

Adopted: July 12, 2010

430 EMPLOYEE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

I. PURPOSE

As a leader in using technology as an accelerator of learning, the Sleepy Eye Public School District recognizes the value of teacher inquiry, investigation, and innovation using new technology tools to enhance the learning experience. The District also recognizes its obligation to teach and ensure responsible and safe use of these technologies.

This policy addresses employees' use of publicly available social media networks including: personal web sites, web logs (blogs), wikis, social networks, online forums, virtual worlds, and any other social media. The District takes no position on employees' decision to participate in the use of social media networks for personal use on personal time. However, use of these media for personal use during District time or on District equipment is prohibited. In addition, employees must avoid posting any information or engaging in communications that violate state or federal laws or District policies.

II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

The District recognizes the importance of online social media networks as a communication and e-learning tool. Toward that end, the District provides password protected social media tools and District-approved technologies for e-learning and encourages use of District tools for collaboration by employees. However, public social media networks, outside of those sponsored by the District, may not be used for classroom instruction or school-sponsored activities without the prior authorization of the Superintendent, or designee, and parental consent for student participation on social networks. The District may use these tools and other communication technologies in fulfilling its responsibility for effectively communicating with the general public.

However, employees must avoid posting any information or engaging in communications that violate state or federal laws or District policies.

The line between professional and personal relationships is blurred within a social media context. When employees choose to join or engage with District 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 have responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks, including requirements for mandated reporting.

III. DEFINITIONS

- A. Public social media networks are defined to include: web sites, web logs (blogs), wikis, social networks, online forums, virtual worlds, and any other social media generally available to the public or consumers and which do not fall within the District's electronic technologies network (e.g. My Space, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, YouTube, blog sites, etc.).

- 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. The District has greater authority and responsibility to protect minors from inappropriate content and can limit public access within this limited public forum.

IV. REQUIREMENTS

All employees are expected to serve as positive ambassadors for our schools and to remember they are role models to students in this community. Because readers of social media networks may view the employee as a representative of the schools and the District, the District requires employees to observe the following rules when referring to the District, its schools, students, programs, activities, employees, volunteers and communities on any social media networks:

- A. An employee's use of any social media network 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.

Employees must be respectful and professional 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.

Employees should not use their District e-mail address for communications on public social media networks that have not been approved by the District.

Employees must make clear that any views expressed 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.

When authorized as a spokesperson for the District, employees must disclose their employment relationship with the District.

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.

Employees may not use or post the District logo (defined as the GSL panther logo) on any social media network without permission from the Superintendent, or designee.

1. Employees may not post images on any social media network of coworkers without the coworkers' consent.
2. Employees may not post images of students on any social media network without written parental consent, except for images of students taken in the public arena, such as at sporting events or fine arts public performances.

3. Employees may not post any nonpublic images of the District premises and property, including floor plans.
- B. The District recognizes that student groups or members of the public may create 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. Employees have responsibility for maintaining appropriate employee-student relationships at all times and have responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks. This includes acting to protect the safety of minors online. Employees shall annually disclose to the District the existence of and their participation in such networks.
- C. Employees who participate in social media networks may decide to include information about their work with the District as part of their personal profile, as it would relate to a typical social conversation. This may include:
1. Work information included in a personal profile, to include District name, job title, and job duties.
 2. Status updates regarding an employee's own job promotion.
 3. Personal participation in District-sponsored events, including volunteer activities.
- D. An employee who is responsible for a social media network posting that fails to comply with the rules and guidelines set forth in this policy may be subject to discipline, up to and including termination. Employees will be held responsible for the disclosure, whether purposeful or inadvertent, of confidential or private information, information that violates the privacy rights or other rights of a third party, or the content of anything posted on any social media network.
- E. Anything posted on an employee's web site or web log or other Internet content for which the employee is responsible will be subject to all District policies, rules, regulations, and guidelines. The District is free to view and monitor an employee's web site or web log at any time without consent or previous approval. Where applicable, employees may be asked to disclose to the District the existence of and to provide the District with access to an employee's web site or web log or other personal social media network as part of an employment selection, promotion, or disciplinary process.

