

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social networking media can be a powerful tool for education, research, and communication. Many of us now share "virtual" spaces that did not exist a few years ago. In order for our school district learning community to benefit from myriad opportunities that social media offers for working together productively in and beyond the classroom, it is important to establish a clear policy. Social networking tools offer the potential of vast, diverse, and unique resources to both students and staff. Our goal in providing these resources to staff and students is to promote educational excellence in schools by facilitating resource sharing, innovation, and communication.

Social networking tools shall be made available to students and staff for the express purpose of supporting the educational program, to conduct research for that purpose, and to communicate with others for educational purposes. Use of district Internet network accounts shall be for class assignments or research for school-related activities or courses. Access to social networking tools is not to be used for private business or personal, non-work-related communications.

All users of social networking media in school must acknowledge their understanding and acceptance of this policy as a condition of using it. Access to social media network is a privilege and not a right and the privilege of access entails responsibility.

Students will not be permitted access to social media tools unless they have attended a session in which they are presented with the rules and responsibilities for the use of social networking that are aligned with the Code of Conduct.

Teachers will explain appropriate standards for use of social networking tools to students and will inform students that if they misuse any social networking, they may lose their use privileges and be subject to disciplinary action as prescribed in the School District's Code of Conduct.

Use of social networking shall be governed by all Board policies as well all federal and state laws and regulations including, but not limited to, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), New York State Education Law Section 2-d, as well intellectual property, copyright and fair use statutes. District employees and officers with access to personally identifiable student information shall be provided with data privacy and security training on an annual basis in accordance with applicable law.

Use of Social Networking Sites

South Orangetown Central School District respects the right of employees to use social media and networking sites, as well as personal websites and blogs, but it is important that employees' personal use of these sites does not negatively reflect upon the District's reputation, its employees, or its students or their families. Employees should

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exercise care in setting appropriate boundaries between their personal and public online behavior, understanding that what is private in the digital world often has the possibility of becoming public, even without their knowledge or consent. The District strongly encourages all employees to carefully review the privacy settings on any social media and networking sites they use and exercise care and good judgment when posting content and information on such sites. -District employees, particularly certificated faculty members, are role models to the District's students. To that end, District employees must be mindful of the nature and content of their social media communications, even when using their own private accounts. To the extent that a private communication creates a public perception of incompetence concerning a District employee, then such communications could give rise to disciplinary consequences pursuant to applicable law.

When using a social media site, an employee may not include current students as "friends," "followers," or any other similar terminology used by various sites. If an employee maintains or participates in a South Orangetown sponsored online community that extends to persons who are parents, alums, or other constituents, they must exercise good judgment about any content that is shared on the site. Additionally, employees should adhere to the following guidelines, which are consistent with the District's policies regarding harassment, student relationships, conduct, professional communication, and confidentiality:

- An employee should not make statements that would violate any of the District's policies, including its policies concerning discrimination or harassment;
- The employee must uphold the District's value of respect for the individual and avoid making defamatory statements about the District, its employees, its students, or their families;
- An employee may not disclose any confidential information of the District or confidential information obtained during the course of his/her employment, about any individuals or organizations, including students and/or their families.

If the District believes that an employee's activity on a social networking site, blog, or personal website may violate the District's policies, the District may request that the employee cease such activity. Depending on the severity of the incident, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action.

Class Use

Use of social media tools can provide opportunities for students to develop their communication and collaboration skills and to share their knowledge, questions or opinions in a clear, meaningful manner. In addition, these tools can provide opportunities for teachers to give the relevant and timely feedback that may help students develop a better understanding of their own learning needs and what they may have to do next.

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When using a social media tool with students, the tool should be available on a network created by the teacher, or on one that allows for direct oversight by the teacher and is available for use by all students.

Use of Social Network Media

When using social network media with a particular class, or group of students or parents, the page should be set up as a "group" page.

When using social network media as a communication tool with the masses, the page should be set up as a "fan" page.

The personal security for the individual establishing the page should be set so students cannot view personal information about the employee. For example: set all security "for friends only."

When building a page you must identify the page in the page description area as a classroom or organization in the South Orangetown Central School District.

The creator of the page is responsible for monitoring content on the page and deleting any posts that violate the rules of engagement.

Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, this policy must be followed. If you currently have a page established for work purposes, please be sure it complies with this policy. Failure to follow this policy may result in removal of the page as well as consideration of disciplinary proceedings.

[Ref: Matter of Jerry, 50 A.D.2d 149 \(1975\)](#)

Cross Ref.: Policy 1130, Media Relations and Communications

Date of Adoption: February 21, 2013

[Policy Revised & Readopted:](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA

GUIDANCE FOR STAFF

Social media offers a powerful means for communicating and engaging with parents, students, staff, colleagues, members of our community--and beyond. As SOCSO employees, modeling good digital citizenship is important and may prevent mishaps or misunderstandings that could affect you personally and/or professionally.

Social media are online technologies and platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn and YouTube, which enable users to share information, perspectives and experiences with each other. This guidance solely addresses social media use by staff in a non-instructional capacity, such as communicating with parents, colleagues and the general public, to showcase teaching and learning in their classrooms. Please note that this document is meant to provide general guidance and does not cover every potential social media situation.

