

Lamar County Schools Guidelines for Use of Social Media

Includes staff/student engagement on blogs, on microblogs, in online communities, on video/photo sharing sites, in forums and discussion boards, or on any other Internet-based or mobile communication tool for sharing and discussing information (e.g. Edmodo, Twitter, Facebook, Google Plus, YouTube)

Everyday new technologies are created and new channels and clouds are opened for our use on desktops, laptops, tablets, and Smartphones for us to share knowledge, express our creativity and connect with others who share our interests. While these are exciting, expressive, progressive, and ever changing, we must be aware of possible inappropriate use and how our use can impede the instructional process or assessment policies.

The following "best practice" guidelines are provided to help you effectively use these forums, protect your personal and professional reputation and follow national, state and/or district laws, rules and policies. It is not a requirement to use these emerging media and mandating their use is discouraged. Everything you need to successfully perform your duties is provided for you by Lamar County Public Schools (Powerschool –our Student Information System, Edmodo – a secure learning network for teachers and students, email, etc.). The Internet and social media sites change rapidly.

These guidelines are intended to provide direction if you choose to use social media sites for either personal or professional reasons. It is important to remember to conduct yourself in an appropriate manner to avoid any unintended situations that could adversely affect your professional standing. These guidelines are not intended to restrict your participation but to provide some protection if you choose to engage in online activities.

Professional Use

It is vital that when participating in social media in a professional capacity that you are honest about who you are, that you are thoughtful before you post and that you respect the purpose of the community in which you are posting. You must realize the following:

- Any information shared via social media sites regarding the business of the district is considered public record regardless of the ownership of the equipment used to post. You should notify parents of the intent to use social media to communicate with students and the intended purpose of such communications. All ethical expectations for appropriate employee/student relationships must be followed.
 - ALL electronic communication between staff, students, and parents should be transparent. As a public school district, we are expected to maintain openness, visibility, and accountability with regard to all communication.
 - ALL electronic communication between staff, students and parents are a matter of public record and/or may be accessible by others.
 - ALL electronic communication from staff to student or parent should be written as a professional representing Lamar County Schools. This includes word choices, tone, grammar and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a district professional. Always choose words that are courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike in manner. Please thoroughly proof the content before you post. Citizens expect that education employees set a good example when they write and speak in public. Content never disappears entirely once it is posted, so it's important you correct any

errors as soon as possible. Since transparency is important, admit your mistake, apologize if necessary, correct it and move on.

For school/district related use of such resources, remember:

- You must get approval from your supervisor before engaging.
- If you identify yourself as a district employee, PSC Ethics Guidelines govern your behavior(s).
 - You may still be identified with the district, and your behavior is governed by the Ethics Guidelines of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission even if you choose NOT to identify yourself with the district.
- Never create an alias and never be anonymous. Misidentifying yourself or providing false information may result in disciplinary action.
- Your @lamar.k12.ga.us address attached to your name and/or E-mail implies that you are acting on behalf of the district and are therefore required to conduct yourself as a professional.
- Accessing inappropriate Web sites during work hours or using your district E-mail or resources inappropriately may result in disciplinary action (whether accessing from desktop, laptop, tablet or Smartphone).
- Your actions are public and you will be held fully responsible when using a district E-mail address and/or equipment to participate in any social media or professional social media activity (such as Edmodo, and others),
- Confidential or proprietary information about the district, its students, alumni or employees may not be posted. Use good ethical judgment and follow federal, state and/or district rules, guidelines and policies.
- Social media is 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 the material is deleted.
- Think before you post. If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it may not be the time to share your thoughts in a post – you should delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed.
- Remember that you are writing for publication, even if it's just for a social media site. Refrain from making unsubstantiated statements such as “research shows” unless you also provide full citations of the research.

Personal Use

The inappropriate personal use of social media places your professional career at risk. As an employee of the district, you are subject to the PSC Code of Conduct. Below are suggested guidelines to follow when using social media for personal use:

- If you participate in social media for personal use and identify yourself as an employee of the district, you must state that you are expressing your own opinion, not that of the district.
 - If you identify yourself as a district employee, remember, your actions will reflect not only on you but on the district as well.
 - If you identify yourself as a district employee, readers will associate you with the district, even with the disclaimer that your views are your own.
- Never pretend to be someone else and post information about the district. Tracking tools enable supposedly anonymous posts to be traced back to their authors.
- Personal use of the district's official seal or individual school logos, athletic logos, mascots or any other such graphic representations or images is permitted only at the discretion of the district.
- If you post information or comments that are not related to the district, your activities may result in professional and/or personal repercussions. Such actions include, but are not limited to:

- Posting of photographs, regardless of the content, which could be considered offensive to other parties and be a violation of federal, state and/or district laws, guidelines and policies;
 - Posting of information considered to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene (as defined by the courts).
- You do not have control of what others may post on social media sites; therefore, be aware that your conduct in your private life may affect your professional life.
 - Be vigilant about what others post about you or on your page and, if necessary, take steps to remove comments that pose a risk to you or the district.
 - Do not fall prey to cyberbaiting. Think before you post. If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it may not be the time to share your thoughts in a post – you should delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed.
- Communicating with students on any public social media site may be viewed as inappropriate. All ethical expectations for appropriate employee/student relationships must be followed. This includes becoming “friends” or allowing students to access your personal page to communicate.
- Employees should refrain from creating “personal” web pages, blogs, or social media sites permitting social interaction with current students enrolled in the district.
- Employees should refrain from providing their personal E-mail address to students.