

# ALEXANDER CITY SCHOOLS

## Social Media Guidelines

Alexander City Schools recognizes the importance of social media as a means of communication. The District encourages the appropriate use of social media as a means to communicate, whether as an individual or as a school or District program, if such use is helpful in reaching our various educational goals.

The District acknowledges that its employees have the right under the First Amendment as private citizens to speak out on matters of public concern. However, the District has the right to regulate the speech of employees in specific circumstances. Accordingly, it is essential that employees conduct themselves in such a way that their personal and/or educational use of social media does not adversely affect their position with the District.

The purpose of these guidelines is to establish protocols for the use of social media by employees and to outline expectations for its use. Social media includes websites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snap Chat or other social media.

### I. Guidelines for all use of social media (personal and educational)

- ACS employees' behavior on social media should reflect the same standards of honesty, respect and consideration they are expected to adhere to in all forms of communications and interactions.
- Privacy settings need to be checked. Consider the audience when tagging people in posts or using a hashtag because both of these actions will make a post more visible.
- Do not submit or post confidential or protected information about the District, its students, or employees. You should assume that most information about a student is protected from disclosure by federal law (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)). Disclosure of confidential or protected information may result in liability for invasion of privacy or defamation and result in disciplinary action up to, and including, discharge from employment.
- Report, as required by law, any information found on a social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines.
- Do not use language that could be considered defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libelous, or that constitutes an incitement to imminent violence or a true threat.
- Do not post or otherwise publish content that is or could reasonably be perceived as bullying, discrimination, or harassment in violation of ACS policy.
- Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colorful language, guesswork, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterizations.
- Consider whether a particular posting puts your professional reputation and effectiveness as an ACS employee at risk.
- Be cautious of security risks when using third-party applications within a social media site.
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### II. Guidelines for the personal use of social media

Maintaining professional boundaries on social media is critical to sustaining public trust and ensuring relationships with students remain professional.

- All online dialogue and interactions with students should be for educational purposes only.
- Refrain from accepting current ACS students as "friends" on personal social media sites. Never communicate with a student online.
- Be aware that people classified as "friends" have the ability to download and share your information with others.
- Do not send private messages/or texts to students.

- Remember that once something is posted to a social media site it may remain available online even if you think it is removed.
- Assume that anything you post to a personal social media site can be accessed by anyone and will be available forever.
- Retweets, likes, shares and favorites are perceived as endorsements. These interactions should be done with care.
- It is recommended that all social media settings be set to private rather than public. Be aware that social media sites can change their privacy policies and standards at any time, possibly exposing posts that employees believed were private to the public.
- Avoid using a social media site to post content which may be considered defamatory or obscene, and do not post content which violates copyright or other intellectual property laws.
- Never use a social media site to post information about an ACS student or employee in a way that is or could be reasonably perceived as discriminatory, harassing, or otherwise derogatory.
- Never use a social media site to post or otherwise publish confidential or protected information about the District, its students, or its employees. Disclosure of confidential or protected information may result in liability for invasion of privacy or defamation.

### **III. Guidelines for the educational use of social media**

We respect and encourage your interest in creating engaging assignments for your students, and in communicating with your students and parents.

- Use a site promoted by ACS for class-related activities, assignments, and conversations such as Learning Tree, Edmodo, Remind, etc.)
- Comply with all District policies and state laws on the use of district-owned hardware, software and networks, as relevant, to the use of social media for any ACS school, class or program.
- Notify your supervisor if you wish to establish a social media site for a school, class or program.
- If using Facebook, create an organization page for your school, class or program; do NOT use a personal Facebook page for school-related information.
- Establish expectations for acceptable use on your social media site that are compliant with the District's expectations for acceptable use.
- Do not post anything on a school or District affiliated social media page that advocates for or against a political candidate or ballot initiative.
- Refrain from posting or otherwise publishing images that include students without parental release forms on file.
- Pay close attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved participants access to the site.
- Remember that behavior inappropriate in school or the classroom should be considered inappropriate online.

Employees found to have engaged in inappropriate use of social media or other electronic communication may be subject to disciplinary action by the District, up to and including termination.