

Red Hook Central School District

Social Media and Digital Communication Policy for Staff

The Red Hook Central School District recognizes the values associated with using social media as a communication and learning tool. The purpose of these guidelines is to establish best practices for District employees regarding the appropriate use of social media tools in their professional lives.

Definitions

Social media includes any and all forms of online publication where individuals engage in conversation or posting of written or image information (such as blogs, wikis, podcasts, virtual worlds, messaging sites and social networks). Some of the more familiar social media tools include such online services as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, Yik Yak, and LinkedIn. This list is by no means comprehensive or exhaustive; new social media platforms are continually introduced to the marketplace. The same set of professional expectations applies regardless of the choice of social media.

Professional Use: Refers to using social media to advance a program or function of the Red Hook Central School District as part of an employee's job responsibilities.

Personal Use: Refers to employees using social media to advance themselves personally.

Personal vs. Professional Use

The District does not take a position on an employee's decision to participate in the use of social media for personal use on personal time.

If, however, employees choose to use social media for personal use on personal time, they should not communicate with students and/or their families regarding topics pertaining to their employment at the Red Hook Central School District that could be considered sensitive, confidential, or disparaging. District-provided communication tools such as an employee's school email account, voicemail account and/or district website should be the only means by which you engage students and/or their families in communications pertaining to your employment responsibilities.

All staff are expected to serve as positive ambassadors for the District and as appropriate role models for students. It is important to maintain professionalism in all interactions with students, their families and the community. Failure to do so could put an employee in violation of existing District policy and at risk of disciplinary action.

Please keep in mind that as a school employee you have a responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity in any forum, including requirements for mandated reporting and compliance with all applicable District policies (e.g. DASA). Employees' online behavior in social media forums must reflect the same standards of professionalism, respect and integrity as face-to-face communications.

When using social media for personal use, if you identify yourself as an employee of the Red Hook Central School District, you are by extension associating yourself with the District, your colleagues and our school community; therefore you must ensure that any associated content is consistent with the mission of the district. Employees who identify themselves as associated with the District should use the following disclaimer on personal social media sites, “The views expressed on this site are my personal opinions and do not necessarily represent the views, opinions, mission or goals of the Red Hook Central School District.”

The District recognizes that student groups or members of the public may create social media representing students or groups associated with the District. When adults authorized to interact with students (coaches, advisors, volunteers, etc.) choose to join or engage with these social networking groups, they do so as if they were paid employees of the District. All employees are responsible for maintaining appropriate employee-student relationships at all times, and have further responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks. This includes acting to protect the safety of minors online.

1. You are Always a School Employee

- The lines between public and private, personal and professional can be very blurry in the digital world. Please keep in mind that you will be publicly identified as working for and sometimes representing the district in what you say and do online.
- Always write in the first person and make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the district. If you are speaking on behalf of the district, make sure you have secured prior authorization to do so from the Superintendent.
- Do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else’s identity or misrepresenting your identity.
- Do not share confidential information about school business, students or your colleagues.

2. Be Professional

- Respect the District’s values of respect, responsibility, honesty, integrity, and community service. Express your ideas and opinions in a respectful manner and consider carefully what you post. Assume that anything you post is public and will be viewed by everyone in your personal and professional domains.
- Respect copyright and fair use guidelines. Cite your source when quoting others’ work and use Creative Commons licensing when possible.
- Do not use any school logo or image without prior permission.

3. Respect Others and Ensure the Safety of Students

- Respect the privacy and the feelings of others and do not, under any circumstances, post offensive comments about students, colleagues, or the district in general. Negative comments about others may be interpreted as cyber-bullying and could lead to disciplinary action.
- Employees who join or engage in social networks that include students have the responsibility for monitoring content and addressing appropriate behavior or activity, including the protection and safety of minors.

- Do not post photos or movies of fellow employees without their permission. Do not post photos or movies that contain students to public social media sites without parent consent unless those images are taken in the public arena, such as sporting events or fine arts public performances.

4. Manage Employee/Student Relationships Carefully

- Employees are prohibited from establishing personal relationships with students that are unprofessional and therefore inappropriate. Do not fraternize with students as if they are your peers or friends. Unprofessional relationships include writing personal letters, email or text messages; calling students on cell phones or allowing students to make personal calls to you unrelated to class work or school activities; sending inappropriate pictures to students; discussing or revealing personal matters about your private life or inviting students to do the same; engaging in sexualized dialogue in any form. Do not connect with students via personal social media networks.
- Inappropriate or offensive content posted to social media sites by employees and viewed by students, parents or other employees may be investigated by building and district officials and, if warranted, may result in disciplinary action.
- School email accounts are not private. All communications by employees to students or parents at any time from any email system is expected to be professional in topic and tone. Email between employees and students or parents is to be done through the school-provided email account, and must conform to the policies set forth in the District's Acceptable Use Policy.

5. Classroom Use

- Social media tools are powerful teaching and communication tools that can add great value to classroom instruction. Teachers are encouraged to use social media tools where appropriate in addressing an educational goal of the classroom.
- Inform your building or department administrator when creating social networks for classroom use and make sure parents are aware of the intended use and educational purpose.
- Use district contact information (email, address, voicemail extension, etc.) for creating and maintaining classroom-related social media accounts.
- Abide by the user guidelines established by the owner of the social media site.
- Treat the social media network like an extension of your classroom. Monitor closely the interactions between students and deal with inappropriate use immediately.

6. Other Uses – Coaches, Advisors, Fundraisers, Programs

- Social media networks can be helpful for groups in interacting and sharing information. Any adult authorized to interact with students on behalf of the district should abide by the same set of expectations established for District employees when it comes to social media networks.
- Inform your supervisor (or designee) when you create social media networks for any school-related use.
- Be proactive by stating clearly that the network you have created is school-related.
- Abide by the user guidelines established by the owner of the social media site.
- Monitor closely the interactions between students and deal with inappropriate use immediately.

- Consult with your immediate supervisor/building administrator or technology director if further guidance is needed.

7. Questions

- Social media tools, including their uses and challenges, are evolving rapidly. The Red Hook Central School District will continue to monitor its strategies and best practices for using these tools. As a result, this policy will continue to evolve. Employees with suggestions or questions are encouraged to contact either their immediate supervisor and/or the district's Director of Technology.

Resources consulted:

Madison Metropolitan School District, Social Media & Digital Communications Guidelines dated 10.16.13
(<http://mmsd.org/communicationstoolkit>)

Bloomington Public Schools, Social Media Guidelines for Staff, rev. 12/16/2011
(<http://bloomingtonschools.info/SocialMediaGuide>)

Minnetonka Public Schools, Policy #470: Employee Use of Social Media (approved 3/4/2010), and
Guidelines for Policy #470: Social Media Networks
(<http://www.minnetonka.k12.mn.us/policies/470.pdf>)

Social Media Guidelines for Schools Wiki
(<http://socialmediaguidelines.pbworks.com/w/page/17050879/FrontPage>)

IBM's Social Media Guidelines (<http://socialmedia.biz/social-media-policies/ibms-social-media-policy/>)

Approved by BOE: 6/24/15