

Morgan County R-II School District

Social Media Guidelines for Faculty and Staff: Personal Use

Updated September 2017

Morgan County R-II School District realizes that part of 21st Century learning is adapting to the changing methods of communication. The importance of faculty, staff, students, and parents engaging, collaborating, learning, and sharing in these digital environments is part of 21st Century learning. To this aim, Morgan County R-II School District has developed the following guidelines to provide direction for employees, participating in online social media activities in their personal capacity (blogs, wikis, online social networks, application [“app”] development, or any other form of online publishing or discussion). While these guidelines may also be helpful for employees posting in their professional capacity, those postings are subject to board policy.

However, it is important to note that free speech protects educators who want to participate in social media, but courts have ruled that speech made pursuant to an employee’s duties, as an employee of the district, are not fully protected by the First Amendment and schools can discipline faculty and staff if their speech, including online postings, disrupts school operations.

Examples of social media include but are not limited to the following: blogs, Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Snapchat, YouTube, etc.

Best Practices:

Be Transparent

- How you represent yourself online is an extension of yourself. It is recommended that you do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else’s identity or misrepresenting your identity. Be honest about who you are, where you work, and what you do.

Personal Responsibility

- Morgan County R-II School District employees are personally responsible for the content they publish online. Be mindful that what you publish on your personal social media accounts will be public for a long time – it is recommended that you protect your privacy.
- Be aware that even with the strictest privacy settings what you ‘say’ online should be within the bounds of professional discretion. Comments expressed via social networking pages under the impression of a ‘private conversation’ may still end up being shared into a more public domain, even with privacy settings on

maximum. Anyone can take a picture of what you say and share it with others without your knowledge.

- It is recommended that your online behavior should reflect the same standards of honesty, respect, and consideration that you use face-to-face.
- Comments related to the school should always meet the highest standards of professional discretion even when commenting on personal social media accounts. When posting, even on the strictest settings, staff should act on the assumption that all postings are in the public domain. It is recommended that you refer to *Board Policy KB – Public Information Program* and review the portion about Effective Communications (<https://goo.gl/w1tXct>).
- When contributing online, do not post confidential student information or to your personal accounts. This may include, but is not limited to student photos, names, grades, behavior, etc. It is recommended that you refer to *Board Policy EHB – Technology Usage* and review the portion about Online Safety, Security and Confidentiality (<https://goo.gl/wj76ct>).
- If you want to have a professional presence through social media that is not used for classroom or district use, developing a profile on a site like LinkedIn or something similar might be a great practice.

Always A School Employee

The lines between “public and private” & “personal and professional” are blurred in the digital world. Even when you have a disclaimer or use a different user name, you will always be considered a district employee. Whether it is clearly communicated or not and even if it is not your intent, you will be identified as working for and sometimes representing the school in what you do and say online.

When writing personal posts, it is recommended that you always write in the first person (I, me, we, us) and make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the district.

Use a Disclaimer

- Include a disclaimer on your social media site which says something like this: “The opinions and positions expressed on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect my school district’s positions, strategies, or opinions.”
- This standard disclaimer does not exempt employees from their responsibilities as explained in these guidelines that do fall under board policies.
- When in doubt, direct the public to the principal and/or superintendent.

Media Relations

If asked by media to comment on a school-related issue, please refer them to the Morgan County R-II School District Administrative Offices (573)378-4231. Please do

not comment on behalf of the school district. When in doubt on how you should comment on social media, direct the public to your building principal, program director, or superintendent. Again, it is recommended that you refer to *Board Policy KB – Public Information Program* and review the portion about Effective Communications (<https://goo.gl/w1tXct>).

Be Respectful and Responsible

Employees, parents, and students reflect a diverse set of customs, values, and points of view. It is recommended that you be respectful of the opinions of others in your posts or comments. You are responsible for the content you post. Consider the words used to tag content in a social bookmarking site. Consider the profile picture or image you select. Do your tags, descriptions, and image portray you or others in the way you want to be portrayed?

Own and Correct Mistakes

If you make a mistake, it is recommended that you admit the mistake and correct it quickly. It is recommended that you clearly state if you've corrected a previous post. Even though damage may be done, it is best to admit your mistake and correct it. Apologize if appropriate.

Confidential Information

- Online postings and conversations are not private. Do not share confidential information whether it is internal school discussions or specific information about students or other staff or school situations (including crisis events). What you post will be seen and possibly shared by others and will be online for a long time. It can be forwarded or shared in just a few clicks. Do not write about a colleague or student without their permission. It is recommended that you refer to *Board Policy KB – Public Information Program* (<https://goo.gl/w1tXct>). It is also recommended that you refer to *Board Policy EHB – Technology Usage* and review the portion about Online Safety, Security and Confidentiality (<https://goo.gl/wj76ct>).

School Crisis Situations

During a school lockdown, secure mode, or crisis, employees should not be posting or asking for information online or through other forms of communication (texts, phone calls, etc.). During these situations, rumors can spread quickly and employees should be using this time to make sure that the safety of those in their charge/care is their top priority. It is recommended that you refer to *Board Policy KB – Public Information Program* (<https://goo.gl/w1tXct>).

Posting Photos or Movies of Students and Staff

No photos should be posted if it would violate *FERPA* or *HIPPA* or identify a student as a special-needs student. This includes online accounts, text messaging, or the physical posting of a photo in an employee's classroom or home (designated as special services).

No photos of activities to which the general public was not invited or not allowed may be posted on faculty and staff's personal social media accounts. However, these photos must be initially posted on a school or classroom, district-approved social media account and then shared from that account if the staff member wishes to share them on his/her personal social media.

Photos of activities to which the general public was invited may be posted on private accounts first; however, as a best practice, the district recommends that those photos are posted first on a school or classroom, district-approved social media account and then shared from that account.

There are situations of a personal nature in which you are a family member, friends with parents of a student, work with students in another capacity outside of school and have parent permission to post on your personal social media account. In those cases, your administrator and/or social media coordinator would be made aware. Remember it is recommended to be transparent in our communications.

Responding to Negative Comments and Criticism

How you respond to negative comments or criticism will say more about you and your character than what you post. If you delete a negative post, it discourages open communications. When publicly criticized or the recipient of a negative comment, it is recommended to first, stay cool/calm and don't reply in haste. It is recommended that you express your view in a clear and logical way. It is recommended that you don't get personal, and, if you made a mistake, admit it, and move ahead. It is not uncommon for a negative response to be answered by some other person, who supports your view. When in doubt, it's best to ignore a comment and not give it credibility by acknowledging it with a response publicly; perhaps a face-to-face meeting would be more appropriate.

When someone makes a negative comment or criticism on a district, school, classroom, or district-approved social media account be sure to keep in mind the commenting guidelines for District Facebook/social media pages. It is recommended that you refer to Board Policy KB – Public Information Program (<https://goo.gl/w1tXct>).