

Houston County Board of Education

Monitoring: Review: Annually, in November	Descriptor Term: Employee Use of Social Media and Internet Postings	Descriptor Code: 4.4061	Issued Date: 01/08/18
		Rescinds:	Issued: 07/08/13

This policy applies to employees who post on the following (not an inclusive list):

1. Social Networking websites including, but not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Flickr, YouTube, and LinkedIn.
2. Blogs.
3. Wikis, including, but not limited to, Wikipedia.
4. Other websites and message boards.

Houston County Schools encourages and respects its employees' rights under the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. Therefore, employees should not read this policy as an overt attempt to limit their constitutionally protected freedoms

However, as representatives of the Houston County Schools, employees shall maintain professional and appropriate relationships with their students and the community. Since most social media and internet postings are available to the general public, employees' public postings should remain professional and appropriate for minor students' viewing.

Employees should exercise care in setting appropriate boundaries between their personal and public online behavior, understanding that what is private in the digital world often has the possibility of becoming public, even without their knowledge or consent. Houston County Schools strongly encourages all employees to carefully review the privacy settings on any social media and networking sites they use and exercise care and good judgment when posting content and information on such sites.

When using a social media or internet site, an employee is strongly discouraged from including current, minor students as "friends," "followers," or any other similar terminology used by various sites without the written permission from the student's parent. If an employee maintains or participates in a Houston County Schools sponsored online forum that extends to persons who are parents, alumni, or other constituents, he/she must exercise good judgment about any content that is shared on the site.

The same level of scrutiny will not apply to employees' private internet postings. Private postings include, but are not limited to, matters found on encrypted sites and "invite only" networks. However, when an employee makes those private postings available to students or parents, those postings should be treated as public and handled and maintained with appropriate care.

Social media and networking sites must not be accessed through the Houston County Schools network or by any other means (e.g. smart phones) during work hours, except for legitimate instructional purposes or during duty-free time (i.e. lunch break).

All employees shall sign a fair use agreement wherein employees agree that they will not use school computers or equipment for any inappropriate activities. Employees shall immediately remove any internet postings, public or private, that the district determines are inappropriate or unprofessional, including but not limited to internet postings that mention a student by name or that cast a student in an unfavorable light.

Further, employees shall open their private social networking website, blog, or other internet postings for viewing by school system officials if asked to do so, for causes related to employment. Employees shall refrain from any public or private internet postings that violate federal law, state law, or district policies.

Additionally, employees should adhere to policies that include workplace standards on harassment, student relationships, conduct, professional communication, and confidentiality. An employee shall not make statements that would violate any school board policies, including its policies concerning discrimination, harassment, or obscene material.

A. Liability

Employees should understand that they can be held legally responsible for internet commentary. Therefore, employees should exercise caution with regard to their internet postings. Employees must also understand that Houston County Schools shall not be liable for any errors, omissions, losses, or damages claimed due to those employees' internet postings.

B. Confidentiality

Houston County Schools' employees often find themselves privy to confidential education records. Such confidential information, or information reasonably related to confidential records, shall *never* be shared or posted on the internet in any forum (i.e., public or private).

C. Representation

If an employee's internet postings or profiles identify him/her as a representative of Houston County Schools, employees must make it clear that any views expressed are the employee's alone, and do not necessarily reflect those of the district. Furthermore, an employee's internet postings or profiles should not include trademarks/logos associated with the Houston County Schools without prior permission from the appropriate administrator.

D. Association

Many school district employees' internet postings appear on sites officially associated with the district and/or its schools. The district and its administrators retain editorial control over any internet postings found on those officially associated sites. As such, an employee must obtain written permission from Houston County Schools to associate or link his/her personal site or blog to an officially associated site.

If the director of schools or his/her designee believes that an employee's activity on a social networking site, blog, or personal website may violate board policies, then he/she may request that the employee cease such activity. *Depending on the severity of the incident, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.*