West Plains School District

Electronic & Social Media Guidelines for Faculty and Staff

West Plains School District realizes that part of 21st-century learning is adapting to the changing methods of communication. The importance of faculty, staff, students, and parents engaging, collaborating, learning, and sharing in these digital environments is a part of 21st-century learning. To this aim, West Plains School District has developed the following guidelines to provide direction for employees, students, and the school district community when participating in online social media activities. Whether or not an employee chooses to participate in a blog, wiki, online social network, application ("app") development, or any other form of online publishing or discussion, is his or her own decision.

Free speech protects educators who want to participate in social media, but the laws and courts have ruled that schools can discipline faculty and staff if their speech, including online postings, disrupts school operations. West Plains School District's social media guidelines encourage employees to participate in online social activities. However, it is important to create an atmosphere of trust and individual accountability, keeping in mind that information produced by West Plains School District faculty, staff, and students is a reflection on the entire district and is subject to the district's Acceptable Use Policy. By accessing, creating, or contributing to any blogs, wikis, apps, or other social media for classroom or district use, you agree to abide by these guidelines. Please read them carefully before creating or participating in any online content.

Examples of social media include but are not limited to the following: blogs, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram Pinterest, etc.

Best Practices

Be Transparent

How you represent yourself online is an extension of yourself. Do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else's identity or misrepresenting your identity. Be honest about who you are, where you work, and what you do.

Personal Responsibility

- West Plains School District employees are personally responsible for the content they publish online. Be mindful that what you publish will be public for a long time—protect your privacy.
- Be aware that even with the strictest privacy settings what you 'say' online should be within the bounds of professional discretion. Comments expressed via social networking pages under the impression of a 'private conversation' may still end up being shared into a more public domain, even with privacy settings on maximum.

- Your online behavior should reflect the same standards of honesty, respect, and consideration that you use face-to-face.
- Comments related to the school should always meet the highest standards of professional discretion. When posting, even in the strictest settings, staff should act on the assumption that all postings are in the public domain.
- Remember that online posts and content are an extension of your classroom or the workplace. What is inappropriate in your classroom or the workplace should be deemed inappropriate online.
- When contributing online do not post confidential student information.
- If you want to have a professional presence online through social media, developing a profile on a site like LinkedIn or something similar might be a great practice.
- If you would like to communicate through social media to a group of students, developing a group or page would be the recommended practice.

Always A School Employee

The lines between "public and private" & and "personal and professional" are blurred in the digital world. Even when you have a disclaimer or use a different username, you will always be considered a district employee. Whether it is clearly communicated or not and even if it is not your intent, you will be identified as working for and sometimes representing the school in what you do and say online.

When writing personal posts, always write in the first person (I, me, we, us) and make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the district.

Use a Disclaimer

- Include a disclaimer on your social media site which says something like this: "The opinions and positions expressed on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect my school district's positions, strategies, or opinions."
- This standard disclaimer does not exempt employees from their responsibilities as explained in these guidelines. If asked by the media to comment on a school-related issue, refer them to the Director of Communications. When in doubt, direct them to the principal or Superintendent. Classroom sites do not require a disclaimer.

Be Respectful and Responsible

Employees, parents, and students reflect a diverse set of customs, values, and points of view. Be respectful of the opinions of others in your posts or comments. You are responsible for the content you post. Consider the words used to tag content in a social bookmarking site. Consider the profile picture or image you select. Do your tags, descriptions, and image portray you in a professional manner?

Own and Correct Mistakes

If you make a mistake, admit the mistake and correct it quickly.
Clearly state if you've corrected a previous post. Even though damage may be done, it is best to admit your mistake and correct it. Apologize if appropriate.

Confidential Information
Online postings and conversations are not private. Do not share confidential information whether it is internal school discussions or specific information about students or other staff. What you post will be seen by others and will be online for a long time. It can be forwarded or shared in just a few clicks. Do not write about a colleague or student without their permission.

School Crisis Situations
During a school lockdown, secure mode, or crisis, employees should not be posting or asking for information online or through other forms of communication (texts, phone calls, etc.). During these situations, rumors can spread quickly and employees should be using this time to make sure that the safety of those in their charge/care is their top priority.

School/District Logos
Do not use any school logo or image without permission and adhere to the district logo use guidelines. Contact the Director of Communication for permission on logo usage.

Posting Photos or Movies of Students and Staff
When posting photos or movies of fellow employees, it is always best to obtain permission from that employee.

No photos should be posted if it would violate FERPA or HIPPA or identify a student as a special needs student. This includes an employee's school and personal online accounts, text messaging, or the physical posting of a photo in an employee's classroom or home.

Using Content That Isn't Your Own
Do not utilize protected works. Just because an image, song, movie, etc. comes up in a search online does not mean you can use it freely. Documents found online should be available under Creative Commons (see info below) or your own if you plan to reproduce them in any way. Also, make sure and give credit to the owner of the work when necessary.

A hyperlink to outside sources is recommended. Be sure not to plagiarize and give credit where it is due. When using a hyperlink, be sure that the content is appropriate and adheres to the West Plains School District AUP.

Creative Commons is a way that allows you to use certain photos without getting written permission from the owner. Check out http://creativecommons.org/about for more information.

Responding to Negative Comments and Criticism

How you respond to negative comments or criticism will say more about you and your character than what you post. If you delete a negative post, it discourages open communications. When publicly criticized or receiving a negative comment, first, stay cool and don't reply in haste. Express your view in a clear, logical way. Don't get personal, and, if you made a mistake, admit it, and move ahead. It is not uncommon for a negative response to be answered by some other person, who supports your view. When in doubt, it's best to ignore a comment and not give it credibility by acknowledging it with a response publicly; perhaps a face-to-face meeting would be more appropriate.

Regular Postings on School Sites

- Classroom sites should be updated weekly throughout the school year. Sports sites should be updated weekly in season and at least once a month out of season.
- The purpose of social media is two-way communication and you cannot be a part of the discussion if you do not post regularly.
- Comments should be monitored and responded to multiple times a week.

Requests to Use Blocked Social Media Sites

West Plains School District understands that 21st-century learning is constantly changing and that many sites currently "blocked" by the District's content filter may have pedagogical significance for teacher and student use.

If you would like to request another online site be accessible to use for teaching and learning, contact the District's technology department to review the website.
Requests will be reviewed and, if approved, the district's content filter will be updated accordingly.

A description should be provided of the intended use of the site and what tools on the site match your needed criteria.

A link to the site's privacy policy should be included if possible.

Request to Start and Maintain A Social Media Account for A School Program/Activity/Sport

West Plains School District understands that having a social media presence for a school program, activity, or sport can be a great method of communication and a promotional tool.

Before a program, activity, or sport can start a social media presence, the Director of Communication must approve the account the staff member wishes to create. Employees should fill out the Social Media Account Request Form and submit it to the Director of Communication for review and approval.

Any social media account that has been established prior to this procedure will still need to be approved by the Director of Communications.

Any account not approved by the district but deemed to represent or seem to represent the District in an official manner will result in the district pursuing the removal of the account.