protocols for mandated reporting should be followed.

If Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives are notified of questionable communications or behavior on their site, they may remove the material or contact their supervisor. The representative must contact the appropriate authorities, where required, as well as their supervisor for assistance.

- b. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union supervisors reserve the right to remove postings and/or disable a page of professional social media sites that do not adhere to the law or school policies or do not reasonably align with these Guidelines. To assist in monitoring, as a recommended practice to the extent possible, the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union

representative should examine the default settings for comments on professional social media sites and in general use more restrictive custom settings.

The Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representative 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. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives using professional social media have no expectation of privacy with regard to their use of such media. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union administrators, or their designees, will regularly monitor professional social media sites to protect the school community.
- d. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union administrators 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 creator or administrators of the site so that the representative may take corrective action, if necessary and if possible.

5. Press Inquiries

Any press inquiries received via professional social media sites should be referred to the Superintendent of Schools.

E. Personal Social Media Use

1. Communication with Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Students

In order to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students, Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives shall not communicate with students who are enrolled (as defined by the Vermont AOE) in any Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union school on personal social media sites.

Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives' communication with Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union 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 Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representative should notify his/her supervisor of the contact as soon as possible.

2. Guidance Regarding Personal Social Media Sites

Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives should exercise caution and common sense when using personal social media sites:

- a. As a recommended practice, Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives 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, representatives are responsible for understanding the rules of the social media site being utilized.
- b. It is not recommended that Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives “tag” photos of other school employees, volunteers, contractors or vendors without the prior permission of the individuals being tagged.
- c. When using personal social media sites, anyone identifying as an employee of WSESU must remember they are associated with the district, colleagues, and school community; therefore, any content posted on personal social media sites corresponding with the district, colleagues, and school community topics must be consistent with the mission and work of the district and supervisory union.
- d. Online behavior must reflect the same standards of professionalism, respect and integrity as face-to-face communications. Even with the most stringent privacy settings, when posting online comments that are related to school, students, families or the district, even in a personal capacity, staff should act as if all comments/postings are in the public domain. When posting any comment and/or images to the internet it may reflect negatively on professional image. Be advised that failure to adhere to these guidelines may result in disciplinary action.
- e. The posting or disclosure of personally identifiable student information or confidential information via personal social media sites, in violation of Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union policy, is prohibited.
- f. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives should not use the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union, school logos, likenesses, or mascots or make representations that their personal social media sites speak in an official Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union capacity. Use of the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union or school logo that is automatically populated on personal social media sites, such as LinkedIn, is permitted.
- g. Notwithstanding the guidelines above, postings by a Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representative may be protected activity under applicable labor laws and collective bargaining agreements.

F. Applicability of School Policies and Other Laws

1. These Guidelines provide guidance intended to supplement, not supersede, existing Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union policies, and laws. Users of professional social media sites must comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws, including, but not limited to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) (<https://www.ftc.gov/enforcement/rules/rulemaking-regulatory-reform-proceedings/childrens-online-privacy-protection-rule>), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/index.html>), and intellectual property laws.
2. All existing Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union policies, regulations and laws that cover employee conduct may be applicable in the social media environment. These include, but are not limited to, the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Acceptable Use Policy and Title 16 Chapter 53 of Vermont General Laws.
3. Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representatives who are mandated reporters are required to abide by the same reporting responsibilities in a social media context.

G. Additional Inquiries

These Guidelines are meant to provide general guidance and do not cover every potential social media situation. Should any questions arise, please contact the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Administrator and/or Superintendent. As these Guidelines address rapidly changing technology, the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union Board will regularly revisit these Guidelines and will update them as needed.

Procedures for Social Media:

- School administrators shall be notified of existing professional social media accounts. A log of these accounts shall be kept in a log for access and access periodic review.
- For new professional social media accounts:
 - School administration shall be notified of intention to create any new social media accounts.
 - The most restrictive privacy settings that will meet the purposes shall be recommended.

- School administration shall be added as an administrator for the site/group.
- When there is a complaint or observation of possible violation of this policy,
- pages in question.
 - Principal shall determine if the complaint is about a professional or personal social media account
 - The principal shall determine if a violation has occurred and if there has been any danger to students and/or violation of other school policies or rules.
 - If a violation has been found, the principal shall consult with the superintendent and appropriate disciplinary action shall ensue.

For personal social media accounts, if a complaint or observation is made that may indicate violation of this policy then the principal, in consultation with the superintendent, shall consider the following factors before determining any disciplinary action:

- Does the account bear the imprimatur of the school? Was the Windsor Southeast Supervisory Union representative acting as a representative of the school or as a private citizen?
- Does the content substantially interfere with school operations?
- Is there a legitimate pedagogical concern?
- Were any school rules broken?
- Is there a negative impact on children in the school?

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes", then there may be grounds to pursue disciplinary action.