GUIDELINES FOR POLICY #430: SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

These are the guidelines for social media in the Sleepy Eye Public School District. If you're an employee contributing to blogs, wikis, social networks, virtual worlds, or any other kind of social media – both on and off the District network – these guidelines are for you. We expect all who participate in social media to understand and follow these guidelines. Failure to do so could put you at risk. These guidelines will continually evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge so check back once in a while to make sure you're up to date.

It's your responsibility. What you write is ultimately your responsibility. If it seems inappropriate, use caution. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit “send.” Take time to review these guidelines and try to figure out what's bothering you and fix it. If you're still unsure, you might want to discuss it with your supervisor. Ultimately, what you publish is your responsibility. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully. Trademark, copyright, and fair use requirements must be respected.

Ensure the safety of students. When employees, especially coaches/advisors, choose to join or engage with these social networking groups, they do so as an employee of the District and have responsibility for monitoring content and addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks. This includes acting to protect the safety of minors online. Employees shall annually disclose to their supervisor the existence and participation in such networks.

Be transparent. Your honesty – or dishonesty – will be quickly noticed in the social media environment. If you are posting about your work, use your real name and identify your employment relationship with the District. Be clear about your role; if you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. If you publish to a site outside the District's network, please use a disclaimer to state in clear terms that the views expressed are the employee's alone and that they do not necessarily reflect the views of the Sleepy Eye Public School District.

Protect confidential information. Be thoughtful about what you publish. You must make sure you do not disclose or use confidential information. Students, parents, and colleagues should not be cited or obviously referenced without their approval. For example, ask permission before posting someone's picture in a social network (student photos require parental consent) or publishing a conversation that was meant to be private.

It is acceptable to discuss general details about projects, lessons, or events and to use no identifying pseudonyms for an individual (e.g., Teacher A) so long as the information provided does not make it easy for someone to identify the individual or violate any privacy laws. Furthermore, public social networking sites are not the place to conduct school business with students or parents.

Respect your audience and your coworkers. Always express ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. Make sure your communications are in good taste. Do not denigrate or insult others, including other schools or competitors. Remember that our communities reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Be respectful. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory. Be sensitive about linking to content. Redirecting to another site may imply an endorsement of its content.

Perception can be reality. In online networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as a District employee, you are creating perceptions about your expertise and about the District by community members, parents, students, and the general public; and you

are creating perceptions about yourself with your colleagues and managers. If you choose to join or engage with District students and families in a social media context, do so in a professional manner, ever mindful that in the minds of students, families, colleagues and the public, you are a District employee. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with the District's beliefs and professional standards.

Are you adding value? There are millions of words out there. The best way to get yours read is to write things that people will value. Communication associated with our District should help fellow educators, parents, students, and coworkers. It should be thought-provoking and build a sense of community. If it helps people improve knowledge or skills, do their jobs, solve problems, or understand education better – then it's adding value.

Keep your cool. One of the aims of social media is to create dialogue, and people will not always agree on an issue. When confronted with a difference of opinion, stay cool. If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. Express your points in a clear, logical way. Don't pick fights, and correct mistakes when needed. Sometimes, it's best to ignore a comment and not give it credibility by acknowledging it with a response.

Be careful with personal information. Make full use of privacy settings. Know how to disable anonymous postings and use moderating tools on your social media site(s). Astute criminals can piece together information you provide on different sites and then use it to impersonate you or someone you know, or even reset your passwords.

Be a positive role model. The line between professional and personal relationships is blurred within a social media context. Educational employees have a responsibility to maintain appropriate employee-student relationships, whether on or off duty. Both case law and public expectations hold educational employees to a higher standard of conduct than the general public.

Don't forget your day job. You should make sure that your online activities do not interfere with your job. Remember that District technologies are provided for educational use. Use of social media for personal use during District time or on District equipment is prohibited.