



# **SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES**

## **FOR AKRON CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT EMPLOYEES**

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To accommodate new communication paradigms and tools, Akron Central School District will explore new and emerging technologies, such as Social Media, to supplement the range of communication services available to the community. Social media and social networking sites (SNS) have great potential to connect people around the globe and enhance communication; however, they are also more informal, less structured, constantly changing and still emerging. These guidelines are designed to establish some basic parameters on the creation and use of SNS and other social media for the Akron Central School District and its personnel. Due to the constantly changing landscape of social media platforms, this is a living document that will be periodically updated to reflect current trends, norms, and best practices in the use of social media.

For purposes of these guidelines, the definition of public social media networks or Social Networking Sites (SNS) are defined to include: Web sites, Web logs (blogs), wikis, social networks, online forums, virtual worlds, and any other social media generally available to the public or consumers and which do not fall within the District's electronic technology network (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Flickr, blog sites, etc.). The definition of District approved password-protected social media tools are those that fall within the District's electronic technology network or which the District has approved for educational use. Within these internal forums, the District has greater authority and ability to protect minors from inappropriate content and can limit public access within these internal forums.

## Official District Use

Official District use is defined as the use of social media by an authorized individual(s), on behalf of his or her department, program or school, for the express purpose of communicating the District's broad interests or specific programmatic and policy interests. Authorization may be granted by the Superintendent or his/her designee. Employees are prohibited from setting up social networking sites for any official District use unless they have obtained prior approval from the Superintendent or his/her designee.

For social media accounts previously established by employees prior to the adoption of these guidelines, registration of your account through the Superintendent's office (or Superintendent's designee) is required. Registration allows an employee's social media account to be retroactively authorized for official District use.

### Establishing a Social Networking Site for Official Akron Central School District Use

- 1) Following approval from the Superintendent, the Technology staff will work with the department, building or service to properly set up an appropriate social networking site. All account names and log in passwords must be on file in the Technology Department.
- 2) The Superintendent/designee shall have the exclusive and final authority to determine whether individual buildings/facilities, departments or programs may initiate a SNS. The Superintendent/designee shall designate who will post content to SNS.
- 3) All social media accounts officially recognized by the District must have at least two District administrators as "owners" at all times. Usernames and passwords for all accounts must be on file at the Technology Office.
- 4) All approved building-level, or group pages, must follow or be a fan of the District office social media page.
- 5) The Akron CSD Rules of Engagement must be posted on any SNS officially recognized by the District. If a SNS prohibits posting the complete Rules of Engagement due to limited space, a link to the ACS website page containing the Rules of Engagement should be posted instead. Contact the Technology Department or click the link in this paragraph for the most current version to post.
- 6) All District SNS should include the disclaimer about grounds for removal of comments and the frequency the site is monitored. SNS administrators should compose the following comment/tweet when an issue arises on the site. *"Akron CSD is not liable for the comments posted to this site. Inappropriate content may be removed."* This statement may require revisions for use on alternate SNS.

### Quality Control/Content Integrity

- 1) The intent of creating an official District SNS is to build a communication channel for relaying professional messages regarding District schools, programs, and instruction. District SNS exist to educate the community and are not spaces for personal endeavors.
- 2) The District shall provide general training for all applicable personnel, including training on ethical and legal considerations, and compliance with all applicable policies and regulations. Individuals are responsible for keeping up to date on any changes in policies and regulations.
- 3) The District website will remain the primary source for all content. Any and all material on the District SNS will only supplement information that exists on the District's official website.
- 4) All the material/content that is entered or posted to the District SNS (e.g., Facebook) account/page should include a link back to the official District website wherever appropriate. An occasional reminder or announcement without a link is permissible (for example, a "Save the Date" announcement). A posting that references an event (for example, "Visiting Author Attends Class") should provide a link back to the website for the complete story.

