

GUIDELINES FOR ENGAGING IN ONLINE SOCIAL MEDIA

Definitions

Personal Online Social Media Sites - Any web-based content that includes personal items (photos, videos, opinions, other) intended for personal enjoyment and that are not intended to support the work and/or professional responsibilities of a school district employee.

Professional/Official Online Social Media Sites¹ - Any web-based content that includes information that supports the work and/or professional responsibilities of a school district employee. The information should be aligned with supporting the spirit of promoting the education values and mission of the district.



Develop personal and professional boundaries for “friends” when using online media.

Familiarize yourself with your profile’s security and privacy settings and review them regularly. Depending on how your settings are established, you could be opening your content to everyone, including people you do not know. Your privacy and that of your family is at risk.

Remember that people classified as “friends” on Facebook and similar social networking sites may have the ability to download and share your information with others. Information temporarily posted about you can be maintained permanently by someone else. Pictures and content from your secured site are easily captured and shared with others.

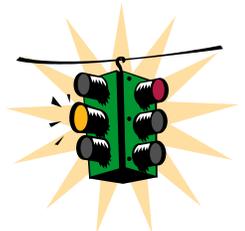
Exercise caution when choosing to be “friends” with students of District 196 or their parents on your personal online social media site. Educational employees have a responsibility to maintain appropriate employee-student relationships, whether on or off duty. In general, if your connection is due to your role as an employee of the district (rather than as a relative or family friend) it is recommended that you maintain a professional relationship and decline the online “friendship” on your personal site. It is recommended that you limit such friendships to professional online social media sites that are kept separate from your personal sites (e.g., Mr. Doe’s World History Facebook page, not John Doe’s personal Facebook page).

If you are uncertain of the language to use when declining the “friend” request of a student or parent, consider the following suggestion for a response:

Thank you for your friend request. I have a routine practice of only sharing information with students or parents through my professional email and web resources. If you feel your request is directly related to my professional responsibilities, feel free to use my school email or professional web resources to contact me.

Safety comes first

If you learn of information on a social networking site that suggests a student is being abused or neglected, you may have a duty to report as a mandated reporter.² When in doubt, talk with your supervisor if you become aware of information on a social networking site that suggests a student may be in harm’s way, whether due to their own actions or the actions of another. The same care and consideration you show for students in a school setting should be shown online.



¹ Official websites are operated pursuant to 407.8AR, Section 5, *Employee Use of Online Social Media*, and are considered District websites subject to 711AR, *Standards and Guidelines for District Websites*. Employees may also elect to create or participate in their own professional websites, which are purely voluntary and for which the District is not responsible for administering.

² See, District Regulation 506.4AR, *Reporting Suspected Maltreatment of a Minor*

Don't share private data

Most information on students (and their parents) is classified as private data under state and federal law and cannot be released without written permission.³ Furthermore, personal online social media sites are not appropriate resources to conduct school business with students or parents. Employees should also use caution before posting pictures or information about colleagues.



Remember copyright requirements



If you are responsible for an official school or district online social media site, you must respect copyright requirements. If you are including content on the site that is not your own, copyright laws and policy apply.⁴ A hyperlink to outside sources is appropriate, provided that the linked content is appropriate and adheres to district policy. Be sensitive about links, as it may imply an endorsement of the linked content.

Use professional judgment and etiquette

Only post content that you would be comfortable sharing with the entire community. Imagine that your students, their parents, or your supervisor may visit your site. Consider whether your content would support your personal values and the values of the school district if shared on the front page of a newspaper. In general, if you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, this may be a good indicator to refrain from posting.



Perception can become reality. In online networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional can be ambiguous. Your postings may create unintended perceptions about yourself and the district. Are your postings honest, fair, and appropriate? Are they expressed respectfully and in good taste? Remember that district employees are held to a higher standard of conduct than the general public. The district can't list all the ways conduct can fall short of that standard, but it believes in its staff to act appropriately and use common sense.

Remain objective when confronted with a difference of opinion in an online discussion. Engaging in online debates can be challenging because the face-to-face human interaction is not present. People are sometimes more likely to write something questionable because they do not have to feel or see the emotion it has created for the person receiving the content.

