

SD 42 PROCEDURE: 5780.1

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

A. INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE

1. Social media technology can serve as a powerful tool to enhance education, communication, and learning. This technology can provide both educational and professional benefits, including preparing Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District (“SD42”) students to succeed in their educational and career endeavors.
2. These Social Media Guidelines (“**Guidelines**”) provide direction regarding recommended practices for professional social media communication between SD42 employees, as well as social media communication between SD42 employees and SD42 students.
3. In recognition of the public and pervasive nature of social media communications, as well as the fact that in this digital era the lines between professional and personal endeavors are sometimes blurred, these Guidelines also address caveats for use of personal social media by staff.
4. These Guidelines do not address student-to-student communication via social media. Each school has a Code of Conduct that establishes limits and parameters to student use of technology and social media.

B. DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is defined as any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication, including, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, internet websites, internet forums, wikis, and apps. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, WhatsApp, Google+, and Flickr.

1. **Professional social media** is a work-related social media activity that is either support services based or school based (e.g., an SD42 principal establishing a Facebook page for their school or an SD42 teacher establishing a blog for their class).
2. **Personal social media** use is a non-work-related social media activity (e.g., an SD42 employee establishing a Facebook page or an X account for his/her own personal use).

C. APPLICABILITY

These Guidelines apply to all SD42 employees at all locations.

D. PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA USE

1. Maintenance of Separate Professional and Personal E-mail Accounts

SD42 employees who decide to engage in professional social media activities must maintain separate professional (SD42 email) and personal email addresses (Gmail, etc). As such, SD42 employees must not use their personal email address for professional social media activities. A professional social media presence will be tied to an SD42 email address and must be completely separate from any personal social media presence maintained by the SD42 employee.

2. Communication with SD42 Students

SD42 employees who work with students and communicate¹ with students through professional social media sites² will follow these guidelines:

- a. Professional social media sites that are school based will be designed to address reasonable instructional, educational or extra-curricular program matters. On school-based professional social media sites that involve SD42 students, SD42 employees will use the sites for professional purposes only. SD42 employees are not to review any personal social media accounts created by their students.
- b. Professional social media sites that are non-school-based will have a reasonable relationship to the mission and function of the SD42 organization creating the site.
- c. SD42 employees will inform their supervisor before setting up a professional social media presence and will acknowledge they have read and understood the SD42 Social Media Guidelines.
- d. Professional SD42 social media sites should include language identifying the sites as professional social media SD42 sites. For example, the professional sites can identify the SD42 school, department or particular grade using the site and be linked to the school website.

3. Guidance Regarding Professional Social Media Sites

- a. SD42 employees will treat professional social media space and communication like a classroom and/or a professional workplace. The same standards expected in SD42 professional settings are expected on professional social media sites.
- b. SD42 employees will exercise caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using professional social media sites.
- c. SD42 employees will use privacy settings to control access to their professional social media sites to ensure that professional social media communications only reach the

¹ As used here, the term “communicates” refers to activity including, but not limited to, “friending,” “following,” “commenting,” and “posting messages” using social media sites.

² The terms “site” and “sites” refer to an online or app-based social media account or usage.

employees' intended audience. However, SD42 employees should be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the internet can easily become public. Furthermore, social media sites can change their current default privacy settings and other functions. Employees are responsible for understanding the rules of the social media site they are using prior to using the site.

- d. Professional social media communication must be in compliance with existing School District regulations, SD42 policies, and applicable laws, including, but not limited to, prohibitions on the disclosure of confidential information and prohibitions on the use of harassing, obscene, discriminatory, defamatory or threatening language.
- e. No personally identifiable student information may be posted by SD42 employees on professional social media sites, including student photographs, without the consent of the students' parents/guardians.

4. Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites

- a. Employees using professional social media have no expectation of privacy with regard to their use of such media.
- b. SD42 administrators reserve the right to remove, disable, and provide feedback regarding professional social media sites that do not adhere to the law or do not reasonably align with these Guidelines.
- c. To assist in monitoring, as a recommended practice to the extent possible, the default setting for comments on professional social media sites should be turned off or moderated regularly. If the default setting for comments is turned on, the user must monitor comments on the site daily.
- d. When establishing professional social media sites, staff will consider the intended audience for the site and consider the level of privacy assigned to the site. Specifically, staff will consider whether the site should be a private network (for example, it is limited to a particular class or particular grade within a school) or a public network (for example, anyone within the school or a larger group within the SD42 community can participate). It is a recommended practice for professional social media sites to be private networks, unless there is a specific educational need for the site to be a public network.
- e. SD42 administrators will maintain documentation of all reported non-compliant communications as well as any violations that are otherwise brought to the supervisor's attention. (Please see section 12.)

5. Media Inquiries

Any media inquiries received via professional social media sites should be referred to the communications department.

E. PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA USE

1. Communication with SD42 Students

To maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students, SD42 employees should not communicate³ on personal social media sites with students who are currently enrolled in SD42 schools.

2. Guidance Regarding Personal Social Media Sites

Employees should exercise caution and common sense when using personal social media sites:

- a. As a recommended practice, employees are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites. However, be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the internet can easily become public. Furthermore, social media sites can change their current default privacy settings and other functions. As a result, employees have a personal responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site they are using.
- b. SD42 employees will not “tag” photos of other employees without the prior permission of the individuals being tagged.
- c. Personal social media use, including off-hours use, has the potential to result in disruption at school and/or the workplace, and can be in violation of Policy 5780: Appropriate Use of Information Technology and Communication Systems.
- d. The posting or disclosure of personally identifiable student information or confidential information via personal social media sites is prohibited.

F. APPLICABILITY OF SD42 POLICIES AND OTHER LAWS

1. These Guidelines provide direction intended to supplement, not supersede, existing SD42 policies and procedures. Users of professional social media sites are responsible for complying with all applicable federal, provincial, and local legislation.
2. These Guidelines are not designed to serve as a code of conduct for social media use. However, all existing SD42 policies and procedures, and legislation that cover employee conduct may be applicable in the social media environment.

G. ADDITIONAL INQUIRIES

This document is meant to provide general guidance and not cover every potential social media situation. Should any questions arise, please contact your zone supervisor. As these Guidelines address rapidly changing technology, SD42 will regularly revisit these Guidelines and will update them as needed.

³ Examples of such communications include, but are not limited to, “friending,” “following,” “commenting,” and posting messages.

H. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why is SD42 issuing guidance regarding social media?

Social media technology offers many educational benefits. SD42 is issuing this guidance to provide expectations of conduct and practices so that employees can take advantage of this technology in a manner that encourages professionalism, responsibility, safety, and awareness.

Getting Started

2. What if SD42 employees are already using social media for either professional or personal purposes?

Professional social media use: SD42 employees currently using social media for professional purposes should examine whether their use aligns with the Social Media Guidelines and these FAQs. Any use not consistent with these documents should be amended within a reasonable period of time. We will answer any questions or address any concerns during training and feedback sessions. If employees have linked their social media site to a personal email address, they should transition the site to a professional email address.

Personal social media use: SD42 employees who use social media for personal purposes will take steps to remove current SD42 students from those sites, subject to the exceptions listed in the Guidelines.⁴ Additionally, employees will review all of the Social Media Guidelines and FAQs to ensure familiarity with the recommended practices.

3. What are some types of common social media?

Blogs - Short for "web-logs", these are sites that can function as ongoing journals with multiple entries. Typically, entries are categorized with "tags" for easy searching. Most blogs allow for reader comments. Examples: *Blogger, Wordpress, TypePad*.

Micro-Blogs - These blogs allow for shorter content posts, typically with a limited set of typed characters allowed. Micro-blogs can be used for status updates and to quickly communicate information to "friends" or "followers." Examples: *X, Tumblr*.