- 5) Posting student photographs are acceptable if done so in accordance with the District's Photo Release Policy and School District Standards and Guidelines for Web Page Publishing. All photographs posted should represent the District in a positive manner. Professionalism is required; do not post photos that could potentially damage the reputation of the District, District employees or students. Official photography will not be edited ("Photoshopped") to misrepresent a situation or otherwise violate the public's trust. Imagery should be limited to standard darkroom edits (brightness, contrast, sharpness, color, cropping), unless it's clearly an illustrative work or captioned as such.
- 6) Do not post confidential or proprietary information about the District, its students, alumni or employees. Use good judgment and follow District policies (i.e., FERPA). Refrain from using information and conducting activities that may violate local, state or federal laws and regulations. If you are unsure whether certain content is protected by privacy or intellectual property laws, contact the Technology Department.
- 7) Thoroughly spell check and grammar check your content before posting. Citizens expect that school district employees will set a good example when they write and speak in public.
- 8) Remember you are writing for publication, even on SNS. Refrain from making unsubstantiated statements. Always provide full citations for laws or research. Make sure you have facts to back up your statements. Where necessary, provide appropriate and complete credit for copyrights, primary sources, and trademarks.
- 9) Personnel responsible for posting acknowledge and agree that when they create or post material on the Akron CSD SNS (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) they are in effect "content publishers" and as such are subject to a host of ethical and legal obligations including, but not limited to, compliance with the federal Digital Millennium Copyright Act. As "content publishers" what you write is ultimately your responsibility. If it seems inappropriate or may create controversy, use caution. If you're unsure, discuss it with your supervisor. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully.
- 10) SNS shall be required to contribute a minimum of two posts per week to maintain an active SNS and to keep users engaged. In general, do not post excessively. Exceptions may apply during school breaks and athletic off-seasons.
- 11) The District reserves the right to require the removal of any content which the District solely deems as a violation of any rule, regulation, or policy (e.g. vulgar, defaming, harassing, inappropriate). The District also reserves the right to end the right of any individual to post through the SNS for any reason. The Superintendent and the District reserve the right to end any District SNS created.
- 12) When in doubt, do not post. You may come across negative or disparaging posts about the District, or find users trying to spark negative conversations. Reject any urge to escalate these confrontations. Refer to the Technology Department to respond to negative posts. If necessary, seek advice from your supervisor or contact the Technology Department for best practices in addressing difficult situations online.
- 13) One of the aims of social media is to create dialogue, and people will not always agree on an issue. When confronted with a difference of opinion, stay calm. If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. Express your points in a clear, logical way. Don't pick fights, and correct mistakes when needed. Sometimes, it's best not to give certain comments credibility by acknowledging it with a response. You don't have to have the last word. Know when to stop engaging in active dialog. Seek assistance from your supervisor and/or Technology Department.
- 14) District employees identified as administrators of accounts are responsible for managing and monitoring content of their social media accounts. Administrators are responsible to notify the district about content that may violate the District's Social Media Guidelines for Employees. Inappropriate, offensive, injurious and illegal content or information that may compromise a student, employee or school's safety or security must be removed by ACS SNS administrators, via the technology office, or by the request of the Superintendent.
- 15) The community must feel encouraged to openly communicate within official District SNS. Attention must be paid to providing accurate and timely information for immediate reviewing and commenting, so as to minimize hasty reactions to ambiguity. The District appreciates that enormous resources are often required to "set the record straight" after people have reacted to vague, misleading or false reports – action is a powerful force in public opinion. It's important to deliver timely, accurate information, before misinformation affects actions.

## Professional and Classroom Use

Professional use is defined as an employee's use of SNS for the purpose of furthering his or her specific job responsibilities or professional duties through an external site or a District sponsored site. For example, a teacher signing up for a discussion forum to engage with other teachers in a community of practice. While use for professional interests is beneficial to the work of the District because it enables employees to stay informed on important issues or to collaborate with their peers, the social media tool or site the employee is using is not maintained or monitored by the District itself. Employee participation in external social media for professional use, using District technology, equipment and email addresses or during the school day requires prior approval and is subject to the procedures set forth below.

Classroom use is defined as use of SNS in a classroom for instructional purposes. An example may be the creation of a forum for class discussion taking place in a password protected online environment. Students can interact with their peers and teacher to discuss a class topic, sharing what they have discovered on the internet and voice their opinions. Teachers can upload homework, post notices, moderate discussions and share materials. Staff must also obtain prior approval from Building Administration for classroom use of these internal forums.

### Establishing Access

- 1) If you are participating in a SNS and/or blog for District-related professional use, it must be done with the approval of Technology Department and/or Superintendent.
- 2) Use of outside SNS for classroom or instructional purposes is discouraged. The District does not permit any communication or contact between staff and students on non-District based SNS (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Teachers are encouraged to use existing District established web tools such as teacher web pages within the District website, to communicate with students, to assign and collect student work, or to provide online feedback.
- 3) 21st century learning is constantly changing and many sites that are currently "blocked" by the District internet filter may have educational significance for teacher and student use. If you would like to request an online site be accessible to use for teaching, submit a request to the Building Principal/Technology Department for review. Requests will be reviewed and the list of blocked sites will be updated throughout the school year. A description should be provided of the intended use of the site and what tools on the site match your needed criteria. A link to the privacy policy for such sites should also be included.

