

STAFF AND PRIVATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The purpose of this policy is to raise awareness among all staff members about when their private use of social media can cause work-related problems and can even be grounds for disciplinary action.

District Philosophy

The Port Angeles School District Board of Directors recognizes that the rapid growth of social media technologies, including social media platforms such as Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, and Facebook, or texting/SMS technology, combined with their ease of use, make them attractive channels of communication. However, the availability and ease of use of these technologies present a risk of unintended consequences or miscommunication. A staff member's private use of social media can create confusion about one's role as a staff member versus one's role as a private individual, and it can raise questions about professional conduct or respecting the professional boundaries between the staff member and students.

The Board adopts this policy to help staff identify and avoid potential issues. Adoption of this policy should in no way be construed as an attempt to limit the inherent personal communication rights of staff members in their private lives. Rather, this policy is intended to help staff understand, from a wide range of perspectives, the implications of participation in social media and where it may potentially become of concern to the District as an employer.

Responsible Use and Best Practices Generally

Staff members should recognize before they post information to any social media site or platform that there is realistically no such thing as a "private" social media site and that online postings can be permanent even if they are "deleted." The user should always check and recheck privacy settings to protect his or her identity and any confidences. Search engines can turn up posts and pictures years after the publication date, and even "private" comments can be forwarded or copied. Archival systems save information even after posts are deleted.

When using social media, staff members are encouraged to ask themselves whether the content of the message would be acceptable for face-to-face conversation, over the telephone, or in another more personal medium. If not, it is likely not appropriate for use in social media. It also is useful and appropriate to ask whether one would want to see the message published in another public medium, such as a newspaper or billboard, at any time in the future. Similarly, staff members should post only pictures that they would be comfortable sharing with the general public.

These points are intended as constructive suggestions for responsible use and to maintain personal confidences. That stated, however, the Board recognizes that it is up to each individual staff member as to how they utilize social media in their personal lives and how much they share via social media.

District Expectations

In addition to encouraging staff members to consider the recommendations above, the Port Angeles School District Board of Directors establishes the following specific expectations regarding the use by staff members of social media in reference to their employment with the District:

- When a staff member utilizes social media, he or she shall not post confidential or proprietary information about the District, its students, alumni, or fellow employees.
- Use of digital images of students or school operations without District authorization is prohibited. This can include images generated from the school environment or school events.
- It is also recommended that staff members avoid use of other District images on personal social media sites. If such an image is to be used, a disclaimer is appropriate to indicate that the posting is not associated with the District.
- When a staff member uses social media, careful consideration should be given to the implications of texting, friending, linking, or following a member of the District community, or accepting such a communication from another person, especially a student. There is vast potential for misinterpretation of the relationship or for the sharing of protected or personal information. While the Board is not presently adopting a policy that wholly directs how an individual staff member should use social media in the District community, the Board strongly cautions against the possibility of unprofessional behavior that could impact a staff member's standing both at the District and as a professional certificate holder. Good judgment should be used, and District policies on maintaining professional boundaries shall be followed at all times. For instance, any communication of a peer-to-peer nature with a student is of serious concern and is to be avoided, absent a pre-existing relationship independent of the staff member's professional role (*i.e.*, parent, family member, etc.).
- If an individual, including but not limited to a parent of a student or a student, expresses concern related to a staff member's position as a District employee and his or her social media posts, the staff member shall report this to his or her site administrator so that the District can offer appropriate support as the case merits. Despite the Board's respect for personal individual expression via social media outside of the workplace, where postings by staff members present a reasonable possibility of substantially disrupting the educational operations of the school or the experience of a student, or where they create professional concern regarding compliance with District policy or applicable law, these must be reported promptly so that an investigation can be commenced. [*Note: Reporting under this policy does not alter any other independent reporting obligations under District policy or law (mandatory reporting).*]

Employees whose conduct violates this policy may face discipline and/or termination, consistent with the District's policies, acceptable use agreement, and collective bargaining agreements, as applicable.