

SUBJECT: SOCIAL MEDIA AND ONLINE COMMUNICATIONS

The Levittown School District recognizes the importance of teachers, students and parents engaging, collaborating, learning, and sharing in digital learning environments as a part of a comprehensive approach to 21st century learning. The District also acknowledges that social media is an integral part of our staff's, students' and school district community's daily lives, both in and out of the classroom. While the First Amendment and related laws and court decisions protect a broad spectrum of online speech, they also clearly provide that when one's online posts or other communications disrupt school operations, the conduct may lose its protection and subject individuals, including employees, to disciplinary action. Therefore, it is important to create an atmosphere of trust and individual accountability, keeping in mind that online posts and interactions made by the District's teachers and students are a reflection on the entire district.

With this in mind, the Board of Education has developed this policy to provide direction for instructional employees, students and the District community when participating in online and social media activities. In addition, all online and social media activities must comply with the requirements of the Acceptable Use Policy.

Definitions:

Online – Any virtual or electronic network/space that is accessible by multiple individuals via the internet, intranet or data-based connection.

Social Media – forms of electronic communication through which users create or participate in online communities to share information, ideas, personal or group messages and other visual, audio and written content.

Social Media Platforms/Sites – types of online social media communities including, but not limited to, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, SnapChat, VSCO, LinkedIn, Messenger, Pinterest, Yelp, Google, Wordpress, YouTube, blogs; *etc.*

Board of Education – the body of officials elected to serve the Levittown School District; references to the Board of Education include all names, logos, buildings, images and entities under the authority of the Board of Education.

Cloud-Based Services – virtual data storage and sharing services, including but not limited to, Dropbox, Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, Outlook, GMail, digital photo storage sites; *etc.*

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GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL MEDIA ACTIVITY

Generally:

1. Unless authorized to do so by the Superintendent or designee, social media posts are not to be identified as official District communications.
2. Employees are encouraged, and, in some cases, required (*e.g.*, pursuant to FERPA), to obtain consent before using or mentioning the names of Board of Education members, employees, students or other members of the District community on social networking sites.
3. Employees are encouraged to keep their personal social media activities/accounts private from students, so as to maintain the same professional boundaries online as are maintained in the classroom.
4. Unless authorized to do so by the Superintendent or designee, employees may not use the Board of Education's logo or trademarks on non-work-related posts. Please note that this prohibition extends to the use of logos or trademarks associated with individual schools, programs or teams of the school district.
5. Employees are individually responsible for their personal posts on social media. Employees may be sued by other employees, parents or others, by any individual that views an employee's social media posts as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous or creating a hostile work environment. As these activities are outside the scope of employment, employees are personally liable for related claims.
6. Employees are required to comply with all Board of Education policies and procedures with respect to the use of computer equipment, networks or electronic devices when accessing social media sites.
7. Any access to personal social media activities while on school property, during working hours, or using District equipment must comply with the District's policies and may not interfere with an employee's duties at work.
8. If an employee is unsure about the confidential nature of information he/she is considering posting, then he/she is strongly encourage to consult with his/her supervisor prior to posting the information.
9. Board members are advised to be cognizant of their simultaneous participation on social media pages/discussions/groups, as this may trigger NYS Open Meetings Law obligations.
10. Employees and other school district officials must consult with the Superintendent or designee before deleting posts, as certain information may be required to be maintained pursuant to NYS Records Retention and Disposition Schedule ED-1 or pursuant to other laws, rules or regulations.

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11. Violation of the Board's policy or administrative regulations concerning the use of social media by District employees may lead to disciplinary action up to and including the termination of employment, consistent with applicable collective bargaining agreements, state and federal law.

12. Violation of the Board's policy or administrative regulations concerning the use of social media by students, parents or District community members may lead to legal or disciplinary action, consistent with applicable state and federal law.

Prohibited conduct:

The Board of Education does not condone, and will take necessary action, when social media and online posts and other communications violate the law, Board policies or other school rules and regulations including, but not limited to, instances in which online posts/communications:

- 1) Are harassing, discriminate against others, or otherwise violate New York State or federal law;
- 2) Are perceived as intimidating or bullying or violate/potentially violate the Dignity for All Students Act ("DASA");
- 3) Create a hostile environment for staff or students;
- 4) Contain personally identifiable information about students that is protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA");
- 5) Contain information about an individual that is protected from disclosure by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ("HIPAA") or other law;
- 6) Significantly disrupt school district operations;
- 7) Contain sexual content;
- 8) Are libelous/defamatory;
- 9) Encourage illegal activity;
- 10) Are threatening or abusive;
- 11) Contain information that may compromise the health and safety of staff or students; or 12) Contain information or graphics that are subject to a copyright or trademark without first securing prior permission to post the material.

Additional Guidelines for District-Sponsored Social Media Activity:

1.. Prior to creating a District-sponsored social media account/page, written permission must be obtained from the Superintendent or Building Principal, as appropriate. This includes social media accounts/pages created for educational, extracurricular or other District-related purposes.

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2. All user-names and passwords for District-sponsored social media accounts/pages must be provided to the Superintendent and Building Principal.

3. Once approved by the Superintendent or building Principal, if an employee wishes to use Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or any other social media site to communicate meetings, activities, games, responsibilities, announcements; *etc.*, for an official school-based club, activity, organization, or sports team (hereafter, a “school-based group”), the employee must also comply with the following rules:

- Access to the site may only be permitted for educational purposes related to the club, activity, organization or team.
- The account must be a private account, access to which is limited only to participants in the school-based group, including parents of student participants and District officials.
- The account must be consistently monitored. Any activity that violates Board policy, including this policy or other laws, rules or regulations, must be immediately reported to the Superintendent or Building Principal, as appropriate.
- Access to the account must be approved and regulated by the supervising/monitoring employee. Where possible, the employee will be responsible for inviting and approving the individuals who are permitted to have access to the group/page.
- When Facebook is used as the social media site, members will not be established as “friends,” but as members of the group list. When other social media sites are used, the employee will establish a similar parameter based on the functionality of the social media site utilized.
- Employees are required to maintain appropriate professional boundaries in the establishment and maintenance of the page/group.

4. Employees are required to comply with all Board of Education policies and procedures and all applicable laws, rules and regulations regarding the use of computer/electronic equipment, networks and devices when accessing District-sponsored social media sites.

5. Employees may not use District-sponsored social media for private financial gain, political, commercial, advertisement or solicitation purpose

Re-Adopted: July 7, 2021