Don't allow your online activities to interfere with your work duties. Remember that district technologies are provided for business use. Personal use of online social media during district time or on district equipment should not occur except as permitted by the district's acceptable use policy.⁵

³ See, District Regulation 505.2AR, *Protecting and Privacy of Student Records*

⁴ See, District Regulation 407.6AR, *Copyright*

⁵ See, District Regulation 407.7AR, *Acceptable Use of Information Technology - Employees*

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT 196
Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Public Schools
Educating our students to reach their full potential

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Title Employee Use of Online Social Media

1. **Scope of Regulation** - District 196 recognizes the value and increasing role of online social media. The purpose of this regulation is to address the use of social media in the classroom and also to provide guidance to employees on the maintenance of professional ethics and boundaries when utilizing social media in their personal and professional lives.
2. **Definitions**
 - 2.1 *Public online social media* are defined to include: Websites, Web logs (blogs), wikis, social networks, online forums, virtual worlds, and any other interactive social media generally available to the public on the Internet (e.g., MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube, blog sites, etc.).
 - 2.2 *District-approved, password-protected online social media* are interactive media within the District's electronic technologies network or which the District has approved for educational use (e.g., authenticated interactive portions of MOODLE). The District has greater authority and responsibility to protect minors from inappropriate content and can limit public access within this forum.
3. **Classroom Use of Online Social Media** - Teachers may elect to utilize District-approved, password protected online social media in the classroom for purposes of instruction. Teachers may also elect to use public online social media in the classroom for purposes of instruction. Use of online social media in the classroom is subject to the following:
 - 3.1 When using either type of online social media in the classroom, teachers shall instruct students on the appropriate use of such sites as described in 503.7.1P, *Permission for Independent Student Access to the Internet*. Each site must ensure that a signed 503.7.1P, *Permission for Independent Student Access to the Internet*, is on file for each student using the Internet in the classroom.
 - 3.2 Teachers must ensure that private student data and work is not made public on public online social media sites unless permission for publication of student work or data on the Internet is obtained using 503.7.1.3P, *Permission for Student Work or Identifying Data to be Published on the Internet*.

- 3.3 When utilizing either type of online social media in the classroom, teachers shall ensure compliance with any applicable terms of use of the online social media site.
4. **Personal Use of Public Online Social Media By Employees** - The decision to make personal use of public online social media is left to the discretion of each employee. District 196 does not affirmatively monitor employee use of public online social media; however, it may take appropriate responsive action when it becomes aware of, or suspects, conduct or communication on a public online social media site that adversely affects the workplace or violates applicable professional codes of ethics.

Employees will be held responsible for their disclosure, whether purposeful or inadvertent, of confidential or private information, information that violates the privacy rights or other rights of a third party, or for the content of anything communicated by the employee on any online social media site. An employee who fails to comply with the guidance set forth in this regulation may be subject to disciplinary and other consequences, up to and including termination, subject to applicable collective bargaining agreements. For that reason, employees shall observe the following when using public online social media:

- 4.1 Employees must consider their role as school personnel before posting or communicating content that is obscene, profane, vulgar, 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 or sexual harassment.
- 4.2 Views expressed on a public online social media site are the employee's alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the District. Employees may not 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.
- 4.3 Employees may not disclose information on any public online social media site that is private, confidential or proprietary to the District, its students, or employees or that is protected by data privacy laws or District Regulation 505.2AR, Protection and Privacy of Student Records.
- 4.4 Employees may not use or post a District or school logo on any public online social media site without permission from the Superintendent, the school principal, or designee.
- 4.5 The District recognizes that student groups or members of the public may create public online social media representing students or groups within the District. When employees, including coaches/advisors, choose to join or engage with these social networking groups, they do so as an employee of the District.

- 4.6 Employees have responsibility for maintaining appropriate employee-student relationships at all times. This includes using professional judgment when necessary for the safety of students online and responding appropriately as a mandated reporter when applicable.
5. **Official School or District Public Online Social Media Sites** - The School District and individual schools and departments may choose to establish an official presence on public online social media sites with prior administrative approval. When such a presence is established, an employee shall be designated as the website manager and log-in credentials must be shared with the website manager's supervisor and the School District's Coordinator of Technology. The website manager is responsible for keeping the website updated and monitoring the content on the website.

Sites may be linked from the School District or school's official District 196 homepage and must otherwise comply with applicable provisions in Administrative Regulation 711AR, Standards and Guidelines for District Websites. The website manager is responsible for ensuring compliance with applicable records retention requirements.

References

- Minnesota Administrative Rule 8700.7500, Code of Ethics For Minnesota Teachers
- Minnesota Administrative Rule 3512.5200, Code of Ethics for School Administrators
- Public Law 106-554, Title XVII, Children's Internet Protection Act
- District Administrative Regulation 407.7AR, Acceptable Use of Information Technology – Employees
- District Administrative Regulation 503.7AR, Acceptable Use of Information Technology – Students
- District Policy 711, Standards and Guidelines for District Websites
- District Administrative Regulation 711AR, Standards and Guidelines for District Websites
- District Administrative Regulation 505.2AR, Protection and Privacy of Student Records