

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Employee and Student Use of Social Media: Piedmont Public Schools recognizes the value and benefit of using electronic media to communicate digitally with students, families and fellow employees in an effort to engage stakeholders and enhance the learning experience. Whether or not an employee chooses to participate in online social networking 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 students and employees if their speech, including online postings, interferes with the learning environment or causes a disruption to the normal operations at school, violates district policy or the laws of the State of Oklahoma.

District recognizes that the line between professional and personal relationships is blurred within a social media context. When employees choose to join or engage with students, families or fellow employees in social media, they are advised to maintain their professionalism as district employees and take responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks, including requirements for mandatory reporting.

Teachers, administrators and other staff in District schools may use social media platforms and other digital communication to extend and enhance communications with students, parents, colleagues and the community. Employees are expected to maintain an appropriate and professional relationship with students, parents and patrons at all times and in all forms and manners of communication.

I. Definitions:

Social media refers to any user-generated content sites generally available to the public or consumers that include, but are not limited to sites like Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, (X), Instagram, Snapchat, Google apps, Skype, Wikis, social networks, podcasts, forums, blogs, and other content and messaging sites, programs and applications.

II. Employee Guidelines: District employees are expected to serve as positive ambassadors for our schools and remember they are role models to students in this community. Because readers of social media may view the employee as a representative of the district, they are required to observe the following rules when referring to the district, its schools, students, programs, activities, employees, volunteers and communities on any social media:

1. An employee’s use of any social media and an employee’s postings, displays, or communications on any social media network must comply with all state and federal laws and any applicable district policies.
2. District employees should exercise discretion and maintain professionalism when communicating with students or groups of students via computer or wireless telecommunication devices. Employees should limit communication with students to matters concerning a student’s education or extracurricular activities for which the staff member has responsibility.

3. District employees are discouraged from engaging in private electronic media exchanges with students. Only on rare occasions or in emergency situations should individual communication with students occur.
4. District employees are personally responsible for all comments/information they publish online. Respect and professionalism should be maintained in all communications - by word, image or other means. Employees shall not use obscene, profane or vulgar language on any social media network or engage in communications or conduct that is harassing, threatening, bullying, libelous, or defamatory or that discusses or encourages any illegal activity or the inappropriate use of alcohol, use of illegal drugs, sexual behavior, sexual harassment, or bullying.
5. Employees may not act or purport to act as a spokesperson for the district or post comments as a representative of the district, except as authorized by the superintendent or the superintendent's designee. District employees must make clear that any views expressed are the employee's alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the district.
6. When using forms of electronic communication to share information with students, district employees are directed to inform parents in writing (handbook, syllabus, etc.) to the extent this form of communication will be used, establish guidelines for such use, and allow them the option to opt out.
7. District's or school's name/logo may not be used on any social media network without permission from the Superintendent, or designee. Nonpublic images of the district premises and property, including floor plans, may not be posted or shared.
8. Employees are strongly encouraged to set and maintain social networking privacy settings at the most restrictive level. District employees should be aware that persons classified as "friends" or persons who can access a personal social networking site may have the ability to download and share the employee's information and photographs with others.
9. Employees shall not engage in personal use of social media during contract hours unless online activity has been assigned to an employee and/or is related to an employee's work assignment. Use of an employee's personal social media account to discuss school business with parents and students is prohibited.

III. Student Guidelines:

1. Remember that social media platforms are very public and leave a digital footprint for all to see, including future employers. To protect yourself, please observe social media policy guidelines when referring to the district, its schools, students, programs, activities, employees, volunteers and communities on any social media networks.

2. Students should be aware that social posts must adhere to all state and federal laws and any applicable district policies. Students will be held accountable for the content of their electronic communications in relation to school, staff and students that might harm or cause harm to another student or teacher, specifically that which constitutes bullying, harassment, threats or advocates or depicts illegal activity, and/or causes a disruption to the normal operations at school. Illegal behavior is subject to punishment as appropriate and available. Students who engage in cyberbullying also risk civil and/or criminal charges and/or lawsuits that may be filed against them by victims or victim's families. The district will fully cooperate with law enforcement agencies in any and all investigations involving students, electronic devices and social media.
3. Be safe online. Never give out personal information.
4. Do not use other people's intellectual property without their permission. It is a violation of copyright law to copy and paste other's thoughts. Be aware that pictures may also be protected under copyright laws. Verify you have permission to use the image or it is under Creative Commons attribution.
5. Use of social media during the school day is prohibited unless specific permission has been granted by District.

