USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND ELECTRONIC WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Social Media

Social media is an evolving way to share information about Tacoma Public Schools with students, staff, parents and the community. Tacoma Public Schools recognizes the desire to use of social media for professional, educational purposes. This regulation applies to circumstances where employees wish to establish a social media account on approved platforms in the name of a District school, sports team, department, program or club (regardless of if the account is maintained on a personal device or using District Technology Resources) or when staff wishes to use social media in their professional capacities using District Technology Resources. They do not apply to an employee’s ability to engage in free speech as a private individual, District employees are reminded that they remain subject to all District Policies and Regulations while using such social media accounts, including but not limited to, the District’s Employee Conduct Rules, Policy 5010, as well as the Policies and Regulations related to Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Relationships, Policy 5243, and Regulation 5243R and Acceptable Use of District Digital and Technology Resources, Policy 6973, and Regulation 6973R.

Authorization

To open a social media account on behalf of a District school, sports team, department, program or club, or to obtain permission to open a social media account in your professional capacity using District Technology Resources, you must first fill out a Social Media Account Request Form for each account and submit it to the Public Information Office. This form allows PIO to maintain a central directory of social media profiles and account managers to leverage information sharing within a school, school region and other intended audiences. It also allows the District to identify and archive all activity on your social media account (see below).

Maintenance and Monitoring Responsibilities

At the of the discretion of the Public Information Office and the school principal, social media accounts opened in the name of a school may be administered by one or more Fair Labor Standards Act exempt school staff members. Such staff members must monitor and maintain the account consistent with expectations for administrator response to emails or voicemails. Privacy settings should be established to allow the designated account administrator to be notified when the account is tagged or mentioned in photos or posts and should require account administrator approval for posting by others.

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1 The District approves the following list of social media platforms, which are subject to change as the social media landscape evolves: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Periscope, Pinterest, Flickr and blogs.

2 The District does not allow for Snap Chat accounts to be created in the name of a District school, sports team, department, program or club nor does it sanction its staff using District Technology Resources to maintain a Snap Chat account. Further, the District would not allow accounts to be created in the name of a District school, sports team, department, program or club on anonymous social media sites like Yik Yak, Secret, and Whisper nor does it sanction its staff using District Technology Resources to maintain anonymous social media accounts.
Maintaining Professional Boundaries

Maintaining professional boundaries on social media is critical to sustaining public trust and ensuring relationships with students remain professional.

- All online dialogue and interactions with students should be for educational purposes only.
- Do not issue or accept student “friend” requests or “follow” students on social media.
- If you have a classroom social media account where you share important curricular information with students, students may “follow” your account. For the purposes of learning, you do not need to “follow” them back. Instead, encourage them to use hashtags so that you can follow their online conversations linked to a specific area of study.
- Do not send private messages and/or direct message to students on any social media platform or by text. If you need to communicate with a student directly, you must use the District’s email system and only where the parent or guardian has consented to such communications and receives a copy of the communication.
- Never share information with students online that would be prohibited under Maintaining Professional Staff/Student Relationships, Policy 5243 and Regulation 5243R.
- Keep in mind that not all students have or use social media accounts. When considering the use of a social media account for educational purposes, also consider communicating the educational information through other channels to ensure equal access by all students.

Public Records Act/Retention

It is important that employees recognize and understand that when they use social media accounts in the name of a District school, sports team, department, program or club or who establish a social media account in their professional capacities using District Technology Resources, they are creating communications that are likely subject to the Public Records Act. As such, employees who establish social media accounts on behalf of a school, sports team, department, program or club, or to obtain permission to open a social media account in their professional capacity using District Technology Resources must participate in training related to the Public Records Act and cannot delete or remove communications without first speaking with the District’s Public Records Officer.

Staff who elect to maintain social media accounts in their personal capacity using personal devices are cautioned that their social media postings may also be subject to disclosure if the staff member conducts District business on his or her personal social media account, regardless of if they are using personal or District Technology Resources to maintain the account. Staff members are encouraged to always use District email to conduct District business in electronic form.

Student Records and Ethics
As is set forth in Policy 5251, Ethics, District officers and employees may not use confidential information for private gain. A District officer or employee may not disclose or use any confidential information gained by reason of his or her official position, including but not limited to, student records, personal employee information, property appraisals, and business information the disclosure of which would put the District at a competitive disadvantage, for other than a District purpose. It is particularly important that employees who are using social media accounts be mindful of the District’s Student Records Policy and Regulation, Policy 3231, and Regulation 3231R, and not share otherwise confidential student information on social media absent of obtaining advanced written consent from a parent/guardian or adult student. Employees who establish social media accounts on behalf of a District school, sports team, department, program or club, or to obtain permission to open a social media account in their professional capacity using District Technology Resources must participate in training related to compliance with Policy 3231 and Regulation 3231R and the Family Educational Privacy Rights Act.

Generally, staff who establishes social media accounts cannot share:

- Personal student information, including names and current location, should not be posted on social media without informed consent from student’s parent/guardian. This includes, but not limited to, blogs, student work, individual or group photographs, videos featuring the student or other identifying information.

- For the safety of our students, detailed information (where students are to be at a particular time/location) about school field trips, sports, extracurricular activities or events should not be posted prior to the event. However, information about events that are open to parents and the public can be posted prior to the event.

- Particular care must be taken on social media for students who have been identified with custody and safety concerns.

**Student Work and Photos of Students**

Parents/Guardians annually receive the District’s Parent & Student Resource Handbook, which includes the Parent/Student Request to Restrict Release of Information and/or Access to Internet form. For those students with signed forms on file in the school’s office, District staff is not allowed to post such students’ names, photos, videos or work on any social media accounts (personal or District).

- Become familiar with your students who have a photo/video restriction on file.
- Students who are participating in a public school event or sports game are able to be photographed.
- As a courtesy, let students with photo/video permission know when you’ll be posting something about them.

Staff should be mindful that the District’s Policy and Regulation on Copyright Compliance, Policy 2025, and Regulation 2025R, continues to apply to social media use.
As another courtesy, obtain verbal consent from any adult (teacher, parent, volunteer, board or staff member) to post his or her intellectual property when such works are not trademarked, copyrighted, or subject to patent protection.

**Electronic Written Communication**

In order to comply with the Public Records Act, the Family Educational Records Privacy Act, and the Records Retention Schedule for School Districts issued by the Washington Secretary of State, all school employees are expected to use their District email accounts when sending electronic written communications during the performance of their job duties. All staff should be mindful that if they use other forms of electronic written communication during the performance of their job duties (including text messages and email from a non-district email accounts), those communications would be subject to disclosure under the Public Record Act, regardless if the communications are sent from personal accounts or personal devices. As such, all employees are again reminded that they should use their District email accounts when sending electronic written communications during the performance of their job duties.

Student educational records and otherwise confidential student educational information should never be transmitted by employees using personal email addresses or to an employee’s personal email address. Student educational records and otherwise confidential student educational information must be handled in the manner called for in the District’s Student Records Policy and Regulation, Policy 3231 and Regulation 3231R.

**Adopted: 04/12/2016**

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