Guiding Principles

The values, professionalism, and confidentiality that employees are expected to practice in their daily work lives also apply online. The South Orangetown Central School District's expectations for employee use of social media are based on the three principles below.

1) Protect our students.

The safety and well-being of SOCSO students is our primary concern. SOCSO has the same obligation to protect student privacy online as it does offline. Federal law permits the disclosure of "directory information" from a student's record without the parent's prior written consent, unless the parent has opted out of such disclosure. Directory information includes, but is not limited to, the student's name, school name, photos and awards.

- You are responsible for ensuring that every student pictured in any photo you post on your professional social media account has photo permission, including district-based BOCES students. If a parent has submitted a signed Opt-Out Form (as documented in their child's PowerSchool record), you may not disclose their student's directory information on social media.
- A student who does not wish to be included in a photograph or video for any reason--even if there is no Opt-Out Form on file--must be respected and permitted to opt out.
- You are responsible for avoiding the inadvertent disclosure of any personal information which the student or parent may wish to keep private. Examples may include: identifying a student as receiving special education or counseling services, eligibility for free or reduced-price meals, membership or affiliation with clubs/enrichment programs, such as GSA.
- Review all photos carefully to ensure that images of students are appropriate--and look carefully at students pictured in the background, as well. Make sure that there is no

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identifying information on students' work, work area or clothing that is captured in the photo.

- Never share information about students online that would not be appropriate to share in a classroom, school or public community setting.

2) Be professional.

Maintaining professional boundaries is the best way to avoid the potential pitfalls of social media.

- Personal social media account(s) should be kept separate from your professional account(s). Employees may not post photos of SOCSD students on their personal social media accounts.
- Staff must maintain a professional relationship with students at all times. Private, one-on-one online or electronic communications with individual students that are unrelated to school activities and/or any conduct that violates the law is inappropriate and prohibited, and may be grounds for discipline up to, and including, dismissal.
- [Board Policy 8636 \(Social Media\)](#) prohibits SOCSD staff members from following or “friending” current district students on social media. Retweeting, liking, favoriting, tagging, or engaging with student posts in other ways violates Board Policy.
- Keep your actions and tone professional. Don't engage in negative or critical conversations, particularly those that involve students. If you receive negative or critical comments, politely offer to move the conversation to email. Whatever you do, be respectful.
- Protect the privacy of SOCSD students at all times. Never disclose personal information regarding a student or speculate on an issue pertaining to a student on social media.
- Respect the personal privacy of colleagues and their families by not sharing their personal information on social media.

3) Use common sense.

Everything you say or share on social platforms is part of your digital footprint. Once published, content may be photographed and shared without your consent (or knowledge) long after you delete the original post.

- As an SOCSD employee, your posts—whether personal or professional—reflect not only upon you, but also upon our School District. The content of your posts should not impair your capacity to maintain the respect of students and parents or your ability to effectively perform your job. Any action that brings the School District into disrepute may be subject to disciplinary action.
- Posting content related to alcohol, tobacco, vaping and/or illegal substances is not permitted on SOCSD-related social media accounts other than for approved safety and wellness education purposes. Other prohibited content includes obscene, defamatory, discriminatory, harassing, violent, vulgar, or sexual material, or material that advocates the commission of a criminal act, violates SOCSD policy, or that reasonably may lead to substantial disruption of or material interference with School District operations.

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- Think twice before posting the previously-mentioned content on your private social media accounts, as well--they still reflect upon your role as an SOCSO employee. Establishing appropriate privacy settings to limit access to personal information on your social media account(s) is wise, but it's no guarantee that content you post won't be photographed and shared. One screenshot that captures a momentary lapse in judgment can reach thousands of people in minutes.
- The Superintendent of Schools is the only official spokesperson for the School District and official SOCSO Facebook and Twitter accounts are the only authorized social media channels for School District communications. Don't make statements on social media that could be construed as you representing SOCSO in an official capacity.

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 they post on any social media platform. This guidance is intended to supplement, not supersede, existing law, and SOCSO policies and regulations. All existing laws, and SOCSO policies and regulations that cover employee conduct may be applicable in the social media environment. Supervisors should consult with Staff Relations before taking employment action on the basis of personal speech. While personal speech of employees related to matters of public concern (subject to reasonable place, time and location restrictions) is protected pursuant to the First Amendment, speech that is lewd, obscene, vulgar, or plainly offensive as a matter of law (including profane language and/or gestures) is not protected speech and could give rise to disciplinary consequences.

Relevant Policies:

[Policy 4526 Computer Use In Instruction](#)

[Policy 5695 Students and Personal Electronic Devices](#)

[Policy 6470 Staff Use of Computerized Info Resources](#)

[Policy 6471 Website Publishing](#)

[Policy 8630 Computer Resources Data Management](#)

[Policy 8635 Information Security Breach and Notification](#)

[Policy 8636 \(Social Media\)](#)

Refs:

Garcetti v. Ceballos, 547 U.S. 410 (2006)

Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School Dist., [393 U.S. 503](#) (1969)

Bethel School District No. 403 v. Fraser, 478 U.S. 675 (1986)

[Policy Adopted: June 17, 2010](#)

[Revised & Readopted: October 18, 2012](#)

[Revised & Readopted:](#)