

Policy Code: 7335 Employee Use of Social Media

The board recognizes the importance of incorporating current technology tools, including new methods of electronic communication, into the classroom to enhance student learning. It further recognizes the importance of employees, students, and parents engaging, learning, collaborating, and sharing in digital environments as part of 21st Century learning. The board strives to ensure that electronic communication tools incorporated into the school curriculum are used responsibly and safely. As practicable, the board will provide access to secure social media tools and board approved technologies for use during instructional time and for school-sponsored activities in accordance with policies 3220, Technology in the Educational Program, and 3225/4312/7320, Technology Responsible Use.

The board acknowledges that school employees may engage in the use of social media during their personal time. School employees who use social media for personal purposes must be mindful that they are responsible for their public conduct even when not acting in their capacities as school system employees. All school employees, including student teachers and independent contractors, shall comply with the requirements of this policy when using electronic social media for personal purposes. In addition, all school employees must comply with policy 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations, when communicating with individual students through other electronic means, such as through voice, email, text-messaging, or video-conferencing platforms.

A. Definitions

1. Social Media

For the purposes of this policy, “social media” refers to the various online technology tools that enable people to communicate easily over the Internet to share information and resources. It includes, but is not limited to: personal websites, blogs, wikis, social networking sites, online forums, virtual worlds, video-sharing websites, and any other Internet-based applications which allow the exchange of user-generated content. For purposes of this policy, it also includes any form of instant or direct messaging available through such applications. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Web 2.0 tools, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and social media components of learning management systems such as Google Classroom, Canvas, or Seesaw. The use of video-conferencing platforms such as Zoom, Webex, and Google Meet is subject to policy 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations.

2. School-Controlled Social Media

“School-controlled social media” are social media networks, tools, or activities that are under the direct control and management of the school system and that create an archived audit trail.

3. Personal Social Media

“Personal social media” means any social media networks, tools, or activities that are not school-controlled.

B. Social Media Communications Involving Students

Employees are to maintain professional relationships with students at all times in accordance with policies 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations, and 7300, Staff Responsibilities. The use of electronic media for communicating with students and parents is an extension of the employee’s

workplace responsibilities. Accordingly, the board expects employees to use professional judgment when using social media or other electronic communications and to comply with the following.

1. All electronic communications with students who are currently enrolled in the school system must be school-related and within the scope of the employees' professional responsibilities, unless otherwise authorized by this policy or policy 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations.
2. School employees may use only school-controlled social media or approved video-conferencing platforms to communicate directly with current students about school-related matters. (For expectations regarding communication with students through video-conferencing platforms or other forms of electronic communication, e.g., email or texts, see policy 4040/7310, Staff-Student Relations.)
3. Employees are prohibited from knowingly communicating with current students through personal social media without parental permission. An Internet posting on a personal social media website intended for a particular student will be considered a form of direct communication with that student in violation of this policy unless the parent has consented to the communication. However, an employee may communicate with a student using personal social media to the extent the employee and student have a family relationship or other type of appropriate relationship which originated outside of the school setting. For example, an employee may have a relationship with a niece or nephew, a student who is the child of an adult friend, a student who is a friend of the employee's child, or a member or participant in the same civic, social, recreational, sport, or religious organization.
4. An employee seeking to utilize and/or establish a non-school-controlled social media website for instructional or other school-related purposes must have prior written approval from the principal and the superintendent or designee and must verify that the social media application's terms of service meet the requirements of policies 3220, Technology in the Educational Program, 3225/4312/7320, Technology Responsible Use, and 3227/7322, Web Page Development. If the website collects personal information from students under the age of 13, the use will not be approved unless the applicable requirements of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) are met. The employee shall ensure that the website does not include or link to the employee's personal social media footprint. The site must be used for school-related purposes only.
5. To the extent any employee uses social media to communicate with students or their parents regarding any school-related information (including sports and extracurricular activities), those social media tools should not also be used for political advocacy or campaigning.

C. Employee Personal Use of Social Media

The board respects the right of employees to use social media as a medium of self-expression on their personal time. As role models for the school system's students, however, employees are responsible for their public conduct even when they are not performing their job duties as employees of the school system. Employees will be held to the same professional standards in their public use of social media and other electronic communications as they are for any other public conduct. Further, school employees remain subject to applicable state and federal laws, board policies, administrative regulations, and the Code of Ethics for North Carolina Educators, even if communicating with others concerning personal and private matters. If an employee's use of social media interferes with the employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties, the employee is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Employees are responsible for the content on their social media sites, including content added by the employee, the employee's "friends," or members of the public who can access the employee's site, and for Web links on the employee's site. Employees shall take reasonable precautions, such as using available security settings, to manage students' access to the employees' personal information on social media websites and to prevent students from accessing materials that are not age-appropriate.

