Social Media and Digital Communication Guidelines for Staff

October 3, 2013

Effective communication with colleagues, students and families is vital for a thriving school environment where all stakeholders feel heard and engaged. Social media and digital communication devices and methods offer a means by which staff can quickly communicate with others, share information and exchange ideas.

Examples:

Social network - a dedicated website or other application that enables users to communicate with each other by posting information, comments, messages, images, etc.

Microblog – an online space where authors create communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content

Listserv, newsgroup – An email exchange where messages are broadcast to every member of a group at once.

Forum – a web-based place where users post their comments or opinions on topics. Users may comment on or respond to previous posts. Readers can read and/or respond to all prior posts.

Chatroom – An internet space where groups of people meet for live conversations via typed messages

Text message- an exchange, usually one-to-one, of communication typically typed into a smartphone or hand-held device.

Purpose of guidelines

The district understands the value of social media and the benefits offered by digital communication devices for providing quick and easy interaction among peers, students and families. These guidelines are intended to support staff by ensuring that all staff members clearly understand the many factors and possible ramifications to consider and use communication tools in a district-approved manner within district-approved platforms or spaces. These guidelines are in addition to, and complement, existing and future Board of Education policies.

Guidelines

When using social media or digital communication devices to communicate with students and/or families district staff should:

Policies

- Always comply with all Board of Education Policies including, but not limited to, policies related to:

  o Student Records (Policy 4150), Student Records/Confidentiality; Policy 4150, Student Records/Definitions; Policy 4156, Directory Data/Information; Policy 4157, Student Records/Disclosures; Policy 4158, Student Records/Records of Disclosures; Policy 4159, Amendment of Educational Records; Policy 4160, Retention of records; 4161, Student Records/Implementation);

  o Staff Acceptable Use Policy pertaining to the internet (Policy 3720, Staff Policy, Procedures, and Rules for Using Information Technology);

  o Mandatory Reporting of Suspected Abuse or Neglect (Policy 4222, Reporting Abuse or Neglect; see also Policy 4223, Reporting Child Enticement);

  o Copyright (Policy 6500, Compliance with Copyright Law);

  o Discrimination/Harassment (Policy 8012 Prohibition Against Discrimination);

  o Distribution of Materials (Policy 7041; Policy 6481);

- o Anti-Bullying (Policy 4510)

District-sanctioned vs. personal media

These guidelines should serve as a reference tool for staff to inform decisions regarding their selection and use of social media resources and digital communication devices. Communication resources and devices, while of unquestionable value, are not without risk both personally and professionally, if used in the absence of the appropriate level of discretion and intent.

- ▪ The district does not take a position on an employee's decision to participate in blogs, wikis, social media pages, etc. for personal use on personal time. If, however, staff members choose to do so, staff members should not communicate with students and families regarding topics pertaining to your work with the MMSD.

  - o Follow all rules established by social media provider (i.e. age requirements, profile restrictions).

  - o Be aware that even with the most stringent privacy settings, photo tagging and other tools may make personal information regarding students and their families publicly available. Staff should be prepared to address these issues and remind families of this potential.

- ▪ Do not "friend", "follow" or otherwise interact with students from your personal social media accounts.

- ▪ When using social media sites/products for school or MMSD-related purposes, use district-sanctioned and/or district-created platforms, (e.g. MMSD Facebook page).

- ▪ Communicate with families and students through district-provided devices on district systems.

  - o Staff must avoid communicating with families regarding school or MMSD-related matters through personal social media accounts, blogs, etc.

- o Staff must avoid posting student information, pictures, work-product exemplars on personal social media sites, blogs, etc. Current parental consents apply only to district-sanctioned sites.

- o Staff must avoid communicating with students and families through personal communication devices such as cell phones, tablets, etc. for any school or MMSD-related matters. Staff members who choose to communicate with students and families through text messages should do so using a district-provided device or district-sanctioned technology. Staff should avoid giving students and families' personal phone numbers, especially cell phone numbers.

Social media in the classroom

- Communicate clearly and meaningfully with families and students before using social media within the classroom so that families understand what, if any, information regarding their children may be available on the internet.

  - o When using social media within the classroom, staff should provide information to families regarding the purpose for the use of the selected media, an example of what the media project will look like and a description of the amount of student information and level of security. Unless detrimental to the overall objective of the project, staff should used password-protected social media sites available only to families.

  - o Passive consent (consent that requires parents to actively opt-out rather than opting-in) is appropriate in most instances.

  - o Staff should work with their building principal whenever they are considering a new use of social media or digital communication within the classroom.

- Always use common sense and professional judgment when contacting students through social media.

- Communications must be age-appropriate and related directly to a student's education.

- Staff at the elementary and middle school levels must include parents in all digital communications unless parents actively opt-out.

- Staff at the high school level may communicate directly with students via media devices only after parents have been generally advised of the staff's intent to do so and have had the opportunity to opt-out.

Standards of professional conduct

Your online behavior must reflect the same standards of professionalism, respect and integrity as your face-to-face communications.

When using personal social media sites, if you identify yourself as an employee of the Madison Metropolitan District you must remember that you have associated yourself with the district, your colleagues and your school community; therefore, you must ensure that any associated content is consistent with the mission and work of the district.

- Staff who have identified themselves as associated with the district should use the following disclaimer on personal social media sites, including blogs, "The views on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent the views, opinions, vision or strategies of the Madison Metropolitan School District."

- 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.

Use caution when posting any comment and/or images to the internet that may reflect negatively on your professional image. Be advised that failure to adhere to these guidelines may result in disciplinary action.

For questions about the guidelines contact your building principal or supervisor.

Resources and tips for effective communication are available to staff at: mmsd.org/communicationstoolkit or call 663-1879.

Use good judgment.