

The Norwalk Board of Education recognizes that social media sites serve a dual purpose for employees. In their private capacities, employees (which includes certified and non-certified staff, coaches and extracurricular advisors) use these sites to communicate with friends and family, and to exercise their right to engage in free and public discussions. In their professional capacities, employees use social media sites to facilitate communication among groups of students or members of the school community to further the instructional program and the interests of approved programs and extracurricular activities.

As used in this Policy, the term “social media” shall mean and refer to any web-based, so-called “cloud” based or other electronic forum in which individuals (whether by invitation, use of a specified log-in protocol or otherwise open to the public) can communicate with other (whether directly or through posting to a message board, blog or other forum), and shall include (but not be limited to) Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and similar websites..

Employees of the Norwalk Public Schools who engage in any public communication, including social media, should be aware that any use which interferes with the educational mission of the District, breaches confidentiality obligations of District employees, insults or demeans students or other employees, or harms the goodwill and reputation of the District in the community is prohibited.

An employee may not use any District-sponsored social media communications in a manner that misrepresents personal views as those of the Board of Education, individual school or school district, or in a manner that could construed as such.

Social media sites may be used to facilitate communication among groups of students or members of the school community to further the instructional program. Employees are expected to conduct all social media communications in accordance with the following guidelines and as they would in any professional situation:

A. Use of Social Media in Classrooms, by Athletic Teams and by Extracurricular Advisors

1. Information about the use of any social media should be included in the classroom syllabus, team rules or extracurricular information, and department supervisors and school administration should be aware of what social media tools are being used.
2. Teachers and staff, as well as all employees, must ensure that the social media tools they are using are appropriate and comport with professional standards for the students with whom they are interacting. .
3. Teachers and staff should establish clear rules and expectations and a code of conduct for all network participants. Just as in the classroom setting, online rules should be established to foster an atmosphere of respect, trust, and clear professional boundaries.
4. Parents should be informed of the social media tools being used, how their children are being contacted online, and the expectations for appropriate behavior.
5. Teacher should treat social media as an extension of the classroom, and should weigh every posting for how it affects their effectiveness as teachers.

B General Guidelines and Privacy Issues

1. Employees should be aware that they will be identified as working for and representing the school in what they do and say online.
2. Employees should not discuss students or coworkers publicly.
3. Teachers and employees must keep all student information private.
4. Users must pay close attention to the site's security setting and allow only approved participants access to the site.
5. If an employee learns of information on a social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines, or that suggests that potential for violence or self-harm by a student, that employee must report that information as required by law and District policy.

C. Communications with Students

1. Communications with students should be professional and appropriate within the context of the teacher/student, advisor/advisee or coach/athlete relationship. It shall be deemed inappropriate for a teacher or administrator to "friend" a student on social networking sites such as "Facebook" or otherwise "follow" a student on sites such as Twitter.
2. The use of individualized text messaging, or other means of communication directly with an individual student utilizing SMS or MMS services is deemed inappropriate. However, so-called "broadcast" text messages to all members of a class, club, team or other extracurricular activity, provided those communications comport with this policy and the appropriate professional standards of conduct, are not prohibited. This provision is subject to the following exceptions: (a) communication with relatives and (b) if an emergency situation requires one-on-one communication with a student, provided that the District employee notifies his/her supervisor as soon as possible so that the parent can be informed about the one-on-one contact and the reason for the exception.

Legislative authority:

Children's Internet Protection Act ("CIPA"), Pub.L. No. 106-554

24 CFR Section 54.520 (certifications required for internet safety compliance)

Policy Enacted: 9/3/13