School employees are prohibited from accessing social networking websites for personal use during instructional time.

D. Posting to Social Media Sites

Employees who use social media for personal purposes must be aware that the content they post may be viewed by anyone, including students, parents, and community members. Employees shall observe the following principles when communicating through social media.

1. Employees shall not post confidential information about students, employees, or school system business.
2. Employees shall not accept current students as "friends" or "followers" or otherwise connect with students on personal social media sites without parental permission, unless the employee and student have a family relationship or other type of appropriate relationship which originated outside of the school setting.
3. Employees shall not knowingly allow students access to their personal social media sites that discuss or portray sex, nudity, alcohol, or drug use or other behaviors associated with the employees' private lives that would be inappropriate to discuss with a student at school.
4. Employees may not knowingly grant students access to any portions of their personal social media sites that are not accessible to the general public without parental permission, unless the employee and student have a family relationship or other type of appropriate relationship which originated outside of the school setting.
5. Employees shall be professional in all Internet postings related to or referencing the school system, students or their parents, and other employees. Employees who mention New Hanover County Schools, or express an opinion regarding New Hanover County Schools' actions, on a personal social media site should specifically note that the opinion expressed is the employee's personal opinion and not that of New Hanover County Schools.
6. Employees shall not use profane, pornographic, obscene, indecent, lewd, vulgar, or sexually offensive language, pictures, or graphics, or other communication that could reasonably be anticipated to cause a substantial disruption to the school environment.
7. Employees shall not use the school system's logo or other copyrighted material of the system on a personal social media site without express, written consent from the board.
8. Employees shall not post identifiable images of a student or student's family on a personal social media site without permission from the student and the student's parent or legal guardian. Employees may post such images on a school-controlled social media site only with prior permission of the employee's supervisor and in accordance with the requirements of federal and state privacy laws and policy 4700, Student Records.
9. Employees shall not use Internet postings to libel or defame the board, individual board members, students, or other school employees.
10. Employees shall not use Internet postings to harass, bully, or intimidate students or other employees in violation of policies 1710/4020/7230, Discrimination and Harassment Prohibited by Federal Law, 1725/4035/7236, Title IX Sexual Harassment – Prohibited

Conduct and Reporting Process, and 1735/4329/7311, Bullying and Harassing Behavior Prohibited, or state and federal laws.

11. Employees shall not post content that negatively impacts their ability to perform their jobs.
12. Employees shall not use Internet postings to engage in any other conduct that violates board policy or administrative procedures or state and federal laws.

E. Consequences

School system personnel shall monitor online activities of employees who access the Internet using school technological resources. Additionally, the superintendent or designee may periodically conduct public Internet searches to determine if an employee has engaged in conduct that violates this policy. Any employee who has been found by the superintendent to have violated this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

The superintendent shall establish and communicate to employees guidelines that are consistent with this policy.

Legal References: [U.S. Const. amend. I](#); Children’s Internet Protection Act, [47 U.S.C. 254\(h\)\(5\)](#); Electronic Communications Privacy Act, [18 U.S.C. 2510-2522](#); Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, [20 U.S.C. 1232g](#); [17 U.S.C. 101 et seq.](#); [20 U.S.C. 6777](#); [G.S. 115C-325\(e\)](#) (applicable to career status teachers), [-325.4](#) (applicable to non-career status teachers); [16 N.C.A.C. 6C .0601, .0602](#); State Board of Education Policy [EVAL-014](#)

Cross References: Discrimination and Harassment Prohibited by Federal Law (policy 1710/4020/7230), Title IX Sexual Harassment – Prohibited Conduct and Reporting Process (policy 1725/4035/7236), Bullying and Harassing Behavior Prohibited (policy 1735/4329/7311), Technology in the Educational Program (policy 3220), Technology Responsible Use (policy 3225/4312/7320), Web Page Development (policy 3227/7322), Copyright Compliance (policy 3230/7330), Staff-Student Relations (policy 4040/7310), Student Records (policy 4700), Staff Responsibilities (policy 7300)

Adopted: February 2, 2021

Revised: September 3, 2024; July 8, 2025

New Hanover County Public Schools
