

SOCIAL NETWORKING POLICY FOR SCHOOL EMPLOYEES

The growing use of social networking on the Internet has blurred the lines between personal and professional conduct. School employees must understand that certain expectations of professional conduct extend into areas of their personal lives. One such area is that of social networking. All school district employees must take great care in any online interactions with students to maintain professional standards of conduct.

The use of social networking sites on the Internet can be a valuable educational tool, but the use of such sites can also have a detrimental impact on the school district as well as the families, students and employees of the district if guidelines and protocols are not established, followed and enforced regarding social networking use. The very nature of the Internet and social networking sites are that they are ever changing. These guidelines are intended to provide direction to school employees if they choose to use social networking sites. Another goal of this policy is to help school employees avoid any unintended situations that could result in discipline or adversely affect their professional standing with the school district, up to and including termination of employment. These guidelines are not intended to restrict the use of social networking sites by school employees in their personal capacity, but rather they are intended to educate school employees as to code of conduct expected of them in regards to the use of social networking sites and to inform them of the potential consequences for the violation of such guidelines.

For the purpose of this policy, the term “social networking” or its variants, means a website that allows users to do any of the following: share content, interact, chat, post materials or develop a network of “friends”, “followers” or “contacts.” Some well known examples of social networking sites are Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Youtube, LinkedIn, Flickr, Friendster, MyLife, Blogster, Bebo and Xanga. For the purpose of this policy, personal web pages, blogs, and Internet dating sites are also considered social networking sites.

Guidelines and Consequences for Social Networking Use by School Employees.

1. All school employees shall respect the privacy and confidentiality rights of the students, their families, and other employees of the school district. School employees shall not post information on social networking sites that personally identifies members of the school community or infringes on their privacy or confidentiality rights without the consent or permission of said persons. Examples of personally identifiable information may include names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, photos, and videos.
2. School employees are not prohibited from adding a student as a “friend”, “follower” or contact to their own personal social networking sites. However, such a practice is discouraged and school employees must use extreme caution

and sound judgment when adding a student as a “friend”, “follower” or contact to their own social networking sites. School employees must be mindful of exercising appropriate boundaries with said students and must at all times act in a professional manner.

3. School employees must not use their personal social networking sites to post information in an attempt to communicate with students in their role as a school district employee and must not hold themselves out to the student or represent themselves in the capacity of a school district employee. The exception to this rule is for educational based social networking sites that have been approved by a supervisor, as noted at #11 below.
4. Be mindful that if you have a social networking site, it may be accessible to the public, your superiors, school board members, students, your co-workers and parents of students, despite your privacy control settings. It is strongly recommended that professional behavior and good taste be exhibited at all times on any social networking site.
5. School employees with a social networking site shall not post content that is defamatory, offensive, pornographic, obscene or which can damage the school’s reputation, or the reputation its employees, students and their families to their social networking sites.
6. Predatory behavior or communications of a sexual nature on social networking sites directed towards, or about, students will subject the employee to discipline up to and/or including termination of employment and potentially criminal charges. If said behavior is not directed towards, or about, a student it may still subject an employee to discipline up to and/or including termination if said content substantially disrupts the educational environment.
7. School employees are strongly encouraged to carefully review the privacy settings on their social networking sites and must recognize that material on these sites always has the potential of being shared with persons outside of your friend network without your knowledge or consent.
8. The content of a school employee’s personal social networking site must still conform with the school’s policies and the law. Employees shall not use social networking sites for the purpose of pornography, stalking, cyber bullying, harassment, discrimination or to engage in any other conduct that is unbecoming of a staff member.
9. School employees are to report any false profiles to the social networking site’s administrator and to school administration. An example of this is if somebody creates a social networking site portraying said site to be your site. School employees are encouraged to report to administration if a person has

posted false or defamatory statements about you in your capacity as a school employee.

10. People are not always who they hold themselves out to be online. Use caution when adding “friends”, “followers” or contacts to your social networking site and recognize that the information portrayed on other people’s sites may be inaccurate (i.e. age).
11. School employees must not use their own personal social networking sites during school hours. However, a school employee may create and use an educational based social networking site to serve an educational purpose that may be used during school hours with the approval of a supervisor.
12. Be mindful that your out of school conduct, such as the use of social networking sites, can carry over to your role as a staff member and can affect your credibility and undermine your effectiveness as a school employee.
13. School employees shall not use school symbols, logos, mascots or other depictions readily identifiable with the school district on their personal social networking sites.
14. If a school employee’s use of a social networking site violates school policies the school district may request that the employee cease such activity and may subject the school employee to discipline, up to and including termination.
15. If a school employees out of school conduct, such as the use of a social networking site, causes a substantial disruption to the education environment or is otherwise deemed to be inappropriate or in violation of school policy, said employee may be subject to discipline which may include termination of employment.
16. The school district reserves the right to bring criminal charges and/or a civil lawsuit against a school employee that violates the law or this social networking policy for any damages suffered by the school district.
17. If a school employee does access a social network in violation of this policy on a school computer and contracts a virus or otherwise damages the school’s computer system, the employee will be held responsible for the damages caused by such use, or the costs to repair such.
18. Content from social networking sites may be used against a school employee in any disciplinary proceedings, including termination proceedings.

Board Adopted: November 8, 2010

Revised: