



**ACCEPTABLE USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY
RESOURCES
SOCIAL MEDIA**

Description:

Social media is an important digital communication tool and when used effectively and responsibly, supports student achievement, parent engagement and stakeholder involvement. As students learn to use social media, it is important to empower them to build strong online safety skills and to establish an appropriate and positive digital footprint. One of the best ways to do this is to model the responsible and professional use of social media.

For the purposes of these guidelines, social media refers to online technology tools that enable people and organizations to communicate and share information and resources over the Internet. Users provide information but can also interact with each other using social media. Examples include, but are not limited to, blogs, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, X (Twitter) and YouTube. Using this definition, the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board (HSCDSB) environment can also be viewed as social media.

Maintaining professional boundaries in all forms of communication, technology-related or not, is vital to preserving public trust and appropriate professional relationships. Even on seemingly less formal social media platforms, these boundaries must be maintained. HSCDSB staff and trustees are expected to uphold professional standards when using social media. This not only ensures the safe and appropriate use of these tools but also positions them as positive examples for our students. These guidelines will convey HSCDSB expectations and help members of the HSCDSB community to use their professional judgment to identify and avoid potential risks.

HSCDSB recognizes that the use of social media is optional and that staff members may use social media to support their instructional practice and develop Professional Learning Networks (PLN).

Authorization:

Board authorization is not required for staff to open a personal social media account. Employees planning to use social media for instructional purposes (e.g., classroom Facebook account or blog) should inform their principal or supervisor of their intended

use. Classroom social media accounts are seen as extensions of the school and must reflect the Mission, Vision and Values of BHSCDSB. If a concern is raised about a classroom account, the principal or supervisor will address any activity that may negatively impact the school, staff and students.

HSCDSB reserves the right to delete comments that are considered:

- spam
- advertising or promotion of services, products or political organizations
- off-topic or disruptive
- advocating illegal activity
- infringement of copyrights or trademarks
- violation of any HSCDSB policies
- personal attacks, insults or threatening language
- private, personal information published without consent
- hyperlinks to material not related to the discussion

HSCDSB reserves the right to ask staff to delete accounts if they go against the guidelines, or do not reflect the Board's Mission, Vision and Values.

Board/Classroom Social Media Accounts: Classroom social media accounts are seen as extensions of the Board and must reflect the Mission, Vision and Values of HSCDSB. In response to the ministry's Policy/Program Memorandum 128, school boards are required to restrict access to all social media platforms on school networks and school devices.

If HSCDSB staff would like to post on their schools' social media platforms, they can do so prior to the instructional school day beginning or after it ends.

Social media posts should not be posted by school staff during school hours unless they have been scheduled to be posted. If staff would like posts to go up during the instructional school day, they can be sent to the Board's Communications Officer to be posted.

Staff using social media accounts must provide the Board Communications Officer and principal with the username and password. Principals must notify the Board's Communications Officer of all school-associated social media accounts in operation and provide the name and contact information for the individual who is responsible for managing each account.

When using social media, staff should be mindful of algorithms and should not post one after another. It is suggested that posts should be scheduled throughout the day.

Personal vs. Professional:

Every time people communicate, whether it's in person or on social media, public opinion is shaped about the individuals, their profession, their school, their board and public education. Statements like, "Posts are my own and don't reflect my employer's views," don't hold true for educators.

A high standard of judgment is expected of HSCDSB staff when using a personal social media account. Inappropriate content posted on a personal social media account may result in discipline. As such, staff should use sound judgment and due care when using social media while on and off duty.

- Maintain a sense of professionalism at all times—in your personal and professional lives.
- The Board strongly advises against using a blended personal and professional account. Staff are encouraged to maintain a clear distinction between their personal and professional social media use and should have two separate accounts for these purposes. When identifying yourself as an HSCDSB employee, be conscientious that any post made can be associated with your employer.
- Social media users are accountable for their perceived endorsements (i.e., likes, tags, reposting), comments and opinions. These interactions should be limited and done with care.
- Staff should communicate with students for educational purposes only and avoid or limit sharing personal information with students of HSCDSB.
- *Staff must not communicate with students over social media.* Texting students is inappropriate, whether for personal or educational purposes.
- *Staff must not initiate 'friend' or 'follow' requests from students or accept student friend or follow requests on personal accounts.*
- Posting images or content related to drug, alcohol and/or tobacco use cannot happen on classroom, department and professional accounts, and is discouraged on personal accounts.
- If you have a personal social media account that students become aware of, refer them back to the educational account for discussion rather than permitting personal or private messages.
- Staff must avoid making impulsive, inappropriate or heated comments and should not engage in hostile interactions with other users on social media.

