

Bentonville Schools Social Media Guidelines

These guidelines supplement but do not replace district policies. In the event of a conflict between these guidelines and any district policy, the district policy governs.

District policy requires employees use a professional account when communicating as an employee of the district or interacting with students as a representative of Bentonville Schools. Employees currently using personal social media sites should remove students from those sites. The Arkansas Code of Ethics for Teachers defines a "student" as a Pre-K – 12 student regardless of age.

These guidelines are intended to provide practical guidance for complying with the district's social networking and ethics policy and best practices for both personal and professional social media use.

For the purposes of these guidelines, "employee" refers to both employees and non-contract personnel, including paid and unpaid volunteers, who work in the district and use social media (as defined in the Digital Communications and Social Media Policy P.1.35.2.B) as part of professional practice or otherwise relating to district activities or delivery of services.

Guidelines

- Employees should not accept friend or follower requests from any student on a personal social media account.
- Employees should not use personal social media accounts to engage with students.
- Employees should not participate in district projects using a personal social media account.
- Employees should not participate in district social media using a personal social media account.
- Employees should not friend or follow any student from a personal social media account.
- Employees desiring an exemption to these guidelines due to a family or other special relationship with a student should apply for such an exemption directly to his/her immediate supervisor.
- Employees are responsible for immediately reporting to the district any inappropriate communication received from a student.
- Employees should not create a personal social media account, blog or website purporting to represent the district without prior express written consent from the employee's immediate supervisor.
- Employees may not use the logo of the district or any school within the district without permission from the employee's immediate supervisor.
- Employees should use good judgment when configuring personal social media account privacy settings, understanding that without proper restrictions, every post will be publicly accessible by students.
- Employees should understand that even posts to limited audiences might be disseminated publicly.
- Employees are responsible for any content published online. Content includes personal comments, links, photographs, audio or video and content created by other users that are liked, shared or re-posted.

- Employees should not post provocative photographs, sexually explicit messages, or content promoting irresponsible consumption of alcohol, use of drugs or any illegal activity.
- Employees must respect the privacy rights of both colleagues and students, paying particular attention to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.
- Employees must not post photos or videos that contain identifying information concerning any student without prior parental consent and a signed District Talent Release Form.
- Employees should understand that once something is posted, it may be permanent; deleting content does not necessarily remove it or prevent others from viewing, re-posting or sharing the content.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why did the District create a social media policy?

Social media has educational benefits when used appropriately and with the intent to improve student learning and timely, relevant communication with parents and other stakeholders. The Policy and these Guidelines provide guidance for employees in their use of social media in a professional, responsible, safe and positive manner.

Why are separate personal and professional social media platforms and email addresses required?

It is the duty of each employee to appropriately manage all interactions with students to ensure that the appropriate staff/student relationship is maintained. Failure to create, enforce and maintain appropriate professional and interpersonal boundaries with students could adversely affect the District's relationship with the community and jeopardize the employee's employment with the District. The purpose of this distinction is to ensure separation between personal and professional online communication. Professional social media is work-related and may involve staff/student communication. Conversely, personal social media is not work-related and should not involve staff/student communication.

What is a professional social media account?

A professional social media account is one that has been set up using a District-issued email address in the District domain - @bentonvillek12.org. An official account should be identified in the user profile using "the official account of" or other identifying language.

What is the deadline for complying with the District's Social Media Policy and Guidelines?

October 1, 2016.

What shouldn't be posted on professional social media accounts? Can I promote my personal religious, political, or social beliefs on my professional social media account?

When an employee elects to use social media as part of their professional practice by creating a professional social media account, they are representing the District in their interactions through that media. Communications via this forum should reflect the vision, mission, and purpose of the District and not the thoughts, opinions, belief systems or practices of the employee. By way of example, communications through this media should avoid endorsement

of one belief system over another, the creation of an unnecessary entanglement with religion, or include personal political discussions. Employees are prohibited by Arkansas law from engaging in election activities during contracted hours or on District provided equipment. With respect to personal social media platforms, employees have the constitutional right to free expression. However, employees of school districts are held to a higher standard due to their professional relationships with children and should not post inflammatory, inappropriate, or obscene information that could compromise the employees' professional relationships with students, parents or other staff, violate privacy, cause a substantial disruption to the school environment, or compromise the District's reputation.

Can employees follow students on social media accounts?

Yes, with limitations and qualifications. Employees need to be aware of the perception created when they follow students' social media activity. While following students on a team, program or club is a way to monitor their activities to ensure they represent the team, program or club appropriately, it can also be seen as an invasion of their privacy if done without their knowledge. If coaches, program directors, and club sponsors want to follow students, it should be done with a District-based account with more than one administrator and with the student's knowledge.

Will my personal social media accounts be monitored?

No. In compliance with A.C.A. § 11-2-124, the District will not require, request, suggest, or cause a current or prospective employee to:

Disclose the username and/or password to his/her personal social media account;

Add an employee, supervisor, or administrator to the list of contacts associated with his/her personal social media account;

Change the privacy settings associated with his/her personal social media account; or

Retaliate against the employee for refusing to disclose the username and/or password to his/her personal social media account.

The District may require an employee to disclose his or her username and/or password to a personal social media account if the employee's personal social media account activity is reasonably believed to be relevant to the investigation of an allegation of an employee violating District policy, or state, federal or local laws or regulations. If such an investigation occurs, and the employee refuses, upon request, to supply the username and/or password required to make an investigation, disciplinary action may be taken against the employee, which could include termination or nonrenewal of the employee's contract of employment or service with the District.

Notwithstanding any other provision in this policy, the District reserves the right to view any information about a current or prospective employee that is publicly available on the Internet.

