

GADSDEN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Social Media Guidelines

The following guidelines are provided to support the effective use of Social Media while following federal and state laws and District rules and policies.

Social Media refers to the use of web-based and mobile technologies that enable the School District of Gadsden County stakeholders to connect, collaborate and form virtual communities.

All employees are expected to serve as positive ambassadors for the District. It is vital that employees conduct themselves in such a way that does not adversely affect their employment and/or the District when using Social Media resources.

In addition to this document, employees who use Social Media are subject to the rules outlined in the District's Acceptable Use Policy Governing Internet and Technology Access, the Acceptable Use Policy Governing Cellular Phones and the Student Records Policy.

All ethical expectations set forth in the "[Code of Ethics and the Principles of Professional Conduct of the Education Profession](#)" for employee/student relationships and communications apply in regard to any communication with a student.

General Communication with Students and Parents

The District utilizes two approved parent and student communications systems called School Messenger and FOCUS. Aside from District email and phone calls, these are the only approved electronic communications systems for employees to utilize with parents and students.

In general, the District recommends all communication with students and parents go through District approved platforms.

Employees, especially teachers and coaches, may not ask parents or students to visit personally created websites, social media sites or outside APPs to communicate, gather information about homework, class activity, practice schedules or other school related information. Employees should also refrain from providing personal email addresses and cell phone numbers to students currently enrolled in the District.

Maintaining GCSD Social Media Accounts

The Technology Department and Public Information Officer maintain the District's social media accounts. District departments should send their posts to the Communications Department for posting. This will allow for a unified 'one voice' approach from the District rather than

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messaging coming from individual departments. If the Public Information Officer determines the need for a department social media presence separate from the general social media accounts, the accounts will be maintained under the District's Business Manager Account with each Social Media platform accessible by the Director of Technology and Public Information Officer.

With Principal approval, schools may choose to maintain school-based Social Media accounts under the District's Business Manager Account. Schools choosing to have a Social Media presence must add, at a minimum, the school principal or a designee as an administrator on the account in order to be recognized as an official GCSD Social Media account.

Employees who manage or participate in officially recognized Social Media accounts must have approval of their supervisor. They are expected to post important, timely, relevant and interesting material that is useful to, and appreciated by, their community/network.

Social Media accounts require commitment. Followers and subscribers expect sites to be maintained as an up-to-date source of information. Employees who maintain Social Media accounts are expected to post 3-5 times per week, per account.

Examples of post-worthy materials include:

- ❖ Good news/What's happening at your school/site
- ❖ School Related Pictures / Picture of the Day
- ❖ Student/Staff Member of the Week
- ❖ Congratulations on Big Accomplishments
- ❖ Videos
- ❖ Event Reminders
- ❖ Weather Information/Bus Information
- ❖ Other Emergencies

Posts involving students, including photos, videos, news about individual students, and displays of student work are subject to the rules outlined in school board policy, the student code of conduct and all applicable state and federal laws.

Any information posted on Social Media sites is considered public record and subject to Florida Public Records Laws. This includes any private messages received during use of these accounts.

Employees who maintain District-related Social Media accounts are acting as representatives of the District. Employees must identify themselves and their position with the District – always using their name, never posting anonymously or using an alias. Misidentifying oneself or providing false information may result in disciplinary action.

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For District related use of Social Media, remember:

- ❖ Employees must refrain from allowing personal or political viewpoints to dictate the kind of information they share
- ❖ Employees must refrain from making unsubstantiated statements and avoid careless comments, such as “research shows” unless full citations of the research are provided
- ❖ Employees will not use derogatory language when posting, and will maintain a positive and friendly tone
- ❖ Employees will avoid posting confidential or proprietary information about the District, its students, alumni or employees
- ❖ Employees must use proper spelling and grammar in posts. Abstain from using “text talk” unless it is necessary. Citizens expect that education employees set a good example when they write and speak in public.

