

STAFF MEMBERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA ELECTRONIC OR DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS

At Stillwater Public Schools, we understand that social media can be a fun and rewarding way to share your life and opinions with family, friends and co-workers around the world. However, use of social media also presents certain risks and carries with it certain responsibilities. In order to assist employees in making responsible decisions, we have established these guidelines for appropriate use of social media.

General Guidelines

Consult Stillwater Public Schools District policy on Internet safety and appropriate use (Stillwater Public Schools District Policy EFBCA), as well as the employee handbook. Be aware that all existing policies and behavior guidelines extend to school-related activities in the online environment as well as on school premises.

Use good judgment. Think about the type of image being conveyed on behalf of the district when you are posting to social networks and social media sites. Remember that what is posted will be viewed and permanently archived. Social media websites and blogs are not private. Internet search engines can find information years after it was originally posted. Comments can be forwarded or copied, and archival systems save information even if a post is deleted.

The district considers an employee's use of any electronic media for the purpose of communicating with a student or a parent to be an extension of the employee's workplace responsibilities. Accordingly, the board expects school personnel to use professional judgment and appropriate decorum when using any social media in this fashion. School district administrators may require an employee to provide access to any websites used by him or her for communication with students or parents and to produce copies of any electronic communication with students or parents, including text messages, web page posts, etc. This policy does not authorize an administrator to inspect an employee's personal devices without the employee's express consent.

~~For the protection of both students and staff, whenever feasible, student contacts should be made with district-sponsored software (such as @stillwaterschools.com email and teacher websites), which provide both administrators and parents/guardians with access to the messages. For software not provided by the district (such as texting, Twitter, Facebook, etc.), employees should, whenever feasible, enable and preserve electronic communication records for a minimum of 60 days.~~

Social Networking Websites

~~Personnel shall abide by the following requirements regarding use of social networking websites, even when done in their personal time, using personal property. These provisions do NOT apply to former students who have graduated from high school NOR to students who are also the teacher's relative in the first or second degree (e.g. son or daughter, niece, nephew).~~

The Superintendent and the site administrators will annually remind staff members and orient new staff members concerning the importance of maintaining proper decorum in the on-line, digital world as well as in person. Employees must conduct themselves in ways that do not distract from or disrupt the educational process. The orientation and reminders will give special emphasis to the following prohibited behaviors:

STAFF MEMBERS AND ELECTRONIC OR DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS (Cont.)

1. **Improper Ffraternization with students using social networking websites on the Internet electronic or digital communication:**
 - a. Inappropriate contact with students or parents via e-mail, phone, or other devices is prohibited; **Teachers may not list current students as “friends” on networking sites.**
 - b. School personnel must exercise caution regarding social media contacts with students. A staff member who is “friends” with a student in such contexts is responsible for all of the information accessible to the student via the social media service. If a staff member allows any current students in the district to be their “friend” or form a similar connection, the staff members may not post items or send messages with sexual content, nor may they post items or send messages exhibiting or advocating the use of drugs or alcohol. This restriction is not intended to interfere with appropriate professional contacts or counseling, such as professional contacts and counseling between a student and a staff member who is also a youth minister, scout leader, appropriate commercial transactions, etc. **All e-contacts with students should be through the district’s school-approved platform(s).**
 - c. School personnel and sponsors should use, and direct students to use, the school e-mail system or other school-sponsored software for contacts whenever feasible, rather than personal emails or messaging services on a social networking site; voice telephone contacts should use the school’s telephone system whenever feasible; **Improper contact via electronic or digital communication is prohibited.**
 - d. Student/teacher contacts via e-mail, phone, or other devices should be limited to school-related or other professional business (e.g. assistance with homework, logistics of school-sponsored extracurricular events, appropriate contacts between a youth minister and a student, appropriate contacts with a student who is a babysitter or lawn care worker); staff shall not send messages that are personal in nature and not related to the business of the school or other community organization or that contain confidential information to persons not authorized to receive that information.
 - e. Before using social media, school personnel and sponsors should be aware of current educational technology best practices and appropriate privacy settings to ensure that information about students is private and not accessible, especially by personal friends of the employee/sponsor.
2. School district personnel and sponsors may not post items on social networking websites with sexual content if they are identifying themselves as an employee of the district; **Inappropriateness of posting items with sexual content.**
3. Employees may not post items exhibiting or advocating use of drugs or alcohol if they are identifying themselves as an employee of the district; **Inappropriateness of posting items exhibiting or advocating use of drugs and alcohol.**
4. Employees may not post pictures, video, or audio of students participating in school sponsored activities if the student’s parent (if the student is under 18) or the student (if the student is 18 or over) has requested to opt out of media release.
5. **Monitoring and penalties for improper use of district computers and technology**

Note that when using a school district e-mail address or equipment to participate in any social media or professional social networking activity, the communications are public records, and employees are responsible for the content in the communications.

