

Social Media and Electronic Communications for Staff

Administrative Procedure

Status:	Active
Effective:	September 2000
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Responsibility:	Superintendent of Human Resources Superintendent of Information Services

INTENDED PURPOSE:

For the purposes of this procedure, *social media and electronic communication* refers to online technology tools that enable people and organizations to communicate and share information and resources over the Internet (e.g. blogs, social media platforms, email, texting, YouTube, etc.).

The Halton District School Board recognizes staff have personal social media accounts and may also be responsible for school board social media accounts. The HDSB also recognizes that the use of social media is optional and that staff members are using social media to support their instructional practice, develop professional learning networks and enhance administrative capabilities.

While there is a distinction between professional and personal life, it is essential to exercise good judgement at all times, including when using social media and sharing content online. The Halton District School Board expects its employees to maintain a sense of professionalism at all times.

This procedure is intended to provide direction and guidance as to the appropriate use of social media in alignment with Halton District School Board policies and procedures related to the use of technology.

The *Ontario College of Teachers Act* confers heightened responsibilities to Teachers. Members (of the Ontario College of Teachers) should maintain a sense of

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professionalism at all times – in their personal and professional lives.

PROCEDURES:

1. Authorization

- Although permission is not required for staff to open a professional social media account, those staff creating the account are responsible for its use. It is recommended the employee let their supervisor know a professional social media account has been created.
- School or department based accounts require the approval of the Principal or Manager and in those cases the Principal or Manager is responsible for its use. Example: School social media feed.
- Other school based accounts (e.g. classroom, student accounts created under the direction of the teacher, school clubs, etc.) require approval of the Principal.
- Corporate accounts: Any corporate account (e.g. department or central initiative) requires the approval of the Superintendent with that portfolio and General Manager of Communications & Engagement.

2. Personal vs. professional

- Every time staff communicate, they shape public opinion about themselves, their profession, their school, the Halton District School Board and public education, regardless of any disclaimers stating otherwise. Staff should use sound judgment and due care when using social media while on and off duty.

Best Practices:

- Maintain a sense of professionalism and awareness at all times. Maintaining professional boundaries on social media is critical to sustaining public trust and

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ensuring relationships with students, staff and others remain professional.

- Maintain a clear distinction between personal and professional social media use.
- Do not follow students on their personal social media accounts.
- Do not post images or content promoting alcohol, drug or tobacco use, use of images that perpetuate stereotypes, images that promote discrimination as defined by the *Ontario Human Rights Code*, against an identifiable community, or explicit content on HDSB , classroom, department and professional accounts.
- Do not use professional accounts to promote or critique political parties, religion or policies.
- If you have a personal social media account that students become aware of, refer them back to the educational account.
- Review privacy settings to block student access to personal social media.
- Be mindful that “likes” or “reshares” can be seen as endorsements of content.

3. Professional boundaries with students

Maintaining professional boundaries on social media is critical to sustaining public trust and ensuring relationships with students remain professional.

- All online dialogue and interactions, messages and texts must be for educational or professional purposes only.
- Only the person or department/school that is responsible for responding on behalf of the school board should do so.
- Be mindful of all HDSB equity and inclusivity-related board policies and the Ontario Human Rights Code when posting content.
- What is inappropriate in the classroom, school, office or community setting is also inappropriate on social media.

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- If you have a classroom account where you share important curricular information with students, students may *follow* your account. For the purposes of learning, you do not need to *follow* them back. Instead, you can encourage students to use tools, like hashtags, so that you can follow their online conversations. These can be linked to a specific area of study.
- Text messaging with individual students using cell phones is discouraged. In some instances, where this must occur, text messaging must be supervisor approved and for educational/well-being purposes only.

4. Privacy and Confidentiality

Breaches of privacy and confidentiality can occur with respect to the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA), the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA), the *Personal Health Information Protection Act* (PHIPA) and Board policies and procedures. The HDSB [Privacy Breach Protocol Administrative Procedure](#) informs the school board's response to privacy breaches.

Personal Information is defined by MFIPPA as recorded information about an identifiable individual which includes, but is not limited to, information relating to an individual's race, colour, nationality or ethnic origin, sex and age. If social media posts, images (e.g., photos, videos), accounts or activities include these or other characteristics of an identifiable individual or the activities in which he or she is engaged, their contents will be considered "personal information" under MFIPPA.

Safety and compliance with provincial law are the overriding concerns with regard to the day to day information handling practices of HDSB staff. With

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respect to information posted online by school board staff on websites or social media, employees must always respect the right of privacy and confidentiality of students, staff and the public as well as their right to exercise control over their own personal information in the care and custody of the school board.

Staff are expected to act in accordance with the following provisions with respect to privacy and social media:

- Providing notification and a choice to opt out before posting images or other personal information of any adult (teacher, parent, volunteer, other school board staff) whose photo, video footage and/or work will be posted online or on social media. Note that consent is not required for photos and videos that are taken of staff at public meetings and/or events (e.g., sports, concerts). Particular care should be taken with individuals for whom the principal has identified legal or safety concerns.
- Obtaining verbal consent to post images or other personal information from principals, vice principals and trustees that are taken during the course of their employment and document this verbal consent upon obtaining it. Particular care should be taken with individuals for whom the principal has identified legal/safety concerns.
- Following the direction provided by parents/guardians via the “HDSB Authorization for Use of Student Photos/Videos and other Personal Identifying Information” form that is sent home to all students annually when staff are posting information online or to social media.
- Excluding any online or social media posting of students for whom consent is entirely withheld via the “Authorization for use of Student Photos/Videos and other Personal Identifying Information” form . All other selections made on the official form must also be respected.

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- Ensuring the privacy of students, staff, and the public when employees are setting up social media sites.
- Ensuring privacy settings are available, understood and appropriately applied in order to protect the privacy and confidentiality of students, staff and the public when posting information online or to social media.
- Never disclosing personal or business confidential information about the school board, school, students, colleagues or the public and ensuring particular diligence with respect to students for whom the principal has identified legal/safety concerns.

5. Additional resources

- Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario – [Managing Current Events and Sensitive Issues: Tips for Members](#)
- HDSB – *Responsible Use Procedures for Information and Communication Technology (ICT)*
- HDSB – *Privacy and Information Management Policy*
- HDSB – *Privacy and Information Management FAQs*
- HDSB – *Privacy Breach Protocol*
- HDSB – *Authorization for Promotional Use of Student Photos/Work/Activities Form*
- Ontario College of Teachers – *Professional Advisory: Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media*

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Cross-Reference:

Legislation

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)

Other

Ontario College of Teachers Social Media Advisory

Ontario College of Teachers Standards of Practice

Board Policies, Procedures & Protocols

Code of Ethics Policy

Code of Ethics Administrative Procedure

Responsible Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

Revision History

- February 2025 (Review and Update to Privacy and Confidentiality Section; shared procedure between Superintendents; and update to approval process for school clubs and corporate social media accounts)