

**POLICY: USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING/MEDIA**

**Statement**

The Manchester Board of Education recognizes the importance of social media for its employees, and acknowledges that its employees have the right under the First Amendment, in certain circumstances, to speak out on matters of public concern. In accordance with the provisions of the First Amendment, the Board will regulate the use of social media by employees, including employees' personal use of social media, when such use:

- 1) Interferes, disrupts or undermines the effective operation of the school district;
- 2) Is used to engage in harassing, defamatory, obscene, abusive, discriminatory or threatening or similarly inappropriate communications;
- 3) Creates a hostile work environment;
- 4) Breaches confidentiality obligations of school district employees; and
- 5) Violates the law, board policies and/or other school rules and regulations.

The Board of Education, through its Superintendent, will adopt and maintain administrative regulations to implement this policy.

Legal References:

U.S. Constitution, Amend. I

Conn. Constitution, Article I, Sections 3, 4, 14

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 31-48d

Conn. Gen. Stat. § 31-51q

Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 53a-182; 53a-183; 53a-250

Electronic Communication Privacy Act, 28 U.S.C. §§ 2510 through 2520

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## **ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING/MEDIA**

### **Definitions:**

Social media includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites, such as

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram.

Board of Education includes all names, logos, buildings, images and entities under the authority of the Board of Education.

### **Rules Concerning Personal Social Media Activity**

1. An employee may not mention, discuss or reference the Board of Education, the school district or its individual schools, programs or teams on personal social networking sites in a manner that could reasonably be construed as an official school district communication, unless the employee also states that the post is the personal communication of the employee of the school district and that the views posted are the employee's alone and do not represent the views of the school district or the Board of Education.
2. Employees are required to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with students, parents, and colleagues. For example, absent an unrelated special relationship (e.g., relative or family friend), it is not appropriate for a teacher or administrator to "friend" a student or his/her parent or guardian or otherwise establish special relationships with selected students through personal social media, and it is not appropriate for an employee to give students or parents access to personal postings unrelated to school.
3. Unless given written consent, employees may not use the Board of Education's logo or trademarks on their personal posts. Please note that this prohibition extends to the use of logos or trademarks associated with individual schools, programs or teams of the school district.
4. Employees must refrain from engaging in harassing, defamatory, obscene, abusive, discriminatory or threatening or similarly inappropriate communications. Such posts reflect poorly on the school district's reputation, can affect the educational process and may substantially and materially interfere with an employee's ability to fulfill his/her professional responsibilities.
5. Employees are individually responsible for their personal posts on social media. Employees may be sued by other employees, parents or others, and any individual that views an employee's social media posts as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous or creating a hostile work environment. As such activities are outside the scope of employment, employees may be personally liable for such claims.
6. Employees are required to comply with all Board of Education policies and procedures with respect to the

use of computer equipment, networks or electronic devices when accessing social media sites. Any access to personal social media activities while on school property or using school district equipment must comply with those policies, and may not interfere with an employee's duties at work.

7. The Board of Education reserves the right to monitor all employee use of district computers and other electronic devices, including employee blogging and social networking activity. An employee should have no expectation of personal privacy in any personal communication or post made through social media while using district computers, cellular telephones or other electronic data devices.
8. All posts on personal social media must comply with the Board of Education's policies concerning confidentiality, including the confidentiality of student information. If an employee is unsure about the confidential nature of information the employee is considering posting, the employee shall consult with his/her supervisor prior to making the post.
9. An employee may not link a personal social media site or webpage to the Board of Education's website or the websites of individual schools, programs or teams.
10. All Board of Education policies that regulate off-duty conduct apply to social media activity including, but not limited to, policies related to public trust, illegal harassment, code of conduct, and protecting confidential information.

#### **Rules Concerning District-Sponsored Social Media Activity**

1. If an employee seeks to use social media sites as an educational tool or in relation to extracurricular activities or programs of the school district, the employee must seek and obtain the permission of his/her supervisor prior to setting up the site.
2. If an employee wishes to use Facebook or other similar social media site to communicate meetings, activities, games, responsibilities, announcements etc., for a school-based club or a school-based activity or an official school-based organization, or an official sports team, the employee must also comply with the following rules:
  - The employee must set up the club, etc. as a group list which will be "closed" (e.g. membership in the group is limited to students, parents and appropriate school personnel, and "monitored" (e.g. the employee had the ability to access and supervise communications on the social media site) unless given permission by the Superintendent or his/her designee to create an "open" or "public" social media account.
  - When Facebook is used as the social media site, members will not be established as "friends," but as members of the group list. When other social media sites are used, the employee will establish a similar parameter on the basis of the functionality of the social media site utilized.
  - Anyone who has access to the communications conveyed through a 'closed' site may only gain access by the permission of the employee (e.g. teacher, administrator, supervisor or coach). Persons desiring to access a 'closed' page may join only after the employee invites them and allows them to join.
  - Parents shall be permitted to access any 'closed' site that their child has been invited to join.
  - Access to a 'closed' site may only be permitted for educational purposes related to the club, activity,

organization or team.

- The employee responsible for the site will monitor it regularly.
  - The employee's supervisor shall be permitted access to any 'closed' site established by the employee for a school-related purpose.
  - Employees are required to maintain appropriate professional boundaries in the establishment and maintenance of all such district-sponsored social media activity.
3. Employees are required to refrain from making harassing, defamatory, obscene, abusive, discriminatory or threatening or similarly inappropriate statements in their social media posts on district-sponsored sites.
  4. Employees are required to comply with all Board of Education policies and procedures and all applicable laws with respect to the use of computer equipment, networks or devices when accessing district-sponsored social media sites.
  5. The Board of Education reserves the right to monitor all employee use of district computers and other electronic devices, including employee blogging and social networking activity. An employee should have no expectation of personal privacy in any communication or post made through social media while using district computers, cellular telephones or other data devices.
  6. All posts on district-sponsored social media must comply with the Board of Education's policies concerning confidentiality, including the confidentiality of student information. If an employee is unsure about the confidential nature of information the employee is considering posting, the employee shall consult with his/her supervisor prior to making the post.
  7. An employee may not link a district-sponsored social media site or webpage to any personal social media sites or sites not sponsored by the school district.
  8. An employee may not use district-sponsored social media communications for private financial gain, political, commercial, advertisement, and proselytizing or solicitation purpose.
  9. An employee may not use district-sponsored social media communications in a manner that misrepresents personal views as those of the Board of Education, individual school or school district, or in a manner that could be construed as such.

### **Disciplinary Consequences**

Violation of the Board's policy concerning the use of social/networking media or these administrative regulations may lead to discipline up to and including the termination of employment consistent with state and federal law.