Digital Learning Materials

At times, employees may find APPs and digital learning materials that may be beneficial to communication, learning and/or achievement. All materials and APPs must be vetted and approved.

Subscribing to GCSD Social Media Accounts

The District and schools strive to provide visitors and subscribers with information on major activities and initiatives, as well as “good news” from around the District. Visitors and subscribers should remember the following regarding our Social Media presence:

- ❖ The District reserves the right to block subscribers who behave in an abusive or inappropriate manner.
- ❖ The District reserves the right to delete comments that use inappropriate language, link to unacceptable websites, or are in any way abusive.
- ❖ The District’s liking, linking, retweeting or subscribing to another post or ‘page’ does not constitute an endorsement on the part of the District of that post or creator, or of his or her opinion, product of service; the same applies to comments posted by others to District Social Media accounts.
- ❖ The posting and presence of content by others does not necessarily mean that the School District of Gadsden County agrees with the content, ensures its accuracy, or otherwise approves of the content.

Nothing on any Social Media account or page constitutes a binding representation, agreement, or an endorsement on the part of the District. Please review each specific Social Media platform’s “Terms of Use” carefully when engaging on the site.

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Booster Club/PTO/PTA/Foundation Social Media & Websites

Schools may choose to allow entities created to support school functions like, but not limited to, Booster Clubs/PTA/PTO organizations to maintain website and social media accounts at the discretion of the Principal.

The title of the website or social media page must contain the organization's name (ex: Stewart Street Elementary PTA or Gadsden County High Booster Club) so as not to confuse it with the official school page.

In addition, prominent in the "About Us" section should be the following disclaimer:

"This organization is managed and operated by a group of individuals who have come together to support (name of school) and fulfill a specific function. While school administration may be involved with our fulfillment of this function, neither the school, nor District, has direct control over this organization, nor this website/social media account. The (organization name)'s website/social media account does not speak for or represent (name of school) and/or The School District of Gadsden County."

Social Networking Sites for Personal Use

The District recognizes the educational and communication value inherent in the responsible use of Social Media sites. The district also recognizes, however, that potential misuse can do great harm to the safety, reputations, and/or careers of those involved, as well as to the reputation of the District and the teaching profession in general.

Below are guidelines to follow when using social networking sites and/or blogs for personal use:

- ❖ Employees, excluding those who have permission to post on official school and District Social Media accounts, should refrain from visiting Social Media sites during student contact hours – including lunch time and/or breaks since such activities will leave time- stamps that could be misinterpreted.
- ❖ The District strongly discourages employees from accepting or initiating invitations to 'friend' students (family and relatives excluded) or otherwise providing students with direct access to the employee's personal Social Media accounts. The District also strongly discourages employees from engaging in private messaging exchanges with students on Social Media sites.

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- ❖ The district's right to release student works, photos, and "directory information" as outlined in School Board policy and the Student Code of Conduct DOES NOT transfer to individual employees acting outside of their roles as agents of the District.
- ❖ Posts involving students, including photos, videos, news about individual students, and displays of student work, are never appropriate for an employee's personal Social Media site. Exceptions to this may include, but are not limited to, performances and athletic events that are considered public events.
- ❖ If you participate in a social networking site for personal use, you may identify yourself as an employee of the District. If you do, you must state that you are expressing your own opinion, not that of the District. Even with that disclaimer though, readers may still associate you with the District and your actions may reflect on the District, which could result in disciplinary action.
- ❖ 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.
- ❖ Do not use the District's Official Seal or individual school logos, athletic logos, mascots or any other such graphic representations or images – including photographs – on any personal sites.
- ❖ Be vigilant about others tagging your page or posting about you and, if necessary, take steps to remove comments that pose a risk to you or the District.

If you post information or comments that are not related to the District, your activities may still 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 state and/or District rules and policies;
- ❖ Posting of information that is considered proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene (as defined by the courts) may be a violation of state and/or District rules and policies.

