

**IFBGC-R Employee Use of Social Media**

6/10/21

GSBA Reference: IFBGC (Employee Computer and Internet Use)

**RATIONALE/OBJECTIVE:**

The Cobb County School District (District) recognizes the educational value inherent in the responsible use of Social Media. The District also recognizes, however, that District employees must use Social Media respectfully and ethically to avoid harming the reputations and careers of themselves and colleagues, as well as the reputation of the District and the education profession as a whole. Accordingly, the District takes the use of Social Media seriously and expects all faculty and staff to use Social Media in the personal and professional capacities with great care and consideration for the privacy and safety of others.

**RULE:****A. GENERAL PROVISIONS:**

This Administrative Rule (Rule) establishes rules and guidelines for the acceptable use of Social Media by District employees in their professional and personal capacities. This Rule sets forth regulations governing:

- the use and management of Professional Social Media Accounts by authorized users on behalf of a School or the District; and
- the use of Personal Social Media Accounts by District employees.

In addition to the rules and guidelines contained within, an employee's use of Social Media may also be subject to other District policies, laws, rules, or regulations.

**B. DEFINITIONS:**

1. "Social Media" means any internet-based technology or website that facilitates or promotes interactive communication, participation, collaboration, or the submission of user-generated content. Examples of Social Media include, but are not limited to: blogs, wikis, microblogging sites, such as Twitter™; social networking sites, such as Facebook™ and LinkedIn™; video sharing sites, such as YouTube™; and the interactive tools and functions they provide to users.
2. "Social Media Content" refers to any statements, materials, documents, photographs, graphics, and other information that is created, posted, or transmitted using Social Media.
3. "Social Media Account" refers to account, or other method of private access, which allows the creation or posting of Social Media Content to any Social Media website or application.
4. "Professional Social Media Account" refers to a Social Media Account created and used for the sole purpose of creating Social Media Content related to District/School activities and consistent with requirements and standards contained herein.
5. "Personal Social Media Account" refers to a Social Media Account which is created and used by an individual for personal use or any other use unrelated to District/School activities. Such accounts are not sanctioned, monitored, or approved by the District, nor is the District responsible for any of the Social Media Content posted on employee Personal Social Media Accounts.

**C. PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS:**

1. **Creation, Use, and Management of District-wide or School-wide Professional Social Media Accounts:**
  - a. The District may create, use, and maintain Professional Social Media Accounts for the purpose of releasing general District news and information. Schools, at the discretion of the principal, may also create and maintain Professional Social Media Accounts for school-related purposes.

- b. District employees who are charged with creating or managing district-wide or school-wide Professional Social Media Accounts are prohibited from using said accounts to share Social Media Content containing personal or political viewpoints, or any information unrelated to the District or school it was created to serve. Employees are expected to post only important and relevant District/School information which will be useful to and appreciated by the public. Employees should use proper spelling and grammar in creating any such Social Media Content and refrain from using "text talk" unless necessary to meet character limits. District-wide or school-wide Professional Social Media Accounts require commitment to ensure that such accounts remain a reliable and up-to-date source of information. Therefore, such employees are encouraged to post often. Examples of appropriate and post-worthy information and materials include, but are not limited to:
  - Good news/What's happening at your school/site;
  - Picture of the Day/Other school-related pictures (with appropriate consent if students are depicted);
  - Event reminders;
  - Congratulations on big accomplishments;
  - Notifications related to school bus operations; or
  - Emergency notifications (weather or otherwise).
- c. District employees are prohibited from making statements on crisis situations or emergencies on behalf of the District without appropriate permission from the District's Communications department or District leadership.
- d. District employees charged with the management of any Professional Social Media Account may:
  - (1) Block subscribers who post abusive or inappropriate content or otherwise post content which would constitute a violation of any provision contained herein if posted by a District employee; or
  - (2) Delete comments that contain inappropriate Social Media Content or would otherwise constitute a violation of any provision contained herein if posted by a District employee.
- e. Any employee-imposed restriction on content posted by public users on a Professional Social Media Account should be made using the employee's reasonable judgment and shall not be made due to the employee's personal or political viewpoints. All restrictions must be viewpoint-neutral, i.e., the employee should not delete comments expressing only one side of an issue but not the other.
- f. As representatives of the District, District employees must respond professionally and politely to comments posted by public users on Professional Social Media Accounts.
- g. District employees must abide by laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others when posting to Professional Social Media Accounts. Employees should not reprint whole articles or publications without first receiving written permission from the publication owner or quote more than a short excerpt of someone else's work. If possible, provide a link to the original or the author's information.
- h. The District does not expressly approve of or ensure the accuracy of any Social Media Content. No Social Media Content shall constitute a binding representation, agreement, offer, or endorsement on behalf of the District. Liking, linking, re-tweeting, or subscribing to another post or "fan page" does not constitute an endorsement on the part of the District of that post or "fan page's" creator, or of his or her opinion, product, or service; the same applies to comments posted by others to any Professional Social Media Accounts.

