

## **Staff Use of Social Media**

ESD 123 recognizes that social media is a tool that can be used to promote and enhance the communication goals of the agency and its programs. Social media includes communication with students, employees, and guests for educational purposes using agency-provided websites, platforms, resources, or documents. Personal, individual expression via social media outside of the workplace is respected.

ESD 123 also recognizes the potential for confusion where personal use of social media by staff includes contact with students within ESD 123 programs or students of districts being serviced by ESD 123 personnel. Social media technologies (including but not limited to Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, online gaming, texting, email, etc.) continue to grow exponentially in both their popularity and ease of use as constant channels for communication. With this comes the possibility of unintended consequences, miscommunication, or abuse during social media interaction with students.

As a result and taking into account the evolving nature of social media and technology, the Superintendent or designee will create and maintain directives for staff on ESD 123 expectations for professional use and supervision of staff interaction via social media, including the need to maintain professional boundaries.

### **Directive for Staff Use of Social Media**

Staff members are expected to comply with these directives in their interactions with students, ESD employees, and guests via social media technologies.

When a staff member utilizes social media, whether personal or within the context of his/her work with the ESD, he/she should not post confidential information about the agency, its students, alumni, or fellow employees. Staff use of digital images of students or school operations outside of their professional role (i.e., ESD 123 websites or approved educational activities) is prohibited. Good judgment should be used and ESD 123 policies should be followed on maintaining professional boundaries and boundary invasion. Additionally, federal privacy requirements, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and, if applicable, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) must be followed at all times. Staff should use and maintain appropriate privacy settings in their social media unless they intend viewing by the general public.

Unprofessional behavior online could impact a staff member's standing both at the ESD and any related professional certifications or licenses. Appropriate professional boundaries should be maintained at all times. Due to these concerns and the possibility for miscommunication, personal contact with a student via social media outside of the school context or approved use is inappropriate. Absent a pre-existing personal relationship independent of one's professional role as a staff member (e.g., parent of the student, family member of the student, longtime family friend to the student and his/her parents, etc.), personal social media contacts with students should be avoided.

Staff members wishing to utilize social media with students within the context of ESD 123 operations and its educational mission should:

- a) Secure approval by the Superintendent or designee(s) in advance;
- b) Reasonably apprise student's parents or guardians of its use; and
- c) Recognize that such use should always remain under ESD 123 supervision and be subject to agency monitoring.

Within this framework, social media is an appropriate educational tool and is encouraged.

If, through the use of social media, postings or commentaries by staff members present a reasonable possibility of substantially disrupting ESD operations or creating professional concern regarding compliance with agency policy or maintaining appropriate professional boundaries, the postings or commentaries should be reported to the program director for follow-up. This expectation is not intended to pre-empt or impact personal freedom of expression in private use of social media but to address any concerns that may arise impacting the student environment.

If a student or a parent of a student reports a concern related to a staff member and his/her individual posts or communication to students, such matters must be reported to the Superintendent or his/her designee(s) so that ESD 123 can follow up and, as appropriate, offer support, clarification, or direction.

### **Legal References:**

At the time of the adoption of this policy, these references are accurate and supportive:

1. RCW 28A.400.320 Mandatory termination of classified employees;
2. RCW 28A.405.470 Mandatory termination of certificated employees;

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