Can employees use personal accounts to communicate with other employees?

Yes. The Policy does not apply to personal social media use. However, the intent of these Guidelines is to support good digital citizenship professionally and personally. Employees who use personal social media should apply appropriate privacy settings to control access to their

Do the Guidelines apply to all District employees or just school-based employees?

The Guidelines apply to all classified, certified, and contracted employees, including employees being paid as support personal for athletic teams, clubs, programs, etc. working in the District. They do not apply to Parent Teacher Organizations, Booster Clubs, or elected officials;

however, as leaders in the District, these groups should model appropriate use and good digital citizenship for students.

How soon do I need to follow this Policy?

The policy was approved by the BPS Board of Education on March 14, 2016. Starting July 1st, the policy is in effect. Changes to social media accounts should be completed by October 1, 2016. Employees can ask clarifying questions via bpsocialmedia@bentonvillek12.org.

What if employees are already using social media for either professional or personal purposes?

Employees currently using social media as part of their professional practice should examine whether their use aligns with the Digital Communication and Social Media Policy, these Guidelines. Any use not consistent with these documents should be altered or amended before October 1, 2016. Questions/suggestions can be sent to bpsocialmedia@bentonvillek12.org to support additional training.

What should employees who want to develop professional social media for their classroom, school or office do?

Employees should:

- Notify their building administrator of their intention to use a professional social media;
- Notify the District's IT Administrator of their intention to use a professional social media site;
- Read and comply with District Policy and these Guidelines;
- Add the District's IT Administrator as a member of the social media platform;
- Add the building's general social media site as a member; and
- Understand and apply the appropriate default privacy and viewing settings for the social media site. For example, we recommend that employees establish groups or pages, rather than individual profiles when using Facebook for educational purposes.

What is the difference between an educational network site and a social media site?

Educational network sites, e.g. Edmodo, Google sites, etc. are considered social media sites and subject to the Policy.

The Guidelines say that the intent is to supplement and not supersede existing district policies. What does this mean?

This means social media use should be in compliance with all district policies and incorporated state and federal laws. Examples include, but are not limited to, the District's prohibitions against discrimination, harassment and bullying and requirements concerning computer use, internet use, confidentiality, intellectual property and copyright – to name a few.

Can employees use personal social media accounts that are professional in nature, such as an employee who runs a book club or leads an extracurricular group not affiliated with the District?

Yes. However, the best practices in the Guidelines should be followed.

What other technology-related guidance exists to guide employees using social media?

The District's Computer Use Policy governs the use of, and access to, the district's network.

Who monitors professional social media sites?

The site administrator and designee in the Central Office.

How should principals address parents who express concerns about their children's use of social media?

Some example responses are:

- Social media presents enhanced learning opportunities for students, teachers, parents and the community by connecting them to each other and the world.
- Learning in a digital world is a 21st Century competency, and students need opportunities to learn safe, appropriate ways to use the available tools.
- The use of technology and digital communication tools is an important component of work-readiness.
- Students need access to digital tools to learn the importance of being good "Digital Citizens" in a world where online interactions carry the same consequences as interactions offline.
- Employers and institutions of higher education examine past social media behavior when making decisions on hiring and acceptance. Developing the understanding that digital interactions are equivalent to face-to-face interactions is a critical component to citizenship in a diverse society.
- Skills learned through the responsible use of social media cover those reported by employers as "very important:" professionalism, oral and written communications, teamwork/collaboration, critical thinking/problem solving, and ethics/social responsibility. Learning and practicing these skills is critical to the integrating into a 21st century workforce.

How can a principal monitor information posted to professional social media sites?

Some possible ways to monitor social media include:

- Maintain a list of all professional social media sites created by staff.
- Become to be a member of all professional social media sites.
- Set up email notifications to alert you when new material is posted.
- Highlight examples of positive appropriate social media usage with staff.

Do I need to be an administrator on every site?

No. It is suggested that the school have an official site that is followed or friended by all the other sites based in the building. Posting rights to this site can be given to employees.

What if a site is blocked?

Currently some social media sites are blocked on the District network. The state is updating content filtering applications that will result in more sites being available for classroom use as long as the use conforms to District policy and Guidelines.

If principals (or their designees) are administrators, does that mean that employees are required to hand over their professional social media username and password?

No. Employees can give the principal or principal's designee access to the site. This provides administrators access to the site via their own username and password.

Are teachers mandated reporters when it comes to online activity?

“School officials” are mandated reporters of suspected child maltreatment if they have reasonable cause to suspect that a child has been subjected to child maltreatment or is being subjected to conditions or circumstances that would reasonably result in child maltreatment.

How should employees respond to friend or follow requests by current district students on their personal social media sites and accounts?

Requests from current students to connect or communicate through a personal social media site should be declined, absent an exemption received by the immediate supervisor for a family or other special relationship.

What if a student is over 18?

The Code of Ethics for Arkansas Educators defines a student as a PreK – 12 student enrolled in an Arkansas school regardless of whether the student is 18 years of age.

What should district administrators and/or their designees responsible for monitoring professional social media do when they discover or receive a report of inappropriate content or activity?

Administrators who discover or receive a report of inappropriate or questionable content posted on a professional social media account should contact the District’s Chief Operations Officer.

Can posting student performance, grading, or disciplinary information be done on professional social media?

No.

Are employees personally responsible for student posts on professional social media sites?

No. However, employees are responsible for ensuring the integrity of the site, and therefore, if an employee views an inappropriate or questionable post on the site, the employee should screenshot the post and report the post to the building administrator. Employees should monitor professional social media sites frequently and act as moderators for content. Students should not be able to post on professional social media sites without teacher approval.