

All school employees, including student teachers and independent contractors, shall comply with this policy when using electronic social media.

For the purposes of this policy, “social media” is any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication, including but not limited to: personal websites, web logs (blogs), wikis, social network sites, online forums, virtual worlds, video-sharing websites, and any other social media generally available to the public or consumers that does not fall within the board’s technologies network (e.g., Web 2.0 tools, MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, Google +, YouTube). The use of video-conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Webex, and Google Meet is subject to policy 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations.

In addition to the standards of this policy, all professional and personal use of social media by school employees shall also be in full compliance with policy 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations.

A. PROFESSIONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Professional use of social media means using social media to carry out the instructional objectives and/or administrative responsibilities assigned to an individual as an employee of the Watauga County Schools (WCS). All professional use of social media shall comply with the following guidelines.

1. Communication on professional social media space shall be handled in the same manner as communication in a classroom and/or workplace. The same standards required in other WCS professional settings will apply on social media.
2. Employees shall exercise caution and sound judgment and will fully comply with all applicable laws and WCS policies, including but not limited to prohibitions on the disclosure of confidential information and the use of harassing, obscene, discriminatory, defamatory or threatening language.
3. The establishment of social media sites for professional purposes shall conform to the process and standards established in 7335-R, Approval of Professional Use of Social Media.
4. No personally identifiable student information and no confidential information about students, school employees, or school system business may be posted by employees on social media.
5. Employees shall not post identifiable images of a student or student’s family without permission from the student and the student’s parent or legal guardian.
6. WCS reserves the right to direct the removal of postings and/or disable a page of professional social media sites that do not adhere to the law or do not fully align with the goals of the district.
7. Employees using social media for professional purposes have no expectation or

right of privacy with regard to their use of such media. The district will regularly monitor professional social media sites to protect the school community and the reputation of WCS.

8. School personnel that establish social media accounts for professional purposes will monitor all activity on the account to ensure consistent adherence with this policy and other applicable policies and laws.

B. PERSONAL USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Personal use of social media is use that is not related to the individual's responsibilities as a WCS employee. The board respects the right of employees to use social media on their personal time. As role models for the school system's students, however, employees are responsible for their public conduct even when they are not performing their job duties as employees of the school system. Employees will be held to the same professional standards in their public use of social media and other electronic communications as they are for any other public conduct. Further, school employees remain subject to applicable state and federal laws, board policies, administrative regulations, and the Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators, even if communicating with others concerning personal and private matters. If an employee's use of social media interferes with the employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties, the employee is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Employees are responsible for the content on their social media sites, including content added by the employee, the employee's friends, or members of the public who can access the employee's site, and for Web links on the employee's site. Employees shall take reasonable precautions, such as using available security settings, to restrict students from viewing their personal information on social media and to prevent students from accessing materials that are not age-appropriate.

The board permits brief and infrequent personal use so long as it does not interfere with the timely and efficient performance of the employee's duties and is not otherwise prohibited by board policy or procedure.

Employees shall observe the following principles in their personal use of social media:

1. Employees shall not post confidential information about students, employees, or school system business, and shall not post identifiable images of a student or student's family without permission from the student and the student's parent or legal guardian
2. Employees shall not accept current students as "friends" or "followers" or otherwise connect with students on social media sites, unless the employee and student have a family relationship or other type of appropriate relationship which originated outside of the school setting.
3. Employees shall not knowingly allow students access to their personal social media

sites that discuss or portray sex, nudity, alcohol, drug use, or other behaviors that would be inappropriate to discuss with a student at school, or which use profane, obscene, indecent, lewd, vulgar, or sexually offensive language, graphics, or other communication .

4. Employees may not knowingly grant students access to any portions of their personal social media sites that are not accessible to the general public, unless the employee and student have a family relationship or other type of appropriate relationship which originated outside of the school setting.
5. Employees shall be professional in all Internet postings related to or referencing the school system, students, and other employees.
6. Employees shall not use profane, pornographic, obscene, indecent, lewd, vulgar, or sexually offensive language, pictures or graphics or other communication that could reasonably be anticipated to cause a substantial disruption to the school environment.
7. Employees shall not use the school system's logo, other copyrighted material of the system, or a school system e-mail address in connection with personal social media.
8. Employees shall not use Internet postings to libel or defame the board, individual board members, students, or other school employees.
9. Employees shall not use Internet postings to harass, bully, or intimidate other employees or students in violation of policies 4020/7030, Discrimination and Harassment Prohibited by Federal Law, 1725/4035/7236, Title IX Sexual Harassment – Prohibited Conduct and Reporting Process, 1735/4329/7311, Bullying and Harassing Behavior Prohibited, or state and federal laws.
10. Employees shall not post content that negatively impacts their ability to perform their jobs, the smooth and orderly flow of work or delivery of services to students or school personnel, or which harms the goodwill and reputation of students, school personnel, the school system, or the community at large.

C. CONSEQUENCES

School system personnel shall monitor online activities of employees who access the Internet using school technological resources. Additionally, WCS personnel may periodically conduct public Internet searches to determine if an employee has engaged in conduct that violates this policy. Any employee who has been found by the superintendent to have violated this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

The superintendent shall establish and communicate to employees guidelines that are consistent

with this policy.

Legal References: U.S. Const. amend. I; Children’s Internet Protection Act, 47 U.S.C. 254(h)(5); Electronic Communications Privacy Act, 18 U.S.C. 2510-2522; Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. 1232g; 17 U.S.C. 101 *et seq.*; 20 U.S.C. 6777; G.S. 115C-325(e) (applicable to career status teachers), -325.4 (applicable to non-career status teachers); 16 N.C.A.C. 6C .0601, .0602; State Board of Education Policy EVAL-014

Cross References: Title IX Sexual Harassment – Prohibited Conduct and Reporting Process (policy 1725/4035/7236), Bullying and Harassing Behavior Prohibited (policy 1735/4329/7311), Technology in the Educational Program (policy 3220), Technology Responsible Use (policy 3225/4312/7320), Web Page Development (policy 3227/7322), Copyright Compliance (policy 3230/7330), Discrimination and Harassment Prohibited by Federal Law (policy 4020/7230), Staff-Student Relations (policy 4040/7310), Student Records (policy 4700), Staff Responsibilities (policy 7300)

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Revised: August 14, 2017 and May 21, 2018 (Legal references only); April 12, 2021; May 12, 2025

Replaces (in part): Policy 4.02.50, Responsible Use for Access to Networked Info Resources