

## **Meriwether County Schools**

### **Social Media Guidelines for District Employees**

Meriwether County Schools recognizes many of our staff, students, parents and community members are active social media users. As a school district, we are also incorporating social media as part of our communications strategy. The purpose of these guidelines is to help participate online in a respectful, relevant way that protects reputation and the reputation of Meriwether County Schools, and respects the relationship among employees, students, parents and community members.

For the purpose of this document, social media includes, but is not limited to, social networking and media sharing sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Flickr, Tumblr, and YouTube. It also includes blogs, comments on web sites, discussion forums, responses to media stories and any other activity involving connecting or communicating with others.

The guidelines complement, but do not replace, any existing policies regarding the use of technology, computers, e-mail and the Internet that are in place at Meriwether County Schools.

#### **Your Personal Responsibility:**

We encourage responsible participation in social networking sites, subject to existing policies, including, but not limited to, those concerning non-discrimination, anti-harassment, anti-bullying, and copyright/fair use. All employees are expected to serve as positive ambassadors for our schools and to remember they are role models to students in this community. We ask carefully consider the public forum are participating in and act in a way that properly represents both professional reputation and Meriwether County Schools.

Express ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. Seek to build trust and responsibility in relationships. Avoid insulting others, including students, staff, parents, our extended school community, or other school districts. Do not use racial slurs, innuendos, obscenity or other inappropriate content. Avoid posting, sharing, commenting, or otherwise engaging in rumors or unsupported information.

Represent the District, students, and parents serve in the best light. Posts and comments should help build and support the school community. Employees are responsible for what post. Communications that would be deemed inappropriate or actionable if they occurred inside or outside the classroom do not become acceptable merely because they are made online. Always bear in mind once posted, cannot be taken back.

Specific Guidelines to Consider:

- Use common sense when posting online. While these guidelines are in no way intended to limit or infringe upon rights to free speech, it remains good practice to never post anything that would embarrass you or Meriwether County Schools, or would call your professional reputation into question.
- You are personally responsible for the content you publish online. Content includes personal comments, links, photographs, audio or video, and content created by other users you choose to share or re-post.
- Any content you publish will be public for a long time. Not only can your content show up in Google and other search engines, but the FTC allows private corporations to store publicly accessible Facebook posts for a period of seven years to be used in employee background checks made by current or potential employers. Moreover, even posts that are private may be subject to discovery in legal actions.
- Once something is posted, you cannot take it back. In most instances, deleting content will not make it disappear. Deleted content can still show up in online searches. Or, with the click of a button, other users can take a screenshot, re-post, or share your content with others. Even if you share your content with a very limited number of people, nothing prohibits your contacts from sharing the information you post.
- Ask yourself if you would want your post in the media. Would you feel comfortable if your content was read by colleagues, your students, parents, or the School Board? If the answer is no, then the content is best not shared.
- Special care should be taken when posting personal photographs. Remember, your social networking site is an extension of your personality and professional reputation. All photographs should be posted with the assumption that they could end up in the public realm.
- Content should not include provocative photographs, sexually

explicit messages, content showing or promoting the excessive or irresponsible consumption of alcohol or use of drugs, or any activity students are legally prohibited from doing. Remember, even with privacy settings in place, your content could be seen by students or parents or find its way into the public realm.

- The lines between personal and professional are blurred in the online world. When you are online, you may be connected to colleagues, students, parents and the school community. Sometimes those connections may be direct and obvious. Other times the connections may be indirect or via mutual connections. You should ensure that content associated with you is consistent with your work at Meriwether County Schools.
- Your online behavior should reflect the same standards of honesty, respect, and consideration you apply offline.
- Protect your privacy. You are responsible for understanding and controlling privacy settings on each social network you use. Always assume default settings will make your profile and any content you share publicly accessible. You should also understand that even with maximum privacy settings in place, content can still find its way into the public domain.
- Use your personal email addresses on personal social sites and while engaging in off-duty social media activities or sites that are not connected with or approved by the district. Never use your district email address on personal sites.
- At no time should you claim to be speaking or issuing opinions on behalf of Meriwether County Schools, except with prior consent from the appropriate supervisor. In instances where there could be confusion, you must add a disclaimer stating that views and content are exclusively your own and not representative of Meriwether County Schools.
- Employees should not make any derogatory statements about colleagues or students or other comments that would reflect badly on your professional reputation or the reputation of Meriwether County Schools. You are ultimately responsible for your comments and Meriwether County Schools recommends that you thoughtfully consider your rights and responsibilities prior to posting.
- Do not post photos or videos that contain identifying information concerning any students on personal sites. Do not post identifying information of co-workers without their permission. For district-sanctioned sites, such as school Facebook pages, do not post items of students who have opted out, as per district media policy, but you may post items of public events of students and staff who

have not opted out, as long as it is not derogatory in nature.

