

Social Media/Social Networking

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As technology rapidly advances, educators' use of technology at work and at home can have a significant effect on their profession. Whether inside or outside of the school building, your use of email, text messaging, blogging, and social media can affect you and your job. This advisory focuses on social media websites and mobile apps, and includes important information to consider in order to use these resources safely.

What is social media?

Most Americans who use the Internet also actively use at least one social media network: Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, LinkedIn, Tumblr, Pinterest, or others, both on computers and mobile devices. Social media websites and mobile apps allow users to share information and build online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.

Social media allows users to share personal information, interests, educational and professional information, photos, videos, links to news articles, and other information. Users connect with colleagues, former classmates and friends by becoming "friends" or "followers."

Social media is a powerful tool that can help users to stay plugged in to current events, connect with friends and colleagues, connect with PSEA, and other education organizations. When used appropriately, these tools can provide educators with valuable professional development opportunities, allow the sharing of ideas, news, and resources, and help you to understand the technology students are actively using, and allow educators stay ahead of the curve.

However, educators should consider the advice outlined in this advisory to ensure that social media use does not cause unintended problems in the workplace.

Three terms you need to know

Profile: Your profile on a social media website represents YOU. Profiles you create display information you post about yourself, and content that appears when people post on your page or tag you in a post. If you create a social media profile, make sure all of the material posted on your page is information you would be comfortable sharing with almost anyone.

Friends: Your "friends" and "followers" on the social media are individuals and organizations who you connect to your profile. You control your list of "friends." Friend is often used as a verb in this context.

Tagging: When social media users post photographs, videos, and other content onto social media sites, they can "tag" other individuals, to identify them or reference them in some way. Be aware of who tags you in photos and other content. Social media sites notifies users when they are tagged in a photo, video, or other post. Users have the option to remove "tags" of themselves if they choose to do so.

Social Media Advisory

Protect your privacy

Protecting the privacy of your information is an essential part of safe social media. Most social media sites have privacy settings to allow you to control who can see your profile and who can post on your profile. Make sure you are familiar with privacy settings provided by any site that you use. Privacy settings can be used to limit profile access to the individuals on your list of “friends.” Even if your information is “private,” make sure everything you post is professional and appropriate.

Think before you post

Each time you post a status update, photo, link, or any information on a social media site, make sure you would feel comfortable if the following people were to see it: your mother; your students; your superintendent; or the editor of the New York Times. Be sure to exercise the same caution when posting content on other people’s profiles, as you don’t know who their friends could be.

Even though the First Amendment protects your speech as a private citizen on matters of public concern, such speech may fall outside of First Amendment protection if it “impedes your employer’s effectiveness or efficiency, or otherwise disrupts the workplace.”

Avoid posting anything on your profile about your colleagues, administrators, or students. Avoid using inappropriate or profane language or graphics, or content that could reflect negatively on your workplace. Be aware that social media applications, quizzes, games, and other features also can involve content appearing on profile page. Make sure that anything posted on your page is appropriate.

Keep in mind that information posted to your profile page could be searchable. When interviewing for a job, would you want your potential employers to know: Your relationship status? Your political views? Your religion? Whether you have children? Is there something on your profile that is inconsistent with what is on your resume?

Picture perfect

Be sure not to post any photographs or video of yourself or others that could be considered unprofessional or inappropriate, or link to any material that could be considered unprofessional or profane. If a friend tags you in a photo or other content that could be considered unprofessional or profane, remove that tag and ask your friend to remove the content.

Know your friends

When accepting “friend requests” or adding individuals to your friend list, keep in mind that these individuals will have access to most information you post. Be sure not to accept a friend request from anyone you do not know. **Do not accept friend requests from your students or their parents.** If a student contacts you through a social media site, do not respond.

Stay informed

PSEA will provide up-to-date information for PSEA members to encourage safe use of social media sites and other electronic communication tools. Visit www.psea.org/technology often for the latest information on Technology & Your Profession.