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Social Media Guidelines

for employees

Communications Department
Updated 3/3/16



March 9, 2016

Dear DeKalb Schools Community,

In the 21st Century, students use technology more than ever before. They grow up with mobile devices at their fingertips, and the Internet has become a social playground. Because social media is instant, easy, and a common way of sharing information today, it is imperative that we practice safe social networking.

The DeKalb County School District (DCSD) is providing guidelines for students and employees on the use of social media inside and outside of the classroom.

While the DeKalb County Board of Education provides an official Internet Acceptable Use Policy, found at the eBoard website on [DeKalb.k12.ga.us](http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us), our guidelines offer a quick reference for safe, online etiquette. See our guidelines online at <http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/communications>.

Engagement, collaboration, learning, and sharing in digital environments are here to stay. Because technology changes rapidly, our community must work together to educate students on how to engage on social media platforms responsibly. In addition to these guidelines, DeKalb County School District will provide activities and resources that support social media, another important method of communication to keep our community in the know.

Let's *Stay Connected* responsibly.

Sincerely,

Dr. R. Stephen Green
Superintendent
DeKalb County School District

SOCIAL MEDIA PUBLISHING GUIDELINES

A. Introduction/Purpose

1. Social media technology can serve as a powerful communications tool supporting student achievement, education, parent involvement, and 21st-century learning. Social media can prepare our DeKalb County School District (DCSD) students to succeed in their educational and professional endeavors. 'Social media,' the term, encompasses all communication shared in an electronic format: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, blogs, social networks, and video-hosting sites.

2. Our Social Media Guidelines offer professional recommendations and practices for communication. We want to be sure that our DCSD employees use digital tools in a safe, responsible manner that helps students reach goals.

Please refer to the DCSD Website and Online Social Media Publishing Guidelines (Policy IFBGB) [DCSD Website and Online Social Media Publishing Guidelines \(Policy IFBGB\)](#) for more information.

B. Definition of Social Media

Social media are online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing, and collaboration. In the DCSD, social media offer exceptional transparency, foster engagement, and increase access to credible information, externally and internally.

C. District Online Content Coordinator

The Superintendent or representative will designate a qualified individual as the District Online Content Coordinator to maintain DCSD web sites and social media accounts. Those sites will comply with all DeKalb County Board of Education policies and regulations, and all local, state, and federal laws.

The Online Content Coordinator will maintain and distribute Web Publishing and Compliance Guidelines for use with DCSD Web sites and social media. All material placed on DCSD Web sites or social media accounts will be consistent with these guidelines and approved by the Online Content Coordinator.

The Online Content Coordinator will maintain and distribute written Guidelines and Recommendations for Personal Use of Web Sites and Social Media Accounts for employees and students with an online presence. These guidelines will support proper use of social media and help prevent disruption of the school environment.

The Online Content Coordinator will create an official registration procedure for individual schools, teachers, students, and extracurricular organizations that want to create web pages and social media accounts.

D. Applicability

Our social media guidelines apply to all our DCSD valued staff and service people.

E. Establishment

The DCSD will establish and manage social media sites, for example Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. Appropriate content for these sites includes:

- DeKalb County School District information
- DeKalb County Board of Education information
- Information from individual schools
- Teacher and classroom information
- Student projects
- Information from our education partners
- Information from extracurricular organizations

F. Professional Social Media Use

1. Professional Email Accounts vs Personal Email Accounts

For social media, our DCSD employees should maintain separate professional and personal email addresses. The regular use of a personal email address for professional purposes may result in DCSD considering the personal address a professional account.

2. Communication with DCSD Students

All DCSD employees who work with students and professionally engage with them on social media sites should:

- a. Create social media sites that address reasonable instructional, educational, or extra-curricular topics.
- b. Notify our DCSD parents each school year of the professional social media activities set up for their children's participation.

