

SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBER USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The School Committee recognizes that many, if not most, of its members are active users of social media, including but not limited to, online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and other digital media such as blogs and personal websites. The School Committee understands that while social media can be a positive tool for supporting schools and encouraging community engagement, School Committee members need to be aware of the legal and ethical considerations that arise when they post, “message,” or otherwise interact with others on social media platforms.

It is not the intent of this policy to interfere with or restrict a School Committee members’ freedom of speech, but to set standards for social media conduct that are consistent with law and School Committee policy, including the School Committee’s Code of Ethics.

School Committee members shall comply with the following provisions:

- School Committee members shall not post on social media or engage in online discussions as a substitute for deliberations at School Committee meetings. School Committee members should be aware that social media activity can be perceived as a meeting if a sufficient number (a quorum) of School Committee members are involved on the site to influence or determine the course of action that will be taken by the School Committee, even if other people are posting to the site as well.
- School Committee members should be aware that any posting that pertains to school unit matters may create a “record” that is subject to laws and regulations pertaining to the retention and disposition of local government records, and to discovery in legal proceedings involving the School Committee or the school unit.
- School Committee members shall avoid disclosing confidential or personally identifiable information about students (including images), school unit employees, or School Committee matters or discussions that have taken place in executive sessions. School Committee members shall comply with the same standards as school employees with regard to confidential information.

School Committee members should adhere to the following ethical guidelines when using social media in their role as public officials:

A School Committee member should:

- Recognize that he/she has no authority to speak on behalf of the School Committee unless specifically designated to do so, and make it clear that he/she is speaking in his/her individual capacity;
- Feel free to invite the public to upcoming school district events, share information about public hearings on bills that affect the schools, and share links to public information about the district (e.g. the proposed budget), and the like, but be clear that he/she is doing so as an individual and not in any official capacity;
- Conduct himself/herself on social media in a manner that reflects well on the School Committee and on the school unit, and with the decorum expected of an elected official;
- Avoid posting in anger, even when provoked;
- Refrain from harassing, defaming, or disparaging fellow School Committee members or others based on racial, religious, or other personal characteristics;
- Keep deliberations within meetings of the School Committee;
- Avoid posting information that is misleading or inaccurate or which has not been released to the public;
- Not make any promise that he/she will vote in a particular way;
- Avoid posting content that indicates he/she has reached an opinion on a pending matter;
- Direct persons presenting concerns or complaints through social media to follow the School Committee's policy pertaining to public concerns and complaints;
- When summarizing discussion or action that took place at School Committee meetings, share only information from open meetings and make it clear that the posting is not an official record of the meeting. A School Committee member should never disclose discussions that have occurred in executive session.

- Retain electronic records, including the School Committee member's own posts and content others post to the School Committee member's account when required to do so by law, regulations, or legal process.

- Comply with the school unit's acceptable use rules, as applicable to school unit employees, when using school-unit owned devices or technology resources, or when accessing the Internet through school unit's network using a personal device.

Legal reference: 1 MRSA § 401 et seq.
20-A MRSA § 6001-6002
20 USC § 1232g

Cross Reference: 2.01A (BBAA)_School Committee Member Authority and Responsibilities
2.03 (BCA) School Committee Member Code of Ethics
2.01J (BEC) School School Committee Meetings –Executive

Sessions
GBJ–Personnel Records and Files
10.5 (JRA) FERPA
11.02 (KE) Community Concerns