

## **Board Policy IFBGC: Use of Social Media and Online Networking**

### **Purpose**

The Floyd County Board of Education (“School District”) has created this policy to define the social networking and social media policy for all employees of Floyd County Schools to address the rapidly changing landscape of the Internet and the way employees communicate and obtain information online. The School District encourages the professional and responsible use of social media to further the goals and mission of the School District. The School District desires to achieve and maintain a healthy educational environment free of disruptions and distractions and free from threats to public safety that may be caused or created by way of online publications or speech, especially while made during school hours and while using the School District’s electronic devices, computers, or hardware.

The School District has an overriding interest and expectation in deciding what is “spoken” on its behalf on any and all Internet and/or social media sites, and this policy establishes guidelines for the use of social media.

Social media is defined as any form of online publication that allows for or provides interactive communication or displays of speech or other communications, including but not limited to social networks, blogs, websites, Internet forums, and wikis. Some non-exhaustive examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Yahoo!, YouTube, Pinterest, Tumblr, Rumble, Reddit, Snapchat, WhatsApp, TikTok, Quora, Vimeo, BuzSugar, Mix, Digg, Medium, Viber, WeChat, Facebook Messenger, Telegram, QQ, and Flickr.

### **Electronic Social Networking**

The on-campus and off-campus conduct of employees may impact their ability to function professionally and effectively as employees of the School District. Given student, parent, and community interest in and the common utilization of electronic or social media, the following rules shall be adhered to by all employees relative to any usage of social networking websites and other electronic media or Internet forums.

### **Electronic Social Networking Guidelines and Requirements**

Employees who create or set up personal electronic social networking webpages/accounts on their home or personal computing device shall be responsible for the content and information published or disseminated of their webpages/accounts, including but not limited to: content added by other persons, friends, or members of the public who may gain access such webpages/accounts; or content which is linked to a given employee’s webpage/account.

By posting comments, having online conversations, etc. on social media sites you are broadcasting to the world. Be aware that even with the strictest privacy settings, what you ‘say’ online should be within the bounds of utmost professionalism. Comments expressed via social networking pages under the impression of a ‘private conversation’ may still end up being shared into a more public domain, even with privacy settings on maximum. Comments related to the School District, its employees, staff and events related to Floyd County Schools, should always meet the highest standards of professionalism. When posting, even on the strictest settings, employees should act on the assumption that all postings are in and will remain in the public domain.

Employees who set up personal social networking websites, accounts, or pages do so at their own risk. Employees are strongly encouraged to keep and maintain their personal social media pages private so as to prevent students, and the parents of students, from accessing their personal pages and content. Content of employees’ personal pages should not violate federal or state law, Code of Ethics for Georgia Educators, Board Policy IFBG (Internet Acceptable Use), all other Board policies, or harm the employees’ ability to function professionally and effectively

in the School District environment. Violation of these guidelines and requirements may result in disciplinary action, including up to immediate termination.

When posting online, each employee must remember that they are an employee of the School District and representatives of your colleagues, students, parents and the school community. Your online behavior should at all times reflect the same standards of honesty, respect, and consideration that you may use during face-to-face encounters.

Cyberbullying will not be tolerated. Any incidence of cyberbullying must be reported to the School District's Human Resources or to your Principal immediately. All cyberbullying incidents will be taken seriously and may serve as grounds for disciplinary action to include immediate termination.

Any act online, the Internet or through electronic devices (cellular phones, tablets) that threatens, harasses, intimidates an individual or group of individuals; places an individual in reasonable fear of harm to the individual or damage to the individual's property; has the effect of substantially disrupting the orderly operation of the school is considered cyberbullying, and such misconduct shall serve as grounds for employee discipline, including but not limited to immediate termination.

### **Electronic Media Use Policy Guidelines**

Electronic media includes all forms of social media networks, social bookmarking services, user rating services, and any other online collaboration, sharing or publishing platform, including but not limited to, text messaging, instant messaging, electronic mail (e-mail), Web logs (blogs), electronic forums, micro-blogs, chat rooms, video-sharing Web sites (e.g., YouTube, Rumble), editorial comments posted on the Internet, and any social network sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, blogs). Electronic media also includes all forms of telecommunication, including but not limited to landlines, cell phones, and Web-based applications.

All School District employees should serve as positive role models for students, employees are responsible for their public conduct and behaviors even while not acting within the course and scope of their employment, even while off school property.

- Employees will be held to the same professional standards in the public use of electronic media as for any other public conduct in accordance with other School District policies and state and federal law.
- Employees are not authorized to post or otherwise utilize social media for personal reasons while they are on site working for the School District, as such access or posting should occur on each employee's own personal time. In the event social media is used during the day by staff (i.e., coaches, administrators, teachers) to promote the school, to publish information about extra-curricular activities, or to otherwise support student development, the School District requires that such social media utilization be performed without any negative or disruptive impact to the school's educational environment.
- If an employee's use of electronic media interferes with, disrupts, or diminishes an employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties or is otherwise disruptive to the educational environment or the School District's operations, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including immediate termination.
- Blogs, wikis, and podcasts are an extension of your classroom and considered official content. What is inappropriate in the classroom should be deemed inappropriate online.
- Do not use photos or movies taken at school without permission. Do not post photos or movies that contain students faces without first verifying or confirming whether the student's parent opted out of the student-directory release.

