

File: INJDB**EMPLOYEE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

For purposes of this policy, "social media" means any internet-based messaging or communication system, where users primarily produce and contribute to the content. Social Media include, but are not limited to, social or professional networking websites/apps, wikis, blogs, virtual worlds, image-sharing websites/apps, and video-sharing websites/apps.

Lack of reference to a specific social media website/app (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) or means of electronic communication (e.g. computer, cell phone, etc.) throughout this policy does not limit its extent or applicability.

All other policies of the district, including, but not limited to Equal Employment Practices, Confidentiality, Bullying and Harassment, the Employee Code of Conduct and the Acceptable Use Policy, apply to online conduct, including engagement in social media. Employees are required to uphold the principles of respect for the individual, dignity, honesty, professionalism, concern for and protection of children, security of intellectual property, accuracy, and safety in all interactions, in-person or on-line.

Requirements and Prohibitions

All electronic communications with students and families by school faculty or staff members must be made through the Sharon Public School Department approved communication systems including; SPS email system, SPS broadcast communications system, district-sponsored web sites or learning management systems, or a tool that has been explicitly authorized by the Superintendent of Schools or his/her designee.

Employees are prohibited from initiating or accepting any person-to-person social media connection requests (e.g. "friending" on Facebook) from current SPS students of any age. Employees are discouraged from connecting to social media groups that are generated by and/or maintained by students. Employees are discouraged from communicating with students directly without copying another adult. Employees are discouraged from connecting personally to parents of current or prospective students because of the inherent conflicts of interest that may arise at any time during a parent's connection to a school. For the purposes of communicating school-related business, employees should not engage in private messaging with students or parents using social media tools.

Employees are prohibited from exchanging personal address, telephone or email contact information with current SPS students of any age without the explicit permission of the Superintendent, Principal or his/her designee.

The Superintendent or Principal may authorize non-SPS-sponsored communication or sharing of personal social media information in situations where student safety would be improved by communication by those means or where the permission of the parent/guardian has been given (and the parent/guardian is included on the communication(s)). Exceptions to this rule are also made for staff and students who are family members or who have an established family relationship.

Coaches and club/activity advisors are prohibited from exchanging personal telephone or email contact information with students without prior approval of the Athletic Director and/or Principal. All electronic or telephone contact by coaches and club/activity advisors with students shall be sent to all team members

(inclusive of non-social media methods), except for messages that would compromise confidential information, such as medical, social, or academic privacy matters. The Athletic Director and/or the Principal will be kept apprised of all digital communications from coaches.

The district requires confidential information to be protected at all times and to be disclosed only pursuant to school policy or as otherwise required by law. No contributions to social media may contain any confidential information about students or staff members.

Employees may not contribute content to social media that could be considered a representation from or statement by the Sharon Public Schools. Employees representing groups affiliated with the Sharon Public Schools must fill out a request to have their social media account legitimately affiliated with the district (Policy INJDC).

The School Department retains the right to monitor its internal technology systems for inappropriate use. Violations of this policy may result in discipline, up to and including termination of employment.

The first duty of any staff member is to ensure the health and safety of students. The School Committee acknowledges that from time to time a student may contact a trusted staff member in a crisis or other unpredictable situation, using a means of personal communication prohibited by this policy. If, in the sound judgment of the staff member, any of the policies presented here need to be broken in order to ensure the immediate well-being of a student, s/he should act accordingly in the best interest of the student. The matter should then be brought to the attention of the building administrator, or his/her designee in such matters, as soon as possible afterward. Every effort to reestablish normal communications should subsequently be made.

Guidelines for Using Social Media

The Superintendent and the school principals shall have staff members annually review the employee handbook which includes detailed information about this policy. These guidelines include the following:

1. When communicating online or interacting in any social network, employees should assume that what is written or posted will be neither private nor temporary.
2. Employees should understand the privacy settings and policies of sites in which they participate, including who owns the rights to information and images posted, and whether information and images may be further promulgated by another party. Reading and understanding privacy notices of any site used is the responsibility of the user and is an important practice to model for students.
3. Employees should err on the side of caution when interacting online, remaining aware that any online activities are not private and may be visible to past, current, or prospective students or colleagues, parents, and community members, and thus reflect (positively or negatively) directly or indirectly on the school district, affecting current students and community members.
4. Employees should be mindful that the uneven power dynamics of a school, in which adults have implied authority over current and former students, continues to shape those relationships after the end of the school day and year, and even after graduation. Employees must act in a manner that always respects and never exploits the power inherent in these relationships.

5. Employees must use good judgment when making and/or accepting connection requests to or from school colleagues. Employees in supervisor/subordinate relationships are particularly encouraged to use caution. Because of the potential for both parties to feel awkward or pressured to accept the request, the work environment may be adversely impacted. Such interactions can generate conflicts of interest, impressions of unequal treatment or discrimination, or harassment complaints.
6. Except for class-related use, employees are expected to limit their use of social media to hours outside of the school day, as those hours are defined in the Employee Handbook.
7. Employees should refrain from posting content about anything related to legal matters, litigation, or employment negotiations in which the District is engaged, or any parties with whom the school may be in litigation or negotiations. This policy is not intended to limit the ability of Teachers Association members to share, among members and their professional representatives, factual or logistic information about negotiations in which they are involved.
8. Employees should refrain from knowingly posting on their own social media sites photographs, videos, or other images of other school employees, students, parents, or other school-community members without their written permission and, in the case of minor students, the express permission of the Superintendent or Principal.
9. Because of differential student access to social media, no school-related communication should be conducted using social media without also being conducted in ways accessible to other students. Staff members and coaches should assume that using a social medium for important communications could mean unintentionally leaving student(s) out. Communication with an individual member, or a defined subgroup of a group, through the school email systems, are sometimes necessary. For example, a coach might need to communicate only with an injured player, or a club advisor might need to communicate something to the club officers. Except for cases like these, teachers, coaches and advisors should strive for parity in all communications with students.
10. Many social media-like online learning environments, such as Schoology, Edline, and Google Suite for Education, are sanctioned for use in the Sharon Schools. It is important that teachers be able to employ technological resources that will enhance teaching and learning in schools. Because this policy cannot foresee such tools that have yet to be developed, it must allow for exploration and deployment of new tools by staff members. The use of any new social media-based technology, however, should comply with the policies and guidelines presented above. Additionally, use of any significantly new social medium or social media-like resource should be brought to the attention of the building principal so that school administrators can evaluate its appropriateness.
11. Employees must be careful not to represent the views of the Sharon Schools. For example, a staff member shares views as a member of the K-12 community, not as a formal representative of the Sharon Schools. Employees should use a disclaimer on their site or profile similar to this: *"The views expressed here are mine and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Sharon Public Schools."*
12. Employees should be aware that they are legally liable for what they post on their own site and on the sites of others.

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