Consequences for Violations of Social Media Policy

Reports of a violation of this policy may result in an investigation of the user's posts, files, internet usage, or other electronic/digital media. The investigation and its scope will be reasonable and calculated to disclose the existence and nature of the alleged violation. If warranted, consequences will be determined in accordance with state and federal laws, considering the type of violation, and past history.

Consequences may include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Loss of internet access (while on school property) and/or network access, for a determined amount of time according to the offense.
2. Student offenses will include notifying the student's parent/guardian of an incident and possible disciplinary action appropriate to the severity of the offense.
3. Staff misuse may result in disciplinary action that may include a recommendation for dismissal or non-reemployment.

Texting/Messaging

With few exceptions, texts and messages sent by teachers, coaches and other staff shall be sent to an entire class, team, club or organization, not to individual students. Exceptions may include situations involving confidential medical

issues, emergencies, or times when students in crisis reach out for support. Administrators should be notified about any individual messages to students that are personal or confidential.

Digital Communication Guidelines and Restrictions

All digital communications between employees and student, whether via social media, texting or other means, should be about legitimate school business. Digital communication is an extension of the physical classroom. What is inappropriate in the classroom is inappropriate in digital communications.

District digital communications, content posted by district employees and comments posted by participants on social media sites shall not contain:

- Profane language;
- Language that is harassing, hazing, accusatory, intimidating, demeaning, defamatory, maligning, inflammatory or verbally abusing toward any person or entity
- Language that threatens personal safety or may tend to compromise personal safety or security
- Language that promotes, fosters, or perpetuates discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation
- Language that incites or encourages attempts to interfere with or disrupt the normal educational process
- Language that encourages illegal activity;
- Language or images of a sexual or flirtatious nature or links to sexual content;
- Support or oppose district bond proposals or candidates for office;
- Solicitations of commerce for personal gain;
- Content that violates a legal ownership interest of any other party;
- Any comments by sponsors/participants not following these guidelines must be deleted and sponsors/participants may be removed from platforms.

Privacy

Staff shall have no expectation of privacy when using district technology or the district network in regards to social media.

Parent Notification

At the beginning of the school year or season, as appropriate, employees should communicate with parents in writing about the manners in which they will communicate with students about classroom activities, clubs or extracurricular activities students are part of.

Directory Information (Personally Identifiable Information)

The school district designates the following personally identifiable information as "directory information": student's name, class designation, student's extracurricular participation, student's achievement awards or honors, student's weight and height if on an athletic team, and student's photograph. Directory information can be released by the district or posted on the school district/school site's website/social media.

If a parent wants to prohibit the release of directory information, the school must be notified in writing. If the release of directory information is prohibited, the student's information cannot be sent to the newspaper for awards or be in the yearbook.

Media Inquiries

Any media contact stemming from social media sites managed by district personnel shall be referred to the District's Communications Department at 405-373-2311.

Personal Use of Digital Communication or Social Media

Employees' personal social media sites, pages or platforms may contain content, including photos or video, that shines a positive light on the district, schools, students or other members of the district community.

Before posting photos or videos of students on personal social media, employees must:

1. verify with the school principal (or designee) that the student's parent/guardian(s) have not opted out of photos or video of their child appearing in district publications (See "Directory Information")
2. Verify in PowerSchool that the student's parents have not restricted the release of directory information.
3. Verify that the use of photos does not violate FERPA.

Appropriateness

Employees are expected to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students. The District strongly recommends that employees not communicate via personal social media with students who are currently enrolled in District schools, with the exception of communication about non-school issues with students who are relatives or children of personal friends. The District recommends employees consider politely discontinuing existing, personal social media profile interaction with current students.

In regard to digital communication and social media use, unprofessional relationships include writing personal letters, email, direct messages (DM) or text messages; calling students on cell phones or allowing students to make personal calls to you unrelated to class work or school activities; sending inappropriate pictures to students; discussing or revealing personal matters about your private life or inviting students to do the same; engaging in sexualized dialogue in any form.

Any inappropriate contact or remarks via digital communication or social media from a student to an employee shall be reported by the employee to his or her supervisor immediately.

Inappropriate or offensive content sent as digital communication or posted to social networks by employees may be investigated by school and district officials and, if warranted, may result in discipline, dismissal from employment, notification to the State Department of Education or criminal investigation.

District employees who have personal social media accounts are strongly encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings. At the same time, employees should also understand that privacy settings are no guarantee of privacy, and that in various manners any post in a personal digital communication or social media account could become public. A good rule of thumb is that if a staff member does not want to see something on the front page of the paper, they should not text it or post it.