Networking - These sites allow people to connect with each other around common interests, pursuits, and other categories. Examples: *Facebook, LinkedIn, WhatsApp Groups, Google+, Ning*.

Photo/Video - These sites allow people to share videos, images, slideshows and other media. Often these sites allow viewers to comment, and share posted content. Examples: *YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr*.

⁴ No exceptions are included in current guidelines.

4. What should SD42 employees who want to develop professional social media for their classroom, school, or office do?

Employees need to review the Social Media Guidelines and FAQs periodically to ensure that they are familiar with their contents and are aware of any updates.

Employees need to research and familiarize themselves with the social media site they intend to use. For example, if the proposed professional social media use involves students, employees are required to review the social media site's regulations and determine whether children under a certain age are allowed to use the site. In addition, employees should, for example, understand the default privacy and viewing settings for the social media site. We recommend that, where possible, employees establish group pages, rather than individual profiles, for educational purposes.

Monitoring

5. Who monitors professional social media sites and how frequently are they monitored?

Professional social media sites may be reviewed or monitored by administrators or their designates, such as a webmaster, from time to time. Employees who decide to establish professional social media sites will advise administrators of the professional social media platform on which they engage and the school administrator may perform a review of their specific platform.

Student Communication

6. Do these Guidelines apply to SD42 students?

These Guidelines do not address student-to-student communication via social media.

7. How should SD42 employees respond to "friend" requests by current SD42 students on their personal social media sites and accounts?

If SD42 employees receive a request from a current SD42 student to connect or communicate through a personal social media site, they should refuse the request. The following language is one suggested response:

"Please do not be offended if I do not accept or respond to your request. School district Social Media Guidelines do not permit interactions between SD42 employees and current SD42 students on personal social media sites. If you do want to connect, please contact me through the school (or class) page at_____ [insert link]."

Personal Use

8. May SD42 employees using social media for personal use communicate with SD42 colleagues?

These Guidelines do not address communication between employees on personal social media platforms. SD42 employees who use personal social media are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media accounts.

9. Why is it a recommended practice to have separate professional and personal social media sites and email addresses?

The reason for this distinction is to ensure separation between personal and professional spheres of online communication for SD42 employees. In this context, this separation is intended to clarify that professional social media use and personal social media use are different. Professional social media is work-related and may involve employee-to-student communication. Personal social media use is not work-related, and subject to certain exceptions noted in the Guidelines.

Feedback

10. May SD42 parents, students and employees provide feedback on these Guidelines?

Yes. SD42 welcomes feedback regarding these Guidelines and the FAQs. Because technology changes rapidly, SD42 plans to review and update its guidelines as necessary. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please forward them to Communications@sd42.ca.

Parents

11. Will SD42 parents/guardians be notified regarding their children's social media use for school-related activities?

Yes. SD42 schools will notify parents/guardians and seek their written consent before their child is invited to participate in professional social media activities. The consent request will also provide information describing the professional social media sites that will be available to their child. Parents/guardians who have questions or concerns about their children's use of social media for school purposes should contact their child's school for more information.

Reporting

12. What should employees or SD42 administrators and/or their designates do when they discover or receive a report of inappropriate activity?

An SD42 administrator or designate who discovers or receives a report of inappropriate or questionable content posted on a professional social media site should contact the director of human resources for assistance.

In addition, if other members of a school community find inappropriate material on a professional social media site, they are encouraged to report it to an SD42 administrator or follow the process outlined in the school district's Whistleblower policy.

13. How can SD42 employees determine what constitutes confidential information or personally identifiable student information that should not be posted or disclosed?

If SD42 employees have questions about what constitutes confidential information or personally identifiable student information, they should contact their supervisor to seek clarity.

UPDATED: August 2024

Parts of the social media guidelines were obtained from the New York Department of Education and modified to fit the SD42 environment and culture. We have contacted this organization to obtain the rights to use their content.