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## Social Media Guidelines Owen County Schools

### 1. Introduction/Purpose

- a. Social media technology can serve as a tool to enhance educational initiatives, communication, and learning. This technology can provide both educational and professional benefits, including preparing Owen County students to become college and career ready.
- b. The Owen County Board of Education is committed to ensuring that all staff and students, who utilize social media technology for professional purposes, do so in a safe and responsible manner.
- c. These Social Media Guidelines provide guidance regarding recommended practices for professional social media communication between Owen County employees, as well as social media communication between employees and students.
- d. In recognition of that the lines between professional and personal endeavors are sometimes blurred, these Guidelines also address **recommended** practices for use of personal social media by staff.

### 2. Definition of Social Media

Social media, as defined by the Owen County Board of Education, is the use of the web by staff to transparently interact, distribute, create, store and share with peers through, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, Internet websites, Internet forums, and wikis. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google, and Flