

SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL NETWORKING

The Hilldale School District (the “district”) recognizes the appropriate use of social media as a method for communicating ideas and information. The forms of electronic and digital communications change rapidly. Social media includes all means of communicating or posting information or content of any nature on the Internet, including but not limited to one’s own or another’s web log or blog, journal or diary, personal web site, social networking or affinity web site, web bulletin board or a chat-room, whether or not associated or affiliated with the district, as well as any other form of electronic communication. This policy addresses common existing forms of electronic and digital communication (e.g., email, texting, blogging, tweeting, posting, etc.) but is intended to cover any existing or new form of electronic or digital communication which utilizes a computer, phone, tablet or other digital or electronic device.

Definitions

“Blog” means an online journal that contains entries or posts that consist of text, links, images, video or other media and is usually between 300-500 words.

“Comment” means a response to an article or social media content submitted by a commenter.

“Copyrights” protect the right of an author to control the reproduction and use of any creative expression that has been fixed in tangible form, such as literary works, graphic works, photographic works, audiovisual works, electronic works and musical works. It is illegal to reproduce and use copyrighted content publicly on the Internet without first obtaining the permission of the copyright owner.

“Hosted content” means text, pictures, audio, video or other information in digital form that is uploaded and resides in the social media account of the author of a social media disclosure. If an employee downloads content off of the Internet, and then uploads it to their own social media account, they are hosting that content. This distinction is important because it is generally illegal to host copyrighted content publicly on the Internet without first obtaining the permission of the copyright owner.

“Professional social media” is a work-related social media activity that is either school-based or non-school based.

“Cyberbullying” means the use of electronic information and communication devices, including, but not limited to email, instant messaging, text messaging, cellular telephone communications, Internet blogs, Internet chat rooms, Internet postings and defamatory websites.

“Social media account” means a personalized presence inside a social networking channel, initiated at will by an individual. YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat TikTok and other social networking channels allow users to sign-up for their own social media account, which they can use to collaborate, interact and share content and status. When a user communicates through a social media account, their disclosures are attributed to their User Profile.

“Social media channels” means blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, social networks, social bookmarking services, user rating services and any other online collaboration, sharing or publishing platform, whether accessed through the web, a mobile device, text messaging, email or other existing or emerging communications platforms.

“Social media disclosures” are blog posts, blog comments, status updated, text message, posts via email, images, audio or video recordings, or any other information made available through a social media channel. Social media disclosures are the actual communications a user distributes through a social media channel, usually by means of their social media account.

“Social networking” or “social media” means interaction with external websites or services based upon participant contributions to the content. Types of social media include social and professional networks, blogs, micro blogs, video or photo sharing and social book marking; and

Official Use of Social Media

The district is responsible for creating and maintaining its “official” online presence. Unless specifically authorized in writing by the Superintendent, no district employee may create an “official” district presence on or in any form of social media, now in existence, or created in the future, or represent themselves as a spokesperson or authorized representative of the district.

Professional Conduct

The district is committed to creating an environment in which all persons can interact in an atmosphere free of all forms of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Therefore, when communicating via social networks, employees are expected to act with honesty, integrity, and respect for the rights, privileges, privacy, and property of others. By doing so, employees will be abiding by applicable laws, school district policy and the core values of the district. The district prohibits abusive or offensive on-line behavior of employees at work or when engaged in work-related activities; likewise, district resources are not to be used in abusive or offensive ways. The district also discourages out-of-school on-line abusive or offensive behavior because of its potential to interfere with and disrupt work and student relationships.

Employees are responsible for the material they publish online as well as the messages they send via computers and wireless telecommunication devices. Any conduct that negatively reflects upon the district, consists of inappropriate behavior, or creates disruption on the part of an employee may expose that employee to disciplinary action up to and including

termination. Inappropriate behavior is defined as any activity that harms students, compromises an employee's objectivity, undermines an employee's authority or ability to maintain discipline among students or work with or around students, is disruptive to the educational environment, or is illegal. Moreover, employees should not engage in personal social media during working hours.

Expectations

District employees are role models and must exemplify ethical behavior in their relationships with students, parents/guardians, patrons, and other staff members. Online activity, including personal online activity, is public and therefore a reflection on the district as an organization. Employees should exercise good judgment and common sense, maintain professionalism, and immediately address inappropriate behavior or activity discovered on district networks. Inappropriate behavior or activity should be immediately communicated to a direct supervisor. The following should inform and guide employee judgment and actions:

1. The line between professional and personal relationships can become blurred; therefore, district employees should always exercise discretion and maintain professionalism when communicating with students via computers or wireless telecommunication devices. Employees should limit this type of communication with students to matters concerning a student's education or extra-curricular activities for which the staff member has assigned responsibility. Excessive school-related messaging or other social media communication to an individual student should be avoided and an employee should only engage in social media communication with a student for a school-related purpose and with the consent of the employee's supervisor and the student's parent/guardian.
2. District employees are prohibited from engaging in private digital exchanges with students, and should only communicate with groups or in such a manner that the communication can be publicly viewed.
3. Photos of and videos featuring students should not be posted on social media without the informed consent of a parent/guardian. For personal protection, employees should never take a photo of an individual student.
4. Photos and videos of fellow employees should not be posted without their express permission.
5. Group student photos may be submitted to a principal or the superintendent for inclusion on official district accounts.
6. Students should not be cited, obviously referenced, or depicted in images without proper written approval of the student's parent/guardian; the confidential details of these individuals should never be disclosed.