- There are many websites that allow users to share personally created movies. Each employee is responsible what he/she does, says, or posts online including videos. Anything posted online should represent you in a professional manner as others will see you as connected to the School District. The educational or learning environment is disrupted when teachers, employees and staff post videos with questionable or inappropriate content for the given educational environment.
- Employees are also responsible for maintaining privacy settings appropriate to the content of the social media platform or account, and each employee shall be responsible for continuously monitoring their social media pages/accounts to ensure appropriate and not disruptive.
- The School District is aware that employees may be “tagged”, “pinned”, or included in electronic media or other social media content such as postings, status updates, or pictures without their knowledge or consent, and employees shall be responsible for ensuring that they are removed from such postings, etc. where such publications depict unprofessional or other content that is disruptive to the School District’s operations or educational environment.

### **Electronic Media Use Policy Requirements and Restrictions**

An employee who uses electronic media for personal or professional purposes shall observe the following, and failure to do so will subject the employee to disciplinary action, up to and including termination:

- Employees must follow the School District’s Internet Acceptable Use Policy (IFBG).
- Employees shall not use the School District’s name, logo, pictures of students, or any private or confidential information obtained by the School District or make use of any other copyrighted material of the School District without the prior written consent from the Superintendent or his/her designee.
- Employees are subject to applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative regulations, and the Code of Ethics for Georgia Educators, when communicating regarding personal and private matters, regardless of whether the employee is using private or public equipment, on or off campus.

These restrictions each employee must adhere to include:

- Maintaining the confidentiality of student records. This includes discussing any information online or otherwise that could lead to the identification of a particular student or in any manner that violates the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act. (“FERPA”).
- Maintaining the confidentiality of health or other personnel information concerning colleagues, staff, or students, unless disclosure serves lawful professional purposes or is required or mandated by law.
- Maintain confidentiality of all School District, including but not limited to personnel evaluations and private e-mail addresses.
- Copyright law.
- Prohibition against harming others by making false, threatening, or defamatory statements about a colleague, a parent, any student, other person, or the School District.

- Prohibition against gaining access to or updating personal social media sites during normal school hours of operation or while using personal or School District issued electronic devices.

### **Use of Electronic Media with Students Generally**

Employees who must communicate through electronic media with currently enrolled students for reasons related to their education must comply with the provisions the Code of Ethics for Georgia Educators and the provisions outlined below.

Employees are prohibited from establishing personal relationships with students that are unprofessional and/or otherwise inappropriate. Examples of unprofessional relationships include, but are not limited to: employees fraternizing or communicating with students as if employees and students were peers such as writing personal letters, texts, or emails; calling students on cell phones or allowing students to make personal calls to them unrelated to homework or class work; sending inappropriate pictures to students; discussing or revealing to students personal matters about their private lives or inviting students to do the same (other than professional counseling by a school counselor); and engaging in any sexualized dialogue, whether in person, by phone, via the Internet, via social media, or other written or verbal communication.

### **Guidelines, Restrictions, and Requirements for the Use of Electronic Media with Students**

- Employees are permitted to communicate directly with any student via electronic media only in a professional capacity. Employees are required to use their Floyd County provided email when emailing currently enrolled students.
- Employees may communicate electronically with a currently enrolled student using other methods besides email. The approved method for mass student communication is Blackboard.
- Employees are permitted to communicate with students via all approved curriculum software such as Google Classroom, Blackboard Websites, Google Meet, Google Hangouts, and Clever etc.
- Employees are placed on notice that they do not have any expectation of privacy regarding any electronic or social media communications with students.
- Employees are at all times subject to all applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative regulations, and the Code of Ethics for Georgia Educators, including but not limited to:
  - Compliance with Public Information Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), including retention and confidentiality of student records.
  - Copyright law.
- Upon request from the School District's administration, an employee shall provide the phone number(s), social network site(s), or other information (including but not limited to copies of all communication / correspondence) regarding the method(s) of electronic media the employee uses or has used to communicate with any currently enrolled students, including but not limited to text messages.
- Employees who post information on Facebook, Twitter or other similar social media platforms or websites that include inappropriate personal information such as, but not limited to: provocative photographs, sexually explicit messages, messages inciting violence, use of drugs or anything students are prohibited from doing must understand that if students, parents

or other employees obtain access to such information, such instances may be investigated by school and district officials and if warranted, may be disciplined up to and including termination, depending on the severity of the offense, and may have their case forwarded to the appropriate state department or law-enforcement officials for review and possible further sanctions. The Superintendent or designees reserve the right to periodically conduct Internet and social media searches to determine if employees have posted inappropriate materials online. If inappropriate use of computers and websites is discovered, the Superintendent's designees will download the offensive material and promptly bring misconduct to the attention of the Superintendent for possible disciplinary action, including up to immediate termination.

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