



TITLE: EMPLOYEE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

1.0 Rationale:

This policy is intended to provide a context for the responsible use of Social Media by all employees of the District School Board Ontario North East.

Maintaining professional boundaries in all forms of communication, technology-related or not, is vital to maintaining the public trust and appropriate relationships with students. Employees must be aware of the numerous challenges and the ramifications associated with the use of Social Media. It is the purpose of this policy to identify potential dangers, provide directions to avoid such dangers, and to set out the Board's expectations for employees with respect to the use of Social Media.

Social Media can be effective when used cautiously and appropriately. They serve a range of purposes, including helping students and parents/guardians access assignments and resources related to classroom studies. However, the most popular Social Media applications were not created specifically for educational purposes and their use can expose employees to risk. Employees are expected to know and respect proper boundaries with students, parents/guardians, other Board employees and members of the school community, even when such persons initiate electronic interaction.

It is important to be aware that Social Media posts are not anonymous. They can be tracked, misdirected, manipulated and live forever on the Internet. Social Media sites create and archive copies of every piece of content posted, even when deleted from online profiles. Once information is digitized, the author relinquishes all control.

It is important to know that online identities and actions are visible to the public and can result in serious repercussions or embarrassment. As the Office of the Privacy Commission of Ontario notes, users may intend to share their online existence solely within their own network, but in theory, anyone can access the users' musings, photos and information. Further, the words can be altered, forwarded and misquoted.

2.0 Definitions:

"Employees" – All staff, including but not limited to, professional teaching staff, support staff, educational assistants, administrative staff, maintenance staff, and student teachers and co-op students placed at District School Board Ontario North East.

"Social Media" – including, but not limited to, software, applications (including those running on mobile devices), and web sites which enable users to interact, create and

exchange information online including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube, Wikipedia, Picasa, MySpace and similar services.

3.0 Policy:

It is the policy of District School Board Ontario North East to provide a context for the responsible and professional use of Social Media by all Board employees.

This includes, but is not limited to Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube, Wikipedia, Picasa, MySpace and similar services.

All District School Board Ontario North East employees are required to know and abide by this policy in order to ensure that Social Media is being used in a respectful and responsible manner.

PROCEDURES:

Expectations for Minimizing Risks

Interact with students appropriately:

- Student interaction should only be engaged in by employees whose job descriptions and requirements require it.
- As a digital citizen, model the behaviour you expect to see online from students.
- Alert students to appropriate online behaviour and the proper use of comments and images.
- Maintain your professional persona by communicating with students electronically at appropriate times of the day and through established education platforms.
- Maintain a formal, courteous and professional tone in all communications with students to ensure that boundaries with students are maintained.
- Do not exchange private text messages, phone numbers, personal e-mail addresses or photos of a personal nature with students.
- For non-professional social media requests, decline student-initiated and/or parent/guardian-initiated “friend” requests and do not issue “friend” requests to students and/or parents/guardians.
- Notify parents/guardians before using social networks for classroom activities. Advise parents/guardians of the platforms you use in class to connect with students and consider giving parents/guardians access to group pages.

Understand privacy concerns:

- Operate in all circumstances online as a professional – as you would in the community.

- Do not engage in any discussion or disclosure of information concerning students, parents/guardians or other Board employees in Social Media applications.
- Do not disclose any “personal information”, as defined in the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* in any Social Media application.
- Manage the privacy and security settings of your Social Media accounts. Privacy settings can shift and change without notice. Check the settings frequently.
- Assume that information you post can be accessed or altered.
- Ensure that the privacy settings for content and photographs are set appropriately and monitor who is able to post to any of your personal Social Media locations. Students should not be among those who are allowed to view or post on it. Remember, no privacy mechanism is guaranteed.
- Monitor regularly all content you or others post to your Social Media accounts and remove anything that is inappropriate.
- Ask others not to “tag” you on any photographs without your permission.
- Ask others to remove any undesirable content related to you.

Act professionally:

- Consider whether any posting may reflect poorly on you, your students, your fellow Board employees, your school, or the School Board. Do not engage in any such communication.
- Be transparent and authentic. Use your true identity at all times. Even if you create a false identity, courts can compel disclosure of your true identity.
- Do not engage in online criticism of students, parents/guardians, fellow Board employees, your employer or others within the school community.
- Do not engage in impulsive, inappropriate, or heated comments.
- Ensure that your comments do not incite others to make discriminatory or other professionally unacceptable comments.
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of student information and Board information.
- Be aware of, and comply with, all applicable policies and programs regarding the use of Social Media/e-communications and the appropriate use of electronic equipment. In all Social Media postings it is your responsibility to exercise good judgment.

Criminal and Civil Law Implications

The inappropriate use of Social Media can result in an employee being subject to disciplinary action, being criminally prosecuted or being sued civilly in Court. Examples of actions and related legal actions include, but are not limited to:

- Making inappropriate online comments that lead to civil actions, such as defamation.
- Disclosing confidential information about the school, students, parents/guardians and fellow Board employees, thus breaching the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the School Board's privacy policies and provisions of the *Education Act*.
- Posting the work of others without proper attribution, that can lead to a civil action for copyright-violation.
- Breaching a court-ordered publication ban and being subject to a contempt of court prosecution under the *Criminal Code*.
- Inciting hatred against an identifiable group and being subject to *Criminal Code* prosecution.
- Disclosing information about a minor, contrary to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*.
- Using technology to harass a student, parent/guardian, fellow Board employee or others, contrary to the *Criminal Code*.
- Using a computer to lure a child for juvenile prostitution contrary to the *Criminal Code*.
- Exchanging or forwarding compromising photos, videos or audio recordings of students leading the charges of possession or distribution of child pornography.

It is important to note that electronic communication and Social Media can also be used as evidence in criminal and civil proceedings.

Disciplinary Implications

Some behaviours that may warrant disciplinary measures, up to and including discharge from employment, include but are not limited to:

- Any of the conduct described above which has criminal or civil law implications.
- Inappropriate or unprofessional electronic communication or posting with or about students, fellow Board employees, parents/guardians and others.
- Sending graphic sexual materials electronically to students, parents/guardians, fellow Board employees, or other members of the school community.

- Using school or Board equipment to access, view or download pornography, including child pornography.
- Luring students and non-students via the internet, as defined by the *Criminal Code*.
- Engaging in communication or posting which may harm the reputation, standing or public image of the Board, its employees or the educational services which it provides.

Important Questions to Ask Yourself:

- When interacting with students electronically am I using Social Media to enhance student learning or to satisfy a personal need?
- What are my reasons for sharing this information with a student – are they professional or are they personal?
- Is this picture or comment something I would be comfortable with students, their parents/guardians, my supervisor, my family or the media seeing?
- Would my peers or supervisors consider what I have posted as reasonable and professional?
- Would I communicate this way in my community?
- Are the videos, photos or audio recordings I am posting susceptible to misrepresentation or manipulation?
- Am I keeping current in my awareness and knowledge of Social Media?