- Respect the privacy and rights of both colleagues and students. Confidential student or personnel information should not be posted online. Be sure not to violate any provision of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.
- Show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others, including but not limited to images found on Google and the like. You should never quote more than short excerpts of someone else's work, and always attribute such work to the original author/source. It is good practice to link to others' work rather than reproduce it, thus reducing the risk of being accused of plagiarism.
- Do not use any school logo or image without permission on personal sites. You may use them on district-sanctioned sites.
- Do not create any social media account, blog or website intended to represent Meriwether County Schools without express prior consent from the superintendent or designee. It is important for the district to protect its brand, ensure certain brand standards and content guidelines are maintained, and ensure any new accounts fit overall communications and education standards established by the district.
- Any content posted by an employee will be subject to all District policies, rules, regulations, and guidelines. The District is free to view and monitor an employee's website or web log at any time without consent or previous approval.

## **Employee-Student Relations**

The district recognizes the role communication and collaboration between employees and students play in the educational process and experience. The district further recognizes the advancement of electronic communication and social media technologies creates greater opportunity for interactions between employees and students, and provides these additional guidelines for your own and students protection.

- Employees are never under any obligation to accept friend or follower requests from any student, or to use personal social media accounts to engage with students or participate in district projects. In addition, employees should bear in mind unless your account has privacy settings correctly configured, everything posted may be publicly accessible to students whether connected or not.

- Employees must exercise great care in connecting with students on any social media channels. Do not send permission-based friend or follower requests to students, such as a Facebook friend request. Use discretion and carefully consider the guidelines provided by the district before accepting any permission-based friend or follower requests received from students. It is Meriwether County Schools recommendation if an employee decides to accept friend or follower requests received from students they should accept all such requests, and not selectively limit their interactions to what could be perceived as a few preferred individuals.
- The district recognizes there may be certain limited exceptions to these guidelines, such as a student being a family member or relative, or in those instances where an employee s interaction with a student is as a result of certain extra-curricular activities, such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, religious organizations or other similar relationships.
- Any employee-student communications or relationship via social media should be of an appropriate professional nature, have content appropriate for both the communications medium and the audience addressed, and must not violate any provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.
- Employees who are connected to or communicate with students via social media must understand they may be granting those students access to all content in their personal social media profiles and should consider the guidelines the district has provided to ensure students are protected from exposure to inappropriate content or content that might compromise the employee s professional reputation.
- Employees are also responsible for immediately reporting to the district any inappropriate communication received from a student. This is as much for the employee s protection as the student s. Any content or communication generated either by you, or by a student, which would be inappropriate in the classroom should also be considered inappropriate when shared via social media.

### Expressing Your Ideas and Thoughts

- Always express ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. Make sure communications are in good taste. Do not denigrate or insult others. This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or

inflammatory. Remember our communities reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view.

- Be sensitive about linking to content. Redirecting to another site may imply an endorsement of its content. Just by identifying yourself as a district employee, you are creating perceptions about your expertise and about the district by community members, parents, students, and the general public; and you are creating perceptions about yourself with your colleagues and managers.
- Are you adding value? Communication associated with our District should help fellow educators, parents, students, and co-workers. It should be thought-provoking and build a sense of community and engagement. If it helps people improve knowledge or skills, do their jobs, solve problems, or understand education better then it's adding value. Keep the conversation informative and educational for all. Be sure that all content is consistent with your work and with the district's beliefs and professional standards.
- Keep your cool. One of the aims of social media is to create dialogue, and people will not always agree on an issue. When confronted with a difference of opinion, stay cool. Express your points in a clear, logical way. Be accurate. Don't pick fights or look for an argument. Sometimes, it's best to ignore a comment and not give it credibility by acknowledging it with a response.
- If you make an error, correct it quickly. If you choose to modify an earlier post, make it clear you have done so. If someone accuses you of posting something improper, deal with it quickly, and/or ask for additional assistance.
- Be honest and transparent. Do not blog anonymously, using pseudonyms or false screen names. We believe in transparency and honesty. Nothing gains you notice in social media more than honesty - or dishonesty. Do not say anything that is dishonest, untrue, or misleading. If you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, point it out.
- Employees must not solicit students and/or staff using Social Media. Employees cannot use social media to solicit students for independent services (i.e. tutoring, photography, etc.)

## **Help Students Leverage Social Media**

Students should learn how to use social media to empower, not just connect. With more and more employers and educational institutions looking at prospective candidates online, it is important we help educate and instruct on best practices for our students using the

various social media channels. Connecting with a purpose requires thought and discipline - as connecting with the wrong people could lead to improper associations.

Teachers and administrators should be teaching students how to leverage their connections, associations and level of engagement as a way to strengthen their individual brands online. This increases their chances of being seen in a positive light for potential employers, colleges or universities as character becomes more and more a consideration for enrollment or hiring in today s workforce. Having our students and teachers ready and adaptable to 21<sup>st</sup> Century communications is a must.