All employees should take adequate precautions to secure their personal Social Media sites/accounts from unwanted intrusion. This can be accomplished by adjusting profile security and privacy settings.

At a minimum, educators should have all privacy settings set to 'only friends'. 'Friends of Friends' and 'Networks and Friends' privacy settings potentially open your personal content to large numbers of unknown individuals.

In all cases, the District accepts no responsibility for the actions of individual employees on Social Media sites.

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Special note – Employees of the School District of Gadsden County are not permitted to participate in the publishing of blogs utilizing their District credentials. District credentials/email addresses are not permitted to be used to sign up for personal social media accounts. If your work email is used to sign up for a personal social media account, the account is subjected to public record laws.

Reporting

Mandatory reporting policy applies to all interactions on Social Media sites.

Archiving

All interactions, posts, and comments on official Social Media sites are considered public record and are subject to the records retention schedule in School Board Policy 2.22 and the Florida Department of State, Division of Library and Information Services. Each individual who initiates a Social Media account is responsible for archiving the account on a regular basis. The District recommends that Social Media sites be archived quarterly.

Twitter and Facebook accounts can be archived directly through the settings on each social media platform.

Modifications to this Document

The very nature of the Internet and social networking sites are that they are ever- changing. The above guidelines are intended to provide direction for those individuals who choose to use social media sites and/or blogs for either personal or professional reasons.

While the use of these sites is becoming commonplace, it is important that all employees remember to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner to avoid any unintended situations that could adversely affect their professional standing with the District. These guidelines are not intended to restrict employee participation but rather to provide some protection for those individuals who choose to engage in Social Media activities.

The School District of Gadsden County reserves the right to modify these guidelines at any time.

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Frequently Asked Questions

I am a teacher or coach; can I open a personal Twitter or Facebook Account?

Yes, however, any personal account that you open should be attached to a personal email address and should not be used for the purpose of posting announcements or communicating with students or parents.

Does that mean we should not mention our work or school on our accounts?

Every employee of the District has the potential to be a digital ambassador. You can brag about your school, your students (without their names or faces) and even share special events on your personal social media accounts. You simply should not imply that your social media accounts are where parents and students should be gathering important announcements about your class or school.

Can I post pictures of my students on my personal social media accounts?

No. The District media permissions signed by parents do not extend to the posting of student images or names on individually owned social media accounts. Pictures of students should be forwarded to the individual managing the official school accounts for distribution and sharing. You are permitted to “share” or “retweet” official District or school posts.

Exceptions to this may include, but are not limited to, performances and athletic events that are considered public events.

I have a video I want my students to view that is on my personal You Tube Account. Can I direct them to the link?

Students should only access You Tube videos from the District or School accounts. See your school administrator or IT specialist to move your video to the school account.

I have identified an APP that may be valuable to my classroom teaching, can I encourage my students to download it?

No. All APPs must be vetted and approved.

A student or parent is texting and calling me on my personal cell. Can I respond back?

This is strongly discouraged. When you text a student or parent, you are creating a public record you must maintain. Additionally, you create an expectation that this is how parents and students can communicate with you. You should direct students and parents to either email you through your District account, or communicate with you through the School Messenger or Focus APP.

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Important to remember:

By their very nature, social media Web sites and blogs are 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 you delete a post.

All work and communication that is completed in your official capacity as a District employee, whether it is on your personal or work accounts, during or after regular work hours, is considered public record.

It is recommended that you do work related activities on your work accounts and use your personal accounts for only personal activities.

MODIFICATIONS

The District reserves the right to amend these guidelines and Board Policy 6.28 being adopted in response to evolving technology, legal requirements, and District needs.

COMPLIANCE

Failure to adhere to these guidelines and Board Policy 6.28 being adopted may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination, consistent with Board policy, state law, and applicable employment agreements.