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| Topic: | Social Media and Electronic Communications for Staff |
| Effective: | September 2000 |
| Cross-References: | Ontario College of Teachers Social Media Advisory; Ontario College of Teachers Standards of Practice; HDSB - Code of Ethics Policy and Administrative Procedure; Responsible Use of Information & Communication Technology (ICT); Authorization for use of Student Photos/Videos and other Personal Identifying Information |
| Revision Date: | February 2021 |
| Review Date: | February 2024 |
| Responsibility: | Superintendent of Human Resources |

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, Google - Communities, YouTube, etc.).

The Halton District School Board recognizes staff have personal social media accounts and may also be responsible for board social media accounts. The Board 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 (PLN) and enhance administrative capabilities.

Although there is a distinction between professional and personal life as a Halton District School Board employee, exercising good judgement while off-duty as it relates to the use of social media must be exercised. The Halton District School Board expects its employees to maintain a sense of professionalism at all times while using social media.

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 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, (e.g., classroom, corporate department, student accounts created under the direction of the teacher, school clubs, etc.)
- 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 Twitter feed
- Corporate accounts require the approval of the Superintendent/Executive Officer of the department.

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. Statements like, “Tweets are my own and do not reflect my employer’s views”, do not hold true. Staff should use sound judgment and due care when using social media while on and off duty.

Best Practices:

- Maintain a sense of professionalism at all times.
- 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 against an identifiable community, or explicit content on board, 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

3. Professional boundaries with students

Maintaining professional boundaries on social media is critical to sustaining public trust and ensuring relationships with students remain professional. When using your social media account the world is watching.

- 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 Board should do so.
- Be mindful of all 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.
- “Retweeting,” “Liking,” “Pinning,” etc. may be perceived as endorsements. These interactions should be limited and done with care and with authentic learning purposes.
- 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

Safety is the overriding concern with regard to information posted online. Always respect the privacy and confidentiality of student and staff information. Breaches of privacy and confidentiality can occur with respect to the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and board policies and procedures.

- Verbal consent should be obtained from any adult (teacher, parent, volunteer, other board staff member) whose photo, video footage and/or work is posted on social media. Exceptions include images of principals, vice-principals and trustees that are taken during the course of their employment. Exceptions also include photos taken at public events where there is no expectation of privacy.
- Consent is not required for photos and videos that are taken of staff at public meetings and/or events (sports, concerts). Students for whom consent is not provided must be excluded and/or have their faces blurred.
- Employees setting up Social Media sites must ensure the protection of privacy of students and staff, and that the ownership of intellectual property is maintained.
- Ensure privacy settings are appropriate and protect the privacy and confidentiality of students and staff.

- Staff must never disclose personal or business confidential information about the board, school, students and colleagues. Particular care must be taken with students for whom the principal has identified legal/safety concerns.
- Informed consent is necessary when placing personal information online. The “*statement of personal information practices*” provides notification.
- Personal information, includes student names, location, student work, individual and group photographs, videos featuring the student or other identifying information.
- Staff shall follow the “Authorization for use of Student Photos/Videos and other Personal Identifying Information” form that is sent home to all students annually.

5. Additional resources

- Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario – [Electronic Communication and Social Media: Advice to 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](#)
- Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation of Ontario – [Using Social Media Safely](#).