

Monroe County Schools Social Media Professional and Personal Guidance

Social media† sites are exciting new channels to share knowledge, express creativity and connect with others who share interests.

While some employees are familiar with social media channels, others are new to this area. The following "best practice" guidance is provided to help effectively use these forums, protect personal and professional reputation and follow national, state and/or district laws, rules and policies. These are developed from respected online and industry sources as guidelines for ethical and acceptable use of such media.

Professional Use

It is vital that when participating in social media in a professional capacity that you are honest about who you are, that you are thoughtful before you post and that you respect the purpose of the community in which you are posting. All communication should meet the "TAP Test:"

- **Transparent** – ALL electronic communication between staff, students, and parents should be transparent. As a public school district, we are expected to maintain openness, visibility, and accountability with regard to all communication.
- **Accessible** – ALL electronic communication between staff, students and parents are a matter of public record and/or may be accessible by others.
- **Professional** – ALL electronic communication from staff to student or parent should be written as a professional representing Monroe County Schools. This includes word choices, tone, grammar and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a Monroe County Schools professional. Choose words that are courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike in manner.

For business/district related use of such resources, remember:

- If you are participating on a social media site for school or district-related business, it should be done with the approval of your supervisor.
- If you identify yourself as a district employee, remember that your actions will fall under the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (<http://www.gapsc.com>) Ethics Guidelines.
- If you choose NOT to identify yourself with the district, you may still be identified with the district, and your behavior is governed by the Ethics Guidelines of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. (<http://www.gapsc.com>)
- Employees should notify parents of the intent to use social media to communicate with students and the intended purpose of such communications. All ethical expectations for appropriate employee/student relationships must be followed.
- Accessing inappropriate Web sites during work hours or using your district E-mail or resources inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. You should identify yourself and your position with the district – always use your name (never create an alias and never be anonymous). Misidentifying yourself or providing false information will result in disciplinary action.

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- The @monroe.k12.ga.us address attached to your name and/or e-mail account implies that you are acting on behalf of the district and are therefore required to conduct yourself as a professional.
- When using a district E-mail address and/or equipment to participate in any social media or professional social media activity (such as LinkedIn, Edmodo, and others), your actions are public and you will be held fully responsible for such activities.
- Any information shared via social media sites regarding the business of the district is considered public record regardless of the ownership of the equipment used to post.
- Confidential or proprietary information about the district, its students, alumni or employees may not be posted. Use good ethical judgment and follow federal, state and/or district rules, guidelines and policies.
- Social media is not private. Internet search engines can find information years after it was originally posted. Comments can be forwarded or copied and archival systems save information even if the material is deleted.
- Think before you post. If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it may not be the time to share your thoughts in a post – you should delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed.
- Please thoroughly spell and grammar check the content before you post. Citizens expect that education employees set a good example when they write and speak in public. Content never disappears entirely once it is posted, so it's important you correct any errors as soon as possible. Since transparency is important, admit your mistake, apologize if necessary, correct it and move on.
- Remember that you are writing for publication, even if it's just for a social media site. Refrain from making unsubstantiated statements such as "research shows" unless you also provide full citations of the research.

Personal Use Guidance for Social Media Use

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The inappropriate personal use of social media places your professional career at risk. As an employee of this district, you are subject to the Professional Standards Commission Code of Ethics and Code of Conduct as outlined in the system personnel handbook. Below are suggested guidelines to follow when using social media for personal use:

- If you participate in social media for personal use and identify yourself as an employee of the district, you must state that you are expressing your own opinion, not that of the district.
- If you identify yourself as a district employee, remember, your actions will reflect not only on you but on the district as well.
- If you identify yourself as a district employee, readers will associate you with the district, even with the disclaimer that your views are your own.
- Never pretend to be someone else and post information about the district. Tracking tools enable supposedly anonymous posts to be traced back to their authors.
- Personal use of the district's official seal or individual school logos, athletic logos, mascots or any other such graphic representations or images is permitted only at the discretion of the district.
- If you post information or comments that are not related to the district, your activities may result in professional and/or personal repercussions. Such actions include, but are not limited to:
 - Posting of photographs, regardless of the content, which could be considered offensive to other parties and be a violation of federal, state and/or district laws, guidelines and policies;
 - Posting of information considered to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene (as defined by the courts).
- You do not have control of what others may post on social media sites; therefore, be aware that your conduct in your private life may affect your professional life.
- Be vigilant about what others post about you or on your page and, if necessary, take steps to remove comments that pose a risk to you or the district.
- Communicating with students on any public social media site may be viewed as inappropriate. All ethical expectations for appropriate employee/student relationships must be followed. This includes becoming "friends" or allowing students to access your personal page to communicate.
- Employees should refrain from creating "personal" web pages, blogs, or social media sites permitting social interaction with current students enrolled in the district.
- Employees should refrain from providing their personal e-mail address, twitter userid, or other social media personal identifier to students.

The Internet and social media sites change rapidly. These guidelines are intended to provide direction if you choose to use social media sites for either personal or professional reasons. While the use of these sites is becoming commonplace, it is important to remember to conduct yourself in an appropriate manner to avoid any unintended situations that could adversely affect your professional standing. These guidelines are not intended to restrict your participation, but these are set forth as guidance as you make personal and professional decisions if you choose to engage in online activities.

†Social Media: Refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue. Social media can take on many different forms, including Internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking.

Social Media. Wikipedia, May 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

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