

Williamstown Independent Schools

Employees Use of Social Media Best Practices

The best practices and guidelines set forth below apply to any user who utilizes digital environments associated with the Williamstown Independent School District, its schools, departments, and/or programs.

Blogs, social networks, websites and more have become common educational resources to share knowledge, express creativity and connect with others in 21st century learning. Williamstown Ind. Schools realizes the importance of these digital environments and support participation using these online communities as long as the activities do not disrupt school operations and/or create negative reflections of our schools, the district, its students, parents, staff, or community. Laws and courts have ruled that schools can discipline employees if their speech, postings, and etc. disrupt school operations.

Digital environments open a world of possible instructional opportunities for us to integrate into our classrooms. As we expand our use of these and explore their applications in the school setting, we have assembled a "best practices" guideline from respected online and industry sources to help users operate in these forums effectively, protect their personal and professional reputation, follow school district policies, and obey laws.

All official school, department and district related presences are considered an extension of the Williamstown Independent Schools information network. Social media is defined as any form of online publication or presence that allows end users to engage in multi-directional conversations in or around the content on the website. These may include, but are not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, Google+, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, and wikis.

Before employees establish an online presence for professional use they should discuss their plans with their supervisor to gain approval and guidance. They **SHOULD NOT USE PERSONAL ACCOUNTS** for classroom, departmental, school, and/or district digital environments, and must maintain professional boundaries with students while using electronic communication regardless of whether the communication methods are provided by the district or if the staff member uses his/her own personal electronic communication devices, accounts, web pages or other forms of electronic communication.

1. EMPLOYEE-STUDENT RELATIONS:

Staff members are expected to maintain courteous and professional relationships with students consistent with Board policy and all applicable laws. All staff members have a responsibility to provide an atmosphere conducive to learning through consistently and fairly applied discipline and the maintenance of physical and emotional boundaries with students. These boundaries must be maintained regardless of the student's age, the location of the activity, whether the student allegedly consents to the relationship or whether the staff member directly supervises the student. Maintaining these boundaries is an essential requirement for employment in the District. Although this policy applies to the relationships and interactions between staff members and District students, staff members who inappropriately interact with any child (whether that child is a District student or not) may be disciplined or terminated when the District determines such action is necessary to protect students.

The District's policies, regulations, procedures and expectations regarding in-person communications at school and during the school day also apply to electronic communications for educational purposes, regardless of when those communications occur. Staff communications must be professional, and student communications must be appropriate. Staff members may use electronic communication with students only as frequently as necessary to accomplish the educational purpose. Electronic communications occurring at odd times, such as, during overnight hours that are not tied to an educational purpose will be deemed a violation and disciplined accordingly.

2. BE TRANSPARENT:

How you represent yourself online is an extension of yourself. Do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else's identity or misrepresenting your identity. Be honest about who you are, where you work and what you do.

Protect Your Identity

While you want to be honest about yourself, don't provide personal information that scam artists or identity thieves could use against you.

3. WRITE FOR CLARITY:

Blogs and wiki posts should be well written. What you post will be online for the world to read. Take the time to run spell check, follow proper writing conventions - proper grammar, capitalization, and punctuation. Be cautious about using abbreviations because not all readers will know what they mean. If you do use abbreviations define them somewhere in your writing.

4. POST AND RESPOND REGULARLY:

Readers won't have a reason to follow you if they can't expect new and updated content regularly or if you don't respond to their posts. Answer their questions, thank them for following you, and post new and updated information. Make it a two-way conversation.

2. THINK BEFORE YOU POST:

There is no such thing as a "private" online presence. Search engines can turn up posts years after the publication date, comments can be forwarded or copied, and archival systems save information even when you think you have deleted the information. You are responsible for what you post. If you hesitate before you are about to publish something, STOP and THINK! Wait a day, review these guidelines and/or talk with a colleague or supervisor. Because once it's posted you can't take it back.

Responding to Negative Comments and Criticism

How you respond to negative comments or criticism will say more about you and your character than what you post. If you delete a negative post, it discourages open communication. When publicly criticized stay cool and don't reply in haste. Express your view in a clear, logical way. Don't get personal and if you did make a mistake, admit it and move forward. When in doubt, it's best to ignore a comment and not give it credibility by acknowledging it; perhaps a face-to-face meeting would be more appropriate.

Maintain Confidentiality

Online postings and conversations are not private. Do not share confidential or proprietary information about your school, department, district, students, alumni or fellow employees. Whether it is an internal school discussions or specific information about students or other staff, what you post will be seen by others and will be online for a long time. It can be forwarded or shared in just a few clicks. Do not write about colleagues or students without their (or their parents') permission. Use good ethical judgment and follow school and district policies and federal requirements, such as FERPA.

Positively Represent Your School and District

Represent the district, the students, parents, and community you serve in the best light. Respect the privacy and the feelings of others. Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about students or colleagues. Negative comments about people may amount to cyber-bullying and could be deemed a disciplinary offence. Your posts and comments should help build and support the school community.

Personal Videos

YouTube is a popular place to share personally created movies. Employees are responsible for all they do, say, and post online including video. Anything created should represent themselves in a professional manner as others will see them as connected to the school district. It is very disruptive to learning when conversations about a teacher-created YouTube video that has questionable content is being circulated around during school hours.

5. COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE:

Respect copyright and fair use guidelines. Share what others have said by linking to the source and using embedded content. Be sure to cite your source when quoting. When using a hyperlink confirm that link goes where it should and that the content is appropriate.

Logos, Photos, Movies, Music, etc.

Do not use any school logos or school images without permission. Do not use photos, movies, or music created or taken at school without permission. Do not use your school or district name to promote or endorse any product, cause, political party or candidate. Do not post photos, movies, or music of fellow employees or students without permission from the employee or the students' parents.