7. Externally communicating any confidential information or information related to the district that is not intended for public dissemination is always forbidden and may be grounds for termination and legal action. Public information will be released through the superintendent or designee.
8. Copyright and fair use laws must be respected at all times. Trademarks such as logos, slogans, and digital content such as art, music, or photographs, may require permission from the copyright owner. It is the responsibility of the employee to seek and obtain written permission for any such trademarked content.
9. District employees are discouraged from sharing content or comments containing the following when it is directed at a colleague, parent, student or citizen of the State of Oklahoma or the United States:
 - a. Obscene and/or sexual content or links to obscene and/or sexual content;
 - b. Abusive and bullying language or tone;
 - c. Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity; and
 - d. Disclosure of information which a school district and its employees are required to keep confidential by law, regulation or internal policy.

Content or comments of the type listed above are especially concerning when directed at or exchanged with a student and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment and, possible referral to law enforcement or licensing and certification bodies.

10. The district is not interested in limiting an employee's ability to participate in personal social networks with a personal email address outside of the workplace. However, what is published on these sites should never be attributed to the district. Employees should make it clear that they are speaking for themselves. Furthermore, even if you do not mention the district, that information is readily ascertainable and could reflect poorly upon the employee and the district. Employees are encouraged to use common sense when making online comments, even if they intend for those to be purely personal in nature.
11. Employees are cautioned to be aware of their association with the district online social networks. If an employee identifies themselves as a district employee, the employee should ensure their profile, photographs, and related content are consistent with how the employee wishes to present themselves with colleagues, students, parents/guardians, and others.

Personal Use of Social Networking Sites (e.g., Facebook, TikTok, Twitter and Instagram, etc.)

1. Employees are personally responsible for all comments/information and hosted content published online. Employees should always be mindful that social media posts like tweets and status updates will be visible and public for an extended time.

2. By posting comments, having online conversations, etc. on social media sites, employees should remember that they are broadcasting to the world; accordingly, they should be aware that even with the strictest privacy settings, what one “says” online should be within the bounds of professional discretion. Comments expressed via social networking pages under the guise of a “private conversation” may still be shared by others in a more public domain.
3. Comments related to the district, its employees, and district events, should always meet the highest standards of professional discretion. Employees should always assume that every one of their postings is in the public domain.
4. Before posting personal photographs, employees should first consider how the posted images reflect on an employee’s professionalism.
5. District employees are not permitted to solicit or accept “friend” requests from enrolled district students on any personal social media account. This includes student accounts and district employee personal accounts.
6. District employees are not permitted to encourage students enrolled in the district to create social media accounts of any kind.
7. All district employees who choose to utilize Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, Instagram or any other social media platform to provide classroom or extracurricular activity information to students and parents must create a “teacher” page, and posts must be exclusively about classroom or school activities.

Accountability

All staff are expected to serve as positive ambassadors for the district and appropriate role models for students. Failure to do so could put an employee in violation of district policy. This guidance and emphasis on personal judgment is provided because violation of district policies and procedures may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment. All employees who have reason to believe that their on-line conduct has generated public or media attention are expected to immediately report their activity and the attention generated to their supervisor.

Staff-Student Relationships

Employees are prohibited from establishing personal relationships with students that are unprofessional and thereby inappropriate. Examples of unprofessional relationships include, but are not limited to: employees fraternizing or communicating with students as if employees and students were peers, e.g. writing personal letters or emails; “texting” students; calling students on a cell phone or allowing students to make personal calls to them unrelated to homework or class work; sending personal or inappropriate pictures to students; discussing or revealing to students personal matters about their private lives or inviting students to do the same (other than professional counseling by an assigned school counselor); and engaging in sexualized dialogue, whether in person, by phone, via the Internet or in writing.

Employees who post information on Facebook, Twitter or other similar platforms that include inappropriate personal information such as, but not limited to, provocative photographs, sexually explicit messages, use of alcohol, drugs or anything students are prohibited from doing must understand that if students, parents or other employees obtain access to such information, the employee's actions will be investigated by district officials; if warranted, an employee will be disciplined up to and including termination, depending on the severity of the offense, and may have their case forwarded to the Oklahoma State Department of Education for review and possible sanctions.

Distribution of Policy

This policy shall be distributed to all employees via the district's e-mail system at the beginning of each school year and at the time of hiring to all new employees hired after the start of the school year.

Reference: 74 O.S. §840-8.1