

Social Media Guidelines

The School District of Lee County, FL



Blogs, social networks and Web sites such as Facebook, Flickr, LinkedIn, Vine, Instagram, Twitter, Google Plus, YouTube, Internet social sites and other emerging sites are exciting new channels for people to share knowledge, express creativity and connect with others who share similar interests.

While some employees are familiar with social media channels, others are new to this area. The following "best practice" guidelines are being provided to help you effectively use these forums, protect your personal and professional reputation and follow state and/or District rules and policies.

Using these sites as a District Professional

First and foremost, it's vital that when participating in Internet social media in a professional capacity that you are honest about who you are, you're thoughtful before you post and you respect the purpose of the community where you are posting. For business/District related use of such resources, remember:

- If you are participating on a social networking site and/or electronic message board for business, it must be done with the approval of your supervisor.
- Accessing inappropriate Web sites during work hours or using your District E-mail or resources inappropriately can result in disciplinary action. It is important to remember that your email is a public record that can be requested by any individual. Do not write something you would be embarrassed to have any member of the public see.
- You must 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 may result in disciplinary action.
- The leeschools.net address attached to your name and/or E-mail implies that you are acting on behalf of the District and as such, you are expected 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 networking activity (such as LinkedIn and others), your actions are public and employees will be held fully responsible for any and all activities.

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- Any information shared via social networking sites and/or blogs regarding the business of the District, whether using personal or District equipment, is considered public record and are subject to Florida Public Record Laws. This includes any private messages you receive during the use of these accounts.
- What does this mean? It means any citizen could request the activity of your account and it must be provided as a result of the public record request.
- Avoid posting confidential or proprietary information about the District, its students, alumni or employees. Use good ethical judgment and follow state and/or District rules and policies and federal requirements.
- 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.
- 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 your 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 you can. 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 networking Web site. Refrain from making unsubstantiated statements and avoid careless comments, such as “research shows” unless you also provide full citations of the research.

Special note – *Employees of the School District of Lee County are not permitted to participate in the publishing of blogs utilizing their District credentials.*

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Social Networking Sites & Blogs for Personal Use

The personal use of social networking sites or blogs creates the risk of affecting your professional career whether you want it to or not. To that end, it is vital that you conduct yourself in such a way that it doesn't adversely affect your position with the District. Below are suggested guidelines to follow when using social networking sites and/or blogs for personal use:

- 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.
 - 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.
- 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 – during your personal online activities (Web site, blogs, etc.) or on any personal sites.
- 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 to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene (as defined by the courts) may be a violation of state and/or District rules and policies.

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- You do not have control of what others may post on social networking 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.
- It could be viewed as inappropriate for District employees to communicate with current students enrolled in the District on any public social networking site (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). This includes becoming “friends” or allowing students to access your personal page to communicate.
 - Employees should refrain from creating “personal” Web pages and social media accounts that permit social interaction with current students enrolled in the District.
 - Employees, especially teachers and coaches, should not ask or expect parents or students to visit personally created websites or social media sites to gather information about homework, class activity, practice schedules, etc.
 - The District utilizes parent and student communication systems called ParentLink and Focus. Aside from District email and personal phone calls, these are the only approved electronic communication systems for employees to utilize with parents and students.
- Employees should refrain from providing their personal E-mail address to students currently enrolled in the District.
 - Employees should only provide their official District E-mail address (this address can be accessed via computers at work, at home and on personal digital assistants and smartphones) as a way to communicate with students or parents regarding District and/or school related business.
- During the work day, employees should refrain from participating on any social networking Web site for personal reasons, even from personal equipment (i.e. their own Blackberry, iPhone, laptop, netbook, etc.)

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- Employees should avoid posting personal comments – on their page or someone else’s page – no matter whose equipment it is during lunch time and/or breaks since such activities will leave time-stamps that could be misinterpreted by others.

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

While the use of these sites is becoming commonplace, it is important that you remember to conduct yourself in an appropriate manner to avoid any unintended situations that could adversely affect your professional standing with the District. These guidelines are not intended to restrict your participation but rather to provide some protection if you choose to engage in online activities.

Frequently Asked Questions

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

Any account that you open should be a personal account attached to a personal email address. It should be opened for your own personal use and not for the purpose of posting announcements or communicating with students or parents.

Professionals are encouraged to keep their account settings private and/or avoid following or interacting with students and parents on social media accounts.

Does that mean we shouldn’t 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.

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

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

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for distribution and sharing. You are permitted to “share” or “retweet” official District or school posts.

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?

All APPS must be vetted and approved by the IT Department.

A student or parent somehow got a hold of my cell number and text me a very simple question. 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.

Important to remember:

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.

In that vein, it is recommended that you do work related activities on your work accounts and use your personal accounts for only personal activities.

Important to remember:

Images of your students should not appear on your personal social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, You Tube, etc.)

Exceptions to this include drama performances and athletic events that are considered public events.