

Policy

BOARD OF EDUCATION
HORTONVILLE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

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USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Technology is a powerful tool to enhance education, communication, and learning.

The Board authorizes the use of social media to promote community involvement and facilitate effective communication with students, parents, staff, and the general public. Social media is defined in Bylaw 0100 - Definitions.

The District recognizes that employees may use social media for personal, as well as professional reasons. The District neither encourages nor discourages employees' use of social media for personal purposes. The District regulates employees' use of social media for purposes related to their District assignment to the same extent as it regulates any other form of employee communication in that regard.

The District uses approved social media platforms/sites as interactive forms of communication; however, although the District-approved social media platforms/sites are considered limited public forums, the District may not respond to or engage in dialogue about any comments received.

Each District-approved social media account/site must contain a statement that specifies its purpose(s) and limits those who access the social media account/site to use of the account/site only for that/those purpose(s), and in accordance with any specified procedures, and applicable terms of service. Users are personally responsible for the content of their posts.

The District Administrator shall maintain the District's social media presence with respect to general announcements, notices, or other such communications that are disseminated to the public at large or specific audiences within the community. To the extent individual staff members or volunteers wish to post information or announcements to a District social media platform, the staff member or volunteer may request that the District Administrator approve and post such information. (This provision does not apply to social media communications that are related to instructional and school-sponsored activities.)

Social Media for Instructional and School-Sponsored Activities

Staff (including District-approved volunteers) may, with prior approval/authorization from the Principal, use social media platforms/sites for communications about classroom instruction or school-sponsored activities, as well as to support classroom instruction. When a staff member uses a District-approved social media platform/site for an educational purpose, it will be considered an educational activity and will not be considered a limited public forum.

Staff members (including District-approved volunteers) must provide parents or guardians of students involved in a school-sponsored activity the ability to opt-out of having their child use social media platforms/sites for communication purposes associated with that activity and arrange for an alternative method of communicating with the participating student concerning the school-sponsored activity.

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Expected Standards of Conduct on District-Approved Social Media

Employees and District-approved volunteers who access District-approved social media platforms are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful, courteous, and professional manner. Students, parents, and members of the general public who access District-approved social media platforms are similarly expected to conduct themselves in a respectful, courteous, and civil manner.

District-approved social media sites shall not contain content that is obscene; is vulgar and lewd such that it undermines the school's basic educational mission; is libelous or defamatory; constitutes hate speech; promotes illegal drug use; is aimed at inciting an individual to engage in unlawful acts or to cause a substantial disruption or material interference with District operations; or interferes with the rights of others. The District may exercise editorial control over the style and content of student speech on District-approved social media if reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns. Staff or students who post prohibited content shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary action.

The District is committed to protecting the privacy rights of students, parents/guardians, staff, volunteers, Board members, and other individuals on District-approved social media sites. District employees and volunteers are prohibited from posting or releasing confidential information about students, employees, volunteers, or District operations through social media, without appropriate consent (i.e., express written consent from the parent of a student, the affected employee or volunteer, or the District Administrator concerning District operations).

Employees and District-approved volunteers are prohibited from using District-approved social media platforms/sites to communicate privately with individual students.

Retention of Public/Student Records

District communications that occur through the use of District-approved social media platforms/sites – including staff members'/volunteers' use of social media with school-sponsored activities, and comments, replies, and messages received from the general public – may constitute public records or student records, and all such communications will be maintained (i.e., electronically archived) in accordance with the Board's adopted record retention schedule and all applicable State statutes.

If a staff member uses District-approved social media platforms/sites in the classroom for educational purposes (i.e., classroom instruction), the staff member must consult with the Principal concerning whether such use may result in the creation of public and/or education records that must be maintained (i.e., electronically archived) for a specific period of time.

Employees' Use of District Technology Resources to Access Social Media for Personal Use

Employees and District-approved volunteers are permitted to use District technology resources (as defined in Bylaw 0100 - Definitions) to access social media for personal use during breaks, mealtimes, and before and after scheduled work hours.

They are reminded that the District may monitor their use of District technology resources.

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Employees' Use of Personal Communication Devices at Work to Access Social Media for Personal Use

Employees are permitted to use personal communication devices to access social media for personal use during work hours, provided it does not interfere with the employee's job performance.

Employees and District-approved volunteers are prohibited from posting or engaging in communication that violates State or Federal law, Board policies, or administrative guidelines. If an employee/volunteer's communication interferes with their ability to effectively perform their job, or violates State or Federal law, Board policies, or administrative guidelines, the District may impose disciplinary action and/or refer the matter to appropriate law enforcement authorities.

This policy and its corresponding administrative guideline will be reviewed and updated as necessary.

NEOLA 2024

Legal Resources

Protecting Children in the 21st Century Act, Pub. L. No. 110-385, Title II, Stat. 4096 (2008)

Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA), Pub. L. No. 106-554 (2001)