



# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF MANATEE COUNTY

School Support Center  
215 Manatee Ave. W.  
Bradenton, FL 34205

## Staff Social Media Guidelines

The School District of Manatee County (SDMC) allows individual schools and the District Communications, Family and Community Engagement Department to use online social media to improve communication among the district, families, students, staff and other members of the SDMC community. This document contains guidelines to ensure that participants in social media communications understand and follow procedures that will make the use of online social media a positive and productive experience for everyone involved.

### A. Definitions

**“Social media”** include various Internet sites and technological tools that enable users to share information and resources easily. Social media can include text, audio, video, images, podcasts, and other electronically transmitted communications. These media provide information from various published sources and allow for interaction through user-generated content.

**“Technology”** includes the Internet and any device used to access it or otherwise share information electronically, including, but not limited to, computers, notebooks, telephones, cell phones, personal digital assistants, pagers, MP3 players such as iPods, USB drives, wireless routers, or other wireless communication devices.

**“District Technology”** is technology owned or provided by SDMC.

**“Personal Technology”** is any device that is owned by the user or provided by a third party other than the District.

### B. Representative Social Media Sites

These guidelines pertain primarily to social networking sites. Some examples include the following:

- Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)
- Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)
- YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>)
- Instagram (<http://www.instagram.com>)
- Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>)
- Blogs (Web Logs)
- Any District-related social media account or page

### C. Authorization

1. **District Accounts** – A District account on any social media site, including accounts for student clubs, teams, field trips, instructional courses, or other groups or activities under the control of the District administration or a District school must be authorized by the principal and his or her executive director. Staff members maintaining unauthorized accounts will be required to deactivate the account until it is authorized and may be subject to disciplinary action.

**District social media accounts, including all content, are public records. Every posting made to the account must be retained. A system for record retention and response to public records requests is required and must be set up on all District social media pages.** The Communications Department staff will assist with that process prior to authorizing accounts.

For emergency purposes only, each district social media account must name the district Communications Department as an administrator. However, monitoring and managing the content of the account remains the responsibility of the designated content manager and his or her principal.

District-level social media accounts, including District blogs, Facebook and Twitter, will be managed by the Communications, Community and Family Engagement Department.

**2. Affiliated Accounts** - Authorized school social media accounts shall maintain a clear separation from any social media accounts managed by school foundations, booster clubs, or parent-teacher groups or other affiliated organizations. However, a link to school foundation or parent-teacher group accounts is permissible. Principals may be responsible for some content on foundation and parent group accounts, including, but not limited to, directing that District policies regarding fundraisers and fees be properly reflected on social media sites.

**3. District Logo** - The use of the SDMC logo(s) on a social media site must be approved by the Communications Department. For approved logo use, follow **SDMC Branding Guidelines** established by the Communications Department.

**4. Sponsors and Advertising** - Sponsor logos are permissible on school social media pages with the prior approval of the principal. The page also must include or link to contact information for an individual who can provide information about sponsorship.

**5. Disclaimer** – Any approved official presence on social media sites outside of those created and managed by the District Communications Department shall include the following text: “The views expressed on this site do not necessarily reflect the views of the SDMC staff or administration. This site may contain user-created content which is not endorsed by the District. The purpose of this site is (specify the purpose).”

#### **D. Content Management**

Content managers are responsible for monitoring and maintaining authorized social media sites as described below:

**1. Legal compliance** - Content must conform to all applicable state and federal laws, as well as all district and board policies and administrative procedures.

**2. Style** - All district or school authored content should use Standard English grammar, spelling and syntax.

**3. Copyrighted material** - Content must conform to copyright or intellectual property laws and the content manager must secure the expressed consent of all involved parties for the right to distribute or publish recordings, photos, images, video, text, slideshow presentations, artwork or any other copyrighted materials.

**4. Confidential Information** - Social media sites are a form of publication. Therefore employees are prohibited from discussing students by name or by revealing any other information that might identify a student to a third party, including other students, faculty, staff or community members. The prohibition includes grades, classroom performance, behavior and all other confidential information. Staff members may not use images of students, emails, or other personally identifiable student information for personal gain or profit.

**5. Assessment information** - Employees are prohibited from discussing or revealing information about testing or other forms of assessment, including general topics, formats or types of questions asked. This prohibition applies regardless of whether the assessment in question has yet to be administered or has been previously administered.

### **E. Acceptable Use Policy**

Although District staff members enjoy free speech rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to the US Constitution, those rights are subject to certain limitations. The use of District technology is a privilege, not a right.

