

APPROVAL OF PROFESSIONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Administrative Code: 7335-R

Watauga County Schools (WCS) empowers its teachers to engage students through embracing the most current pedagogy and teaching tools. Social media tools (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc.) provide new opportunities for communication and collaboration between teachers and students, as well as a new means to tell all stakeholders our district's story. To this end, WCS has developed guidelines for the personal and professional use of social media in policy 7335, "Employee Use of Social Media."

General Guidelines

- Free speech protects individuals who want to participate in social media, but the laws and courts have ruled that school districts can discipline employees if their speech, including personal online postings, disrupts school operations.
- Stay positive and professional. Make posts that reflect our district's values and celebrate our work together.
- Stay current. If you choose to create a social media account, keep it up-to-date so it is a reliable information source. Delete accounts that you do not intend to keep using.
- When in doubt, compare online behavior to what you'd do in the real world. If you wouldn't say it to someone personally or want it seen on a billboard, don't put it online.
- Remember that your online behavior is governed by all WCS policies, particularly policies 7335, "Employee Use of Social Media," and 4040/7310, "Staff-Student Relations." Standards for personal and professional use of social media by WCS personnel are established in these policies.
- We want our Watauga County Schools family to be empowered to use social media to showcase what makes us great. To that end, please use common sense and sound judgment when interacting in online spaces. In short, think before you post.

Professional Use of Social Media

- Though Watauga County Schools does not require the use of separate personal and professional social media accounts, the district does strongly encourage this best practice.
- There is no standard naming convention for professional accounts; however accounts used for professional purposes should be easily identifiable as associated with Watauga County Schools.
- Professional use of social media must be solely for educational purposes consistent with the approved curriculum for NC public schools. It is not to be used for any non-instructional purpose, and all content must be consistent with the mission and policies of the Watauga County Schools.
- Staff should assume all comments/postings are in the public domain.
- Do not post 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.

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Teaching with Social Media

- Teachers who wish to use social media as part of instruction should first submit their plans to their principal (or principal's designee) for approval. Principals shall ensure that the proposed use advances the instructional purposes of WCS, is consistent with applicable curriculum standards, and that the social media platform is approved for use in WCS.
- The technology director or designee shall maintain a list of social media platforms approved for use in WCS and shall provide this information to principals as needed.
- Once their plans are approved, teachers will inform parents about what social media tool(s) will be used, how this use supports instructional goals (including example products, if possible), and what, if any, information regarding their children may be available on the internet.
- Obtain permission from parents for students to use social media in class. In most cases, passive consent (i.e. requiring parents to opt-out rather than opt-in) is appropriate. Teachers should consult with their principal about the best means to acquire permission.
- Social media use will be limited to classes in which all students have permission to use social media or in which non-users can be provided with equivalent educational value without using social media.

Cross Reference: Policy 4040/7310 Staff-Student Relations; Policy 3225/4312/7320 Technology Responsible Use; Policy 7335, Employee Use of Social Media

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