

WATERVILLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Guidelines for Social Media Networks

Guidelines for social media in the Waterville 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 employees to understand and follow these guidelines. Failure to do so could put your employment at risk with Waterville Public Schools. These guidelines will continually evolve as new technologies and social networking tools emerge.

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 the 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, for school purposes, 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 for school use.

Be transparent

Your honesty – or dishonesty – will be quickly noticed in the social media environment. If you are taking a position 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 Waterville 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/guardians, 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/guardian 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 non-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.

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 the 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/guardians, 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 content, 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/guardians, students, and co-workers. 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 re-set 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.