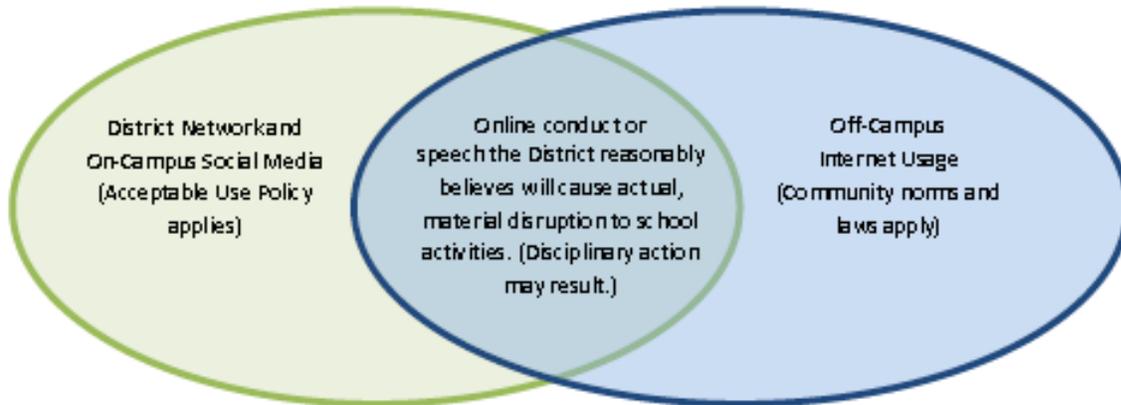
Electronic communication using District technology is governed by the District Acceptable Use Policy. Staff should not expect privacy in the content of personal files on the district's Internet system or other District technology, including email.

District technology may only be used for educational purposes. Use for entertainment, personal blogging, instant messaging, on-line shopping or gaming is prohibited.

Use of personal technology or devices may violate the District Acceptable Use Policy if District officials reasonably believe the conduct or speech will cause actual, material disruption of school activities or interfere with a staff member's ability to perform his or her job duties.

Although off-campus communication is generally unrelated to school business, courts have held that certain inappropriate off-campus communications were connected enough to school activities, students or staff to warrant disciplinary action. The guidelines below and the diagram in Figure 1 are intended to provide staff members with direction for appropriate and ethical use of social media whether it is accessed through District or personal technology.

Figure 1



#### F. Individual responsibilities

1. **Limit On-Duty Use** - Staff members are encouraged to limit their personal technology use during duty hours. Use of personal technology for non-District business should be limited to off-duty time and designated breaks.
2. **Work/Personal Distinction** - Staff members are encouraged to maintain a clear distinction between their personal social media use and any District-related social media sites.
3. **Professional Effectiveness** - District employees must be mindful that any Internet information is ultimately accessible to the world. To avoid jeopardizing their professional effectiveness, employees are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the privacy policies, settings and protections on any social media sites to which they subscribe. Information posted online, despite privacy protections, is easily and often reported to administrators or exposed to District students. Employees may be disciplined for online conduct and/or speech which the District reasonably believes will cause actual, material disruption to school activities.
4. **Friending Students** – Employees should not have online interactions with students on social networking sites outside of those forums dedicated to academic use. District employees’ social networking profiles and personal blogs should not be linked to students’ online profiles. Additionally, District employees should use appropriate discretion when using social networks for personal communications and should limit this activity to off-duty hours and the use of their own electronic communication devices.
5. **Contacting Students Off-Hours** – If an employee needs to contact a district student during off-duty hours using either district-owned communication devices, network services, an Internet access route or those of the employee, the employee should begin by contacting the student’s parent(s) or legal guardian through their district registered phone number. District employees should only contact District students for educational purposes and must never disclose confidential information possessed by the employee by virtue of his or her district employment.

**6. Responsible Online Identity Monitoring** – Employees should monitor their online identity by regularly performing search engine research to track information posted about them online. A simple check may prevent their online profiles from being fraudulently compromised. If unwanted information is posted about an employee, he or she should contact the site administrator to request its removal.

**7. Personal Social Networking and Media Accounts** – Educators must give serious thought to the implications of joining an online social network. Before employees post information to an online social network, they should ask themselves whether they would be comfortable if a “friend” decided to send the information to the employee’s students, students’ parents, or supervisor.

Because online content can be spread in mere seconds to a mass audience, the District encourages employees to ask themselves before posting any information online whether they would be comfortable having the information printed in the newspaper alongside their photo.

**If you would not bring it into the classroom, do not post it online!**

#### **References**

This document was developed by the School District of Manatee County's Communications Department in collaboration with the Sarasota County Schools Information Technology Department and the Office of the Superintendent.

It was adapted with variations from the Staff Social Media Guidelines of the San Diego Unified School District, which developed it in consultation with a consortium of legal, educational and social media experts.

We appreciate the San Diego Unified School District for their support and permission to adapt its Staff Social Media Guidelines for our use.

**Policies:** Policy 7544 – Use of Social Media  
Policy 7540.04 – Staff Technology Acceptable Use and Safety

**Procedures:** SDMC Logo Guidelines

**4/30/19**