STAFF MEMBERS AND ELECTRONIC OR DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS (Cont.)

As per state law, employees are discouraged from sharing content or comments containing the following when directed at a citizen of the State of Oklahoma:

1. Obscene sexual content or links to obscene sexual content;
2. Abusive behavior and bullying language or tone;
3. Conduct or encouragement of illegal activity; and
4. Disclosure of any information required to be maintained as confidential by law, regulation, or internal policy.

“Electronic or digital communication” includes, but is not limited to, emails, text messages, instant messages, direct messages, social media messages, messages sent through software applications, and any other electronic or digital means of communication.

“Social networking” or “social media” means interaction with external websites or services based upon participant contributions to the content. Types of social media include social and professional networks, blogs, micro blogs, video or phone sharing and social bookmarking; and

“Comment” means a response to an article or social media content submitted by a commenter.

Text and Instant Messaging

~~District personnel shall not text or instant message any student individually unless the staff member is using a district-sponsored communication service for instructional purposes, which provides both administrators and parents/guardians with full access to the messages, or the staff member is an activity sponsor contacting students about the logistics of the activity. Staff shall not send messages that are personal in nature and not related to the business of the school or that contain confidential information to persons not authorized to receive that information. These restrictions do not apply to students who are the staff member’s relative in the first or second degree and are not meant to restrict appropriate and professional contacts made in the context of community organizations such as youth ministries, scout troops, community outreach groups, etc., and are not meant to restrict appropriate contacts with a student who is a babysitter or lawn care worker, etc.~~

- ~~1. The Superintendent shall designate those staff persons who have management or administrator access to the district’s social media, including, but not limited to the ability to remove content from the school’s social media if determined to be inappropriate. Only content that is allowable on the school’s website is allowable on the school’s social media pages unless otherwise authorized by the superintendent.~~
- ~~2. Staff should not be accessing or using social media during the contract day unless it is work related.~~

The Superintendent or designees will periodically conduct internet searches to see if teachers have posted inappropriate materials on-line. When inappropriate use of computers and websites is discovered, the School

Principals and Superintendent will download the offensive material and promptly bring that misconduct to the attention of the school district’s legal counsel for review.

The board of education shall designate school-approved platforms. The administration shall publish school-approved platforms on the district’s website and in student or staff handbooks.

STAFF MEMBERS AND ELECTRONIC OR DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS (Cont.)

School personnel engaging in electronic or digital communication with an individual student shall include the student's parent or guardian in any electronic or digital communication, unless such communication is on a school-approved platform and related to school and academic communications. The only exception to this requirement may be made in case of an emergency, subject to subsequent notification to the parent or guardian. School employees shall make reasonable efforts to use school-approved platforms, systems, or applications that allow automatic inclusion of parents or guardians in communications with students.

Penalties

~~District personnel face the possibility of penalties, including employee termination, for failing to abide by district policies when accessing and using social media. Any inappropriate, harassing, intimidating, threatening or bullying to an employee of the district, regardless of whether the activity uses district equipment or occurs during school/work hours, is strictly forbidden and may lead to disciplinary action.~~

School employees reported to have engaged in electronic or digital communications that would violate this policy and state law shall be placed on administrative leave while the school district investigates the incident. If the investigation finds that no misconduct occurred, the school employee shall be reinstated, and the incident noted in the personnel file.

Employees who engage in any of the above-referenced prohibited behaviors are subject to the possibility of penalties, including termination of employment, for failure to exercise good judgment. Incidents will be reported in compliance with district policy FFG and state law

REFERENCE: EFBCA Policy; FL-R Policy
74 O.S. § 840-8.1
70 O.S. § 6-401.

***A copy of this policy shall be distributed to each affected employee by email.**