Professional Boundaries:

Maintaining professional boundaries on social media is critical to sustaining public trust and ensuring relationships with students remain professional. Remember that, on social media, the world is watching.

- All online dialogue and interactions with students should be for educational purposes only.
- Employees' social media interactions should be professional and reflect the Board's Mission Vision and Values.
- Employees should be mindful of all equity and inclusivity-related board policies and the Ontario Human Rights Code when posting content.
- All HSCDSB-related social media interaction must be formal, courteous and professional in tone, reflecting the same rigorous professional atmosphere as in a classroom setting.
- Posts should be positive; engaging in negative or critical conversations online is to be avoided.
- Reposts, likes and favorites are perceived as endorsements. These interactions should be limited and done with care.

Privacy and Confidentiality:

Safety is the overriding concern with regard to information posted online. The privacy and confidentiality of student information must be respected at all times. Breaches of privacy and confidentiality can occur with respect to the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and board policies and procedures. Employees must:

- Always be mindful of the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and Privacy and Management of Personal Information Procedure when using social media. It is important to respect the privacy and confidentiality of students at all times.
- Familiarize themselves with the social media tool's privacy settings. Settings can change without notice and must be checked frequently. This often occurs when platforms are updated.
- Ensure privacy settings are appropriate and protect the privacy and confidentiality of students and their work.
- Never disclose confidential information about the school, students and colleagues. Particular care must be taken with students for whom the principal has identified custody/safety concerns.
- For safety and security reasons, pictures of classrooms or the school environment must not be shared on staff's personal social media accounts. All

schools must obtain written informed consent from parents for the use of their child's image or any identifying information, including its use on official HSCDSB-associated social media. This consent is obtained via HSCDSB's *Identification of Students for School-Related Activities Form* at the time of registration and managed by the principal. The consent form does not provide staff with permission to post images or identifying information of students on their personal accounts, and staff must refrain from doing so.

- Do not post personal information about a student on social media, including student names, locations, age and grade, etc. Students' pictures may be included, but the student's parents/guardians must give informed consent. This includes but is not limited to blogs, student work, individual and group photographs, videos featuring the student, or other identifying information.
- Ensure that events such as school excursions (where students are leaving school or board premises on a school-sponsored activity) are not posted prior to the event. Posts can go up after the event has passed. However, vague posts that do not include the time and location of the excursion are permitted (e.g., Grade 9 Science Trip coming soon).
- Understand that everything posted can be altered and shared, even if an account is anonymous. Comments expressed privately between social media users can be shared in a more public domain, even with privacy settings set to high.
- Events such as Family BBQs, book fairs, school paint nights, etc., should be shared internally through School Messenger or Aspen, Events that are specially for school families should not be posted outside of the school community.

Photos and Student Work:

The "Identification of Students for School-Related Activities Form" that is completed by parents or guardians at the time of registration covers social media. Elementary and secondary students who have signed forms in their Ontario Student Record (OSR) can have their pictures and schoolwork posted on social media.

Employees must ensure that:

- Online tagging photos and videos featuring students should not be posted on social media without the informed consent of a parent/guardian. Photos and posts are tagged with care; this is especially true of photos posted of others.
- Student work is not posted on social media without the informed consent from students' parents/guardians.
- Students/parents/guardians are informed of the intention to post images, videos, and/or student work online. The consent form must include exactly what will be posted.

- Group photos (e.g., a sports team or musical group) are used with the informed consent from everyone in the photograph.
- As a courtesy, verbal consent is obtained from any adult (e.g., teacher, parent, volunteer, other board staff member) whose photo, video footage and/or work is posted on social media. Exceptions include images of administrators and trustees that are taken during the course of their employment or photos taken at public events where there is no expectation of privacy. Consent is not required for photos and videos that are taken at public meetings and/or events or is used by community news outlets.