2. **Creation and Management of other Professional Social Media Accounts by Teachers:**

In cases where an employee desires to use Social Media as an enhancement to his or her instructional or school-based responsibilities, the use of a Personal Social Media account is prohibited. Instead, the creation and use of a Professional Social Media Account may be appropriate for such purposes. Employees who desire to engage with students via a Professional Social Media Account must notify their administrator and provide a link to such Professional Social Media Account for review.

**D. PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS:**

1. District employees are expected to comply with the standards set out herein when using a Personal Social Media Account.
2. District employees are personally responsible for the Social Media Content they post online.
3. In some instances, a District employee's use of a Personal Social Media Account may reflect poorly on the District, may wrongly appear to represent a District policy or opinion, or may wrongly appear to be on behalf of the District. For these reasons, Social Media Content posted on Personal Social Media Sites:
  - a. Shall not contain the District logo or any likeness thereto;
  - b. Shall not suggest or imply in any manner that such content is made or published on behalf of the District; and
  - c. Shall not contain any information which refers to individual or groups of students.
4. District employees are prohibited from each of the following activities with respect to a Personal Social Media Account.
  - a. Accepting or initiating invitations to "friend" students (family and relatives excluded) by otherwise providing students with direct access to an employee's Personal Social Media Account;
  - b. Engaging in private messaging with students (family and relatives excluded). All online conversations between a District employee and a student should be carried out on the Social Media Account's public messaging or public comment area; and
  - c. Displaying any pictures or videos of students on the employee's Personal Social Media Account.
5. Employees should refrain from using Personal Social Media Accounts during student contact hours and the workday.

**E. PROHIBITED USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA FOR BOTH PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL ACCOUNTS:**

District employees are prohibited from using Social Media in any manner which:

1. Publishes or re-publishes any racial or ethnic slur, profanity, personal insult, or similar language;
2. Displays any pictures or videos of students or fellow District employees without appropriate consent;
3. Involves any District employee in any dispute or conflict with other District employees;
4. Interferes with the work or duties of any District employee;
5. Disrupts the smooth and orderly operation of the District;
6. Creates or contributes to a harassing, demeaning, or hostile working environment for any District employee;
7. Places in doubt the reliability, trustworthiness, or sound judgment of the District, the Cobb County Board of Education, or any of its employees;
8. Harms the reputation of or discredits the District;
9. Discloses any information about the District or its employees which might reasonably be considered private or confidential;
10. Discloses any student information in violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ("FERPA") and the regulations promulgated thereunder;
11. Displays inappropriate personal information, videos, or pictures that impair the employee's professionalism and reputation;
12. Impairs or compromises the employee's ability to interact with the public and/or to carry out the functions of their job; or
13. Otherwise violates any applicable law, rule, regulation, or District policy.

**F. EMPLOYEE DISCIPLINE:**

In the event that any District employee violates any provision contained herein, such employee may be subject to disciplinary action up to and potentially including termination. Any person with questions regarding the application or meaning of this Rule should seek clarification from appropriate management.

**G. GOVERNING LAW:**

If any provision of the Policy is inconsistent with any applicable State or Federal law, rule, or regulation, then such provision shall yield, and the applicable law shall govern.

Approved: 6/10/21

Legal Reference

O.C.G.A. 10-1-912	Notification required upon breach of security regarding personal information
O.C.G.A. 16-9-90	Georgia Computer Systems Protection Act
O.C.G.A. 16-9-91	Computer Related Crime
O.C.G.A. 16-9-92	Computer Crimes: Definitions
O.C.G.A. 16-9-93	Computer crimes defined
O.C.G.A. 16-9-93.1	Misleading transmittal
O.C.G.A. 16-9-94	Violations
O.C.G.A. 16-9-122	Attempting or conspiring to attempt identity fraud
O.C.G.A. 16-11-37.1	Dissemination of information relating to terroristic acts
O.C.G.A. 16-12-100.1	Electronically furnishing obscene material to minors
O.C.G.A. 16-12-100.2	Computer or electronic pornography and child exploitation prevention