### Quality Control/Content Integrity

- 1) When using social media for professional purposes, always identify yourself and your position with the District. Use your actual name - never create an alias or post as anonymous. Misidentifying yourself or providing false information may result in disciplinary action. Your District email address implies that you are acting on behalf of the District.
- 2) Do not post confidential or proprietary information about the District, its students, alumni or employees. Use good judgment and follow District policies (i.e., FERPA). Refrain from using information and conducting activities that may violate local, state or federal laws and regulations. If you are unsure whether certain content is protected by privacy or intellectual property laws contact the Technology Department.
- 3) Thoroughly spell check and grammar check your content before posting.
- 4) Remember you are writing for publication, even on social networks. Refrain from making unsubstantiated statements. Always provide full citations for laws or research. Make sure you have facts to back up your statements. Where necessary, provide appropriate and complete credit for copyrights, primary sources, and trademarks.
- 5) District personnel acknowledge and agree that when they create or post material they are in effect "content publishers" and as such are subject to a host of ethical and legal obligations including, but not limited to, compliance with the federal Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

- 6) Employees must be respectful and professional in all communications. While engaged in professional use of social media, employees shall not use obscene, profane or vulgar language on any social media network or engage in online communication or conduct that is harassing, threatening, bullying, libelous, or defamatory, that encourages any illegal activity or the inappropriate use of alcohol, illegal drugs, or that promotes inappropriate sexual behavior, sexual harassment, discrimination, or bullying.

## Personal Use and Responsibility

Personal use is defined as use that is not related to an employee's job duties for the District or his or her professional interests. For example, outside of work hours, an employee might create or maintain a blog related to a hobby, or a personal Facebook page containing news about family and friends. An employee checking a personal Facebook page, sending out a personal Tweet, or watching YouTube videos are examples of personal use of social media.

- 1) *Akron CSD does not allow personal use of social media during work hours and on District owned hardware. In accordance with the Acceptable Use Policy, computer access should be for educational and professional/career development.*
- 2) Akron CSD personnel shall conduct themselves in the "virtual" or online world of SNS just as they would in all face-to-face human interactions, namely treating others with dignity and respect and observing all other established standards of professional conduct.
- 3) District employees are personally responsible for all comments/information they publish online. Be mindful that what is published will be public for a long time. Be sure to protect privacy.
- 4) Online behavior should reflect the same standards of honesty, respect, and consideration that are used in face-to-face contact, and be in accordance with the highest professional standards. District employees are expected to behave honorably in online spaces. Online activities or communications which are improper, unethical, illegal, or which cause undue discomfort for students, employees, parents, or other community members should be avoided.
- 5) Posting comments and having online conversations on social media sites makes those comments public and available to anyone who has any online access. Please be aware that even with the strictest privacy settings what is said online should be within the bounds of professional discretion. Comments expressed via social media under the impression of a 'private conversation' could end up being shared in a larger, more public domain.
- 6) Comments related to the District should meet the highest standards of professional discretion. Employees should act on the assumption that all postings are in the public domain. Posted information could be interpreted as an extension of your office/classroom. What is inappropriate in your office/classroom is also inappropriate online. If posting comments or viewpoints on topics related to the District using any online medium, be sure you state that the information is representative of your views and opinions and not necessarily the views and opinions of the District.
- 7) Before posting personal photographs or avatars that represent you, consider how the images reflect on your reputation and professionalism. Also, remember not to use copyrighted images.
- 8) The line between professional and personal relationships is blurred within a social media context. Educational employees have a responsibility to maintain appropriate employee-student relationships, whether on or off duty. Both case law and public expectations hold educational employees to a higher standard of conduct than the general public. Due to the evolving nature of social web sites, District personnel should not use personal SNS to create or maintain personal relationships with students. For purposes of these guidelines, "personal relationships with students" shall mean any behavior or conduct that is unrelated to course work or official school matters. Such behavior may erode the professional authority and traditional roles of teacher and student within the District and may violate District policies and/or regulations.
- 9) *Akron CSD employees are discouraged from "friending/following" any student currently enrolled in any school within the District, Pre-K through 12, or their parents. It is easy for well-intentioned and innocent comments and situations to be misinterpreted, resulting in potentially damaging consequences for everyone involved. If your position within the District calls for communication with students or parents and is educationally justifiable, the use of the District*

network, email, teacher web pages within the District website, and school-provided/owned equipment are suggested for use when communicating online.

- 10) While mindful of employees' First Amendment free speech rights, District personnel who participate in social networking web sites, including the District SNS, shall not post any material which may result in the disruption of classroom or District activities. The District is entitled to make such a determination based on the facts surrounding the material as the District reasonably believes them to be.
- 11) Any information shared on social networks regarding the business of the District, whether using personal or District equipment to post, may be considered a public record and thus retrievable under FOIL.

## **School Logos**

Within your personal social mediums, do not use any District or school logo without written permission from District officials. For official District SNS, the District will provide you with a profile image to use.

## **Reporting Requirements**

District personnel shall be required to report known or suspected violations of the District SNS Guidelines to their Building Principal or immediate supervisor.

## **Disciplinary Sanctions**

District personnel who violate any provision of the SNS guidelines shall be subject to appropriate disciplinary measures up to and including termination of employment in accordance with legal guidelines, District policy and regulations, and the applicable collective bargaining agreement.

## **Compliance with Other Applicable Policies and Regulations**

District personnel who participate in social networking web sites, including official District SNS, shall be subject to all applicable policies and regulations adopted by the Board of Education.