Who to “Friend” and “Follow”:

Staff should not have online interactions with students on social media outside of forums/platforms dedicated to educational use. This is consistent with the advice provided in the Ontario College of Teachers Professional Advisory: Maintaining Professionalism - Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media.

Employees should not issue or accept student friend requests or follow individual students on social media.

Professional Hours:

Social media operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This doesn't mean you have to. Monitoring and replying at any time of the day or night sets up an expectation that you will always do so. Employees are encouraged to:

- Establish “professional office hours” and share them with students and parents so that they know if and when responses to questions will be posted on social media.
- Link to a social media disclaimer to inform the public of the general monitoring of the account. Office hours should be available on professional social media accounts and be strictly adhered to. See sample social media disclaimer at the end of this document.
- Keep student safety and supervision a top priority. Staff can post to social media before and after the instructional day, only if it is for educational purposes and if student safety can be maintained.

Maintenance and Monitoring Responsibilities:

At the discretion of administration and management, school social media accounts may be run by one or more school staff members. Students should not be posting to social media. Students can create social media posts that can be reviewed by a staff member, but all social posts must be sent out or scheduled by the approved staff member. Communication sent out via social media accounts should have a consistent voice and

be positive in tone. It is important that staff who create their own personal, professional, classroom and/or school social media accounts monitor these accounts with some regularity, at a frequency determined by them. This means that individual staff members are responsible for the accounts they maintain. Just like school websites, some accounts may be more extensive and more frequently updated than others based on school priorities. Best practice, however, would be that an official school account be updated regularly.

If possible, even five minutes a day spent on an account ensures it is considered active and effective. Many social media experts believe that logging into accounts once a day, if even for five minutes, is advisable. In this way, you can respond to questions and remove posts that are inappropriate and contrary to the HSCDSB's Mission Statement. Employees are reminded that:

- Posts and comments of an inappropriate nature or that contain personal or irrelevant information should be removed/deleted promptly, if permitted by the tool.
- In some cases, it may be necessary to report a post or comment to an administrator for investigation. Please use professional judgment in this regard. If a behaviour would be reported at school, it should be reported similarly if it occurs online.
- Privacy settings should be set so that employers are notified if tagged or mentioned in photos or posts. Remove tags that may reflect negatively.
- Social media notifications should be forwarded to an email account to monitor what is being said without logging into social media accounts.
- School administrators and Board Communications Officer will have access to all school social media accounts. Board-secure email accounts should be used to register accounts.

Duty of Care:

- There are concerns about personal duty of care in terms of monitoring social media when a student identifies that they are in crisis. All of the expectations and duties of educators apply with respect to conduct, responding to a child in need of protection or in crisis, specifically regarding bullying, or activities that would be actionable through progressive discipline.
- While staff and administrators are vigilant with respect to students in crisis, it is important for the safety of students and legal liability that employees clearly state the supports that should and should not be expected through social media. There is no expectation that a school, classroom, department or personal social media

account is monitored 24/7. It is important that this information is communicated to potential users. School accounts must have a social media disclaimer—a paragraph or two that defines when the account is monitored and what to do if help is needed. See “Sample Social Media Disclaimer” at the end of this document.

Sample SOCIAL MEDIA DISCLAIMER

The @HSCDSBX, Facebook and Instagram accounts are administered by staff at HSCDSB. We do not monitor this account 24/7.

We update and monitor this account intermittently throughout the school day--from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. At times, the accounts may be used before and after these times to communicate about **urgent issues** or respond to inquiries from members of the public.

While we aim to engage in open conversation, we also ask that posts are respectful of our board community and are consistent with our Mission Statement. Individuals who do not follow the social media guidelines will have their posts removed, and/or be blocked from the sites.

We welcome your comments and questions on social media, but before you do so, please ensure you do not include personal information or photos of others without their consent.

For official correspondence, please contact communications@hscdsb.on.ca or call 705-945-5666.