3. Guidance for Professional Social Media Sites

- a. All our DCSD employees should treat the professional social media space like a classroom or professional workplace. The standards for conduct in DCSD professional settings also apply to professional social media sites.
- b. All our DCSD employees should exercise responsibility, caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using professional social media sites.
- c. When setting up professional social media sites, principals or their representatives and our employees should responsibly consider their intended audience and the appropriate level of privacy.
- d. Individual schools, teachers, students, and extracurricular organizations may create social media accounts. They should first obtain a principal's approval and properly register the account with the Online Content Coordinator.
- e. Principals and their representatives must maintain a list of all professional social media accounts in their schools.
- f. School-based social media accounts on Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook should cross-collaborate with our DCSD central office's social media accounts. While each school owns its' brand, each also belongs to our larger organization. We encourage principals and their representatives to engage with and support DCSD social media sites by, for example, sharing or retweeting District news releases or events on their school sites.
- g. To differentiate professional DCSD social media sites from personal sites, accounts should include language and logos that clearly identify them as professional sites.
- h. Content shared on social media should have a reasonable and positive relationship with the mission and function of DCSD. An example: Sharing public library events supports the partnership in education with DCSD and DeKalb County Government.
- i. Our DCSD employees should use privacy settings for their intended audiences. Limitations to privacy settings exist, however, and DCSD employees should be aware that social media sites can change their default privacy settings and other functions at any time.

- j. Professional social media communication must comply with DCSD policies and laws on the disclosure of confidential information, cyberbullying, student privacy, threatening language, and other school place issues.
- k. No student's personally identifiable information may be posted by DCSD employees on professional social media sites available outside the classroom. An example would be posting student information to a 'buddy' class in another country. Posting any image of a student online requires a written, signed media consent form for the featured child. Consent forms are on file at our schools and may be found online at <http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/communications>.

4. Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites

- a. Our DCSD principals and representatives are responsible for monitoring their employees' professional social media sites. Each school must monitor its own sites. Monitoring responsibilities include regular reviews of site content and reports of any questionable communications.
- b. Our DCSD principals and representatives reserve the right to remove postings or disable pages on sites that do not adhere to laws or DCSD policies.

5. Inquiries

- a. Media inquiries received on sites should be referred to the DCSD Office of Communications. <http://www.dekalb.k12.ga.us/communications>.

E. Personal Social Media Use by Our DCSD Employees

1. Communication with DCSD Students

To maintain a professional relationship with students, our DCSD employees should not communicate on personal social media sites with students currently enrolled in DCSD schools. We make an exception for communication with relatives of students.

2. Guidance Regarding Our DCSD Employees' Personal Social Media Sites

Our DCSD employees should exercise caution, common sense, and professionalism when using their personal social media sites.

- a. We encourage DCSD employees to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites. Be aware, however, that privacy settings have

limitations, and private communication on the Internet can easily become public. Also, social media sites can change default privacy settings and other functions at any time. Our employees are responsible for understanding and complying with the rules of any social media sites they use. Personal social media sites that address workplace business may be subject to Open Records laws.

b. We do not recommend that our employees ‘tag’ photos of other DCSD employees, volunteers, contractors, or vendors without prior written permission from these people.

c. Personal social media use, including use after-hours, always has the potential to cause disruptions at school or the workplace, in violation of DCSD policies and the law.

d. We prohibit the posting or disclosure of students’ personally identifiable information or confidential information on personal social media sites, if it violates DCSD policies or any laws.

e. Our employees should never use the DCSD logo or imply that their personal social media sites speak in an official capacity for DCSD. We do permit use of the DCSD logo when it automatically posts on personal social media sites such as LinkedIn. When in doubt, check with the Coordinator.

f. We strongly recommend that our DCSD employees maintain transparency and be honest about their identities when they post on social media. When employees identify themselves as DCSD employees, they must be clear that they express individual and personal views, not necessarily the official views of the DCSD.

F. Applicability of DCSD Policies and Other Laws

1. The DCSD Guidelines supplement, but do not supersede, existing DCSD policies and laws. Our DCSD social media users must comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws, including the [Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act \(COPPA\)](#), and the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#).

2. Our Guidelines do not serve as a code of conduct for social media use and do not constitute a separate basis for potential discipline. However, all existing DCSD policies, regulations, and laws that cover employee work place conduct also apply in the social media environment. These include the [DCSD Website and Online Social Media Publishing Guidelines \(Policy IFBGB\)](#).

G. Additional Inquiries

This document provides general guidance, but does not cover every potential social media situation. Please consult the District Online Coordinator or our DCSD regulations with any inquiries. As our guidelines address rapidly changing technologies, we will regularly revisit and update them.

H. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) General

1. Why does the DCSD issue guidance for using social media?

- Social media technology offers many educational benefits. We issue these guidelines to encourage professionalism, responsibility, safety, and awareness by our employees who use social media. Our guidelines also recommend best practices for employees who use social media for professional or personal communication.

2. How may DCSD parents, students, and employees give feedback on these guidelines?

- We welcome feedback on our guidelines and FAQs. Because technology and best practices change rapidly, we plan to systematically review and update guidance. If you have any feedback or a suggestion, please send an e-mail to our District email address: dcsd_communications@dekalbschoolsga.org.

3. Do the guidelines apply to all DCSD employees or just those who work in schools?

- Our guidelines apply to all DCSD employees – our valued school staffs and our valued central, network, and cluster staffs too.

4. What are common types of social media?

- Blogs. Short for ‘web-logs,’ blogs function as ongoing journals, where users make systematic entries. Typically, bloggers ‘tag’ entries for easy online searches. Most blogs allow readers to comment. Examples: Blogger. WordPress.
- Microblogs. These blogs, as the name implies, have shorter posts, typically limiting the number of typed characters allowed. Microblogs are good for status updates and quickly communicating information to ‘friends’ or ‘followers.’ Examples: Twitter. Tumblr.
- Networking sites. These allow people to connect with each other to explore common interests and pursuits. Examples: Facebook. LinkedIn. Google+. Twitter. Instagram.

- Photo/Video sites. These allow people to share videos, images, slideshows, and other visual media. These sites often allow viewers to comment and post their own content. Examples: YouTube. Vimeo. Flickr. Instagram. Snapchat.

5. The guidelines state that they supplement, not supersede, DCSD policies and the law. What does this mean?

- Social media use should always comply with our DCSD policies and all laws. Before our DCSD employees use a student's name or other personally identifiable information on social media, for example, they should be aware of policies and laws that might apply to the situations of individual students.

Personal Social Media Sites

6. Why do you recommend that DCSD employees have separate professional and personal social media sites and e-mail addresses?

- All DCSD employees must keep their personal and professional online communications separate. Professional social media is work-related; it may involve employee-to-student communication. Personal social media is not work-related; it does not involve employee-to-student communication, with limited exceptions noted in our guidelines.

7. May DCSD employees use their personal social media accounts to communicate with their DCSD colleagues?

- Our guidelines don't address communication among our employees on personal social media sites. Even so, we encourage our DCSD employees on personal social media to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their sites ... and only use personal sites on their own time.

8. I have a personal web site where I post book reviews. What best practices do you recommend for DCSD employees with personal social media sites like mine that are professional in nature and may involve students, but aren't directly related to the DCSD?

- Keep in mind that even when a DCSD employee is 'off the clock,' students see him/her as an authority figure. If an employee discovers that a DCSD student accesses a personal social media site for any type of activity, the employee should notify the parents or guardians of the student.

Employees

9. What if DCSD employees already use social media for professional or personal purposes?

- For professional social media use: DCSD employees should make sure their use aligns with the Social Media Guidelines and these FAQs. Any use not consistent with these guidelines should be altered or amended in a reasonable period of time to conform to our DCSD policies and the law. Employees with links from a professional social media site to a personal e-mail address should transition the site to a professional e-mail address.
- For personal social media use: Our guidelines recommend that DCSD employees who use social media for personal purposes should not allow any current DCSD students access to those sites.
- Our employees should periodically review the Social Media Guidelines and FAQ (we'll update them as needed) to make sure they remain up-to-date on recommended practices.
- Our DCSD central office and schoolhouses provide social media resources for employees who use social media for professional purposes. Check the Employee Portal for webinar trainings.

10. On social media, when and where should the DCSD logo be used?

- Only use the logo for official DCSD business. Websites that officially represent a school may use the official school logo. Note that when a social media site like LinkedIn and Facebook automatically generates the DCSD logo, it's not a problem.

11. What other technology-related guidance can support DCSD employees on social media?

- Please see the Policy IFBG: Internet Acceptable Use. This link has information that governs all electronic activity for users of DCSD's network.

12. Who monitors professional social media sites? How frequently?

- Our guidelines recommend that professional social media sites be regularly reviewed and monitored by principals and their representatives. The specific frequency and level of review depends on the particular characteristics of the site. Interactive sites that allow comments and posting, for example, should always be monitored more closely.

13. If DCSD employees want to develop professional social media for their classrooms, then what should they do?

- First, our employees should review the Social Media Guidelines and FAQs periodically to be familiar with the content and any updates. Then they should research and familiarize themselves with the social media site they intend to use.
- If students will be using the proposed professional social media, our employees must review the site's regulations and determine the age children are allowed to use it. An example: Let's say a female teacher plans to create a Facebook page for her third-grade class. She will learn that Facebook requires users to be age 13 or older. She will need to find some other tool. Employees should also review the requirements of the federal Children's Online Privacy Protection Act.
- Our employees should know the privacy and viewing settings for a social media site. We recommend, where possible, that our DCSD employees establish groups or pages, rather than individual profiles, for educational purposes.

Guidance for School Leaders

14. How should principals address parents who have concerns about their children's use of social media?

The DCSD recognizes social media's powerful benefits for students, teachers, and school communities. Many, and probably most, schools now use these 21st-century tools. Our own schools should inform parents of the opportunities social media provide for college and career readiness. In some cases, schools may need to 'market' these tools to parents unfamiliar with their benefits. This social media resource can help: *Get Connected* on the Employee Portal under Communications. (Translations are available.)

- Schools should let families know that technology and technology-based tools are an important part of being work-ready in today's society.
- The reason social media skills matter is well explained in this study: [Are they Really Ready to Work?](#)

15. How can administrators effectively monitor information posted on professional social media sites?

Our recommendations:

- ❖ Draw up a comprehensive list of all professional social media sites created and used by your staff.

- ❖ Create one administrative account for administrators or a designated network point-person.
- ❖ Become a member of all professional social media sites and view their posted materials.
- ❖ When possible, set up e-mail notifications when new material posts.
- ❖ Consider having more than one person monitor sites, and prioritize which should be monitored most frequently.

16. Do I need to be an administrator on every site?

- Principals do not need to be an administrator on every site. A representative, such as an AP or media specialist, can fill this role.

Teachers and Other School-Based Staff

17. Should parents be notified if a child needs to use social media for school-related activities?

- Yes. Our DCSD schools should notify parents every school year if a child will participate in professional social media activities. Parents with questions or concerns should contact the school for more information.

18. The guidelines recommend that principals (or their representatives) have administrator rights. Does this mean that teachers or school-based staff must hand over their professional social media user names and passwords?

- It does not. Teachers and staff may choose to give the principal or representative access to a site. The guidelines simply suggest that principals have at least limited access, using their own log-in user names and passwords. Why? If a teacher is out recovering from an extended illness, the administrator can monitor the professional social media site.

19. Are teachers *mandated reporters* as required by federal and state laws when it comes to online activity?

- Yes. As indicated in the guidelines, teachers are mandated reporters.

20. How should our DCSD employees respond to *friend* requests by current students on their personal social media sites and accounts?

- They should decline any request. Our suggested response: *Please do not be offended, but I cannot accept your request. As a DCSD employee, it's best for us to communicate using my professional social media account. Our DCSD Social Media Guidelines*

discourage interactions with current students on personal social media sites. If you want to connect, please contact me through District email.

21. What should DCSD supervisors and representatives responsible for monitoring professional social media do if they discover inappropriate activity?

- Contact the appropriate authorities for assistance. Use the DCSD reporting requirements.

22. What confidential information or personally identifiable student information should not be posted or disclosed? What about graded work?

- Posting certain graded student work online may be in violation of FERPA. Any DCSD employee who has questions about confidential or personally identifiable student information should contact a principal. The principal will then contact our regional superintendent.

23. Are teachers or other school staff personally liable for student posts on professional social media sites?

- No. If a teacher views an inappropriate post, he/she is, however, required to follow DCSD regulations for reporting it. We also recommend that teachers act as moderators for professional social media sites and we recommend that students never post information on professional social media sites without teacher approval. Professional social media sites should be monitored regularly and offensive and inappropriate posts should be removed in a timely manner.

24. Can the guidelines be used for disciplinary purposes?

- No. These are guidelines, not rules. Though we strongly suggest our valued employees follow these guidelines, no one will not be disciplined for failure to follow them.

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