

SOCIAL MEDIA – Employee Use

Edmond 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.

The 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 a social media context that exists outside those approved by the district, 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 required by policy, state and federal laws. Consequences for misuse of social media are addressed in EPS school board policy #5720 (Access to and Responsible Use of Technology Resources and Information Databases) and the Collective Bargaining Agreement.

1. Definitions

A. 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, Flickr, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Google apps, Skype, Wikis, social networks, podcasts, forums, blogs, and other content sharing sites.

B. District approved password-protected social media tools are those that fall within the district's electronic technologies network or which the district has approved for educational use.

2. Employee Use of Social Media:

District's 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:

A. 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.

B. 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.

C. 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.

D. EPS 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 is prohibited. (Refer to Policy 5720)

E. Externally communicating any confidential or privileged information related to Edmond Public Schools, its employees or students not intended for public dissemination is prohibited and may be grounds for disciplinary action. EPS employees may not disclose information on any social media network that is confidential or proprietary to the district, its students, or employees or that is protected by data privacy laws such as FERPA. Posting images on any social media network of co-workers without the co-worker's consent is prohibited. Information or images of students may NOT be posted on any social media network without written parental consent. (Refer to Policy 5720)

F. 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. EPS employees must make clear that any views expressed are the employee's alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the district. District-supported social media may not make reference to any political candidates or issues of a political nature.

G. At the beginning of each year, a list of site social media platforms, managed by school administration, will be sent to the Director of Public Information Officer. The list will include the social media platform and the names of persons with passwords and content responsibilities.

H. 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.

I. The district 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.

J. Edmond Public Schools' 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. Employees are strongly encouraged to set and maintain social networking privacy settings at the most restrictive level.

3. Employee Personal Use of Social Media

A. Edmond Schools is supportive of an employee's personal rights to freedom of speech, expression and association, including the use of electronic devices and social networks.

B. 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.

4. Consequences for Social Media Policy Violations:

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 the collective bargaining agreements and state and federal laws, considering the type of violation, past history, and level of the user. Disciplinary action may include a letter of counsel, reprimand, plan-of-improvement, or a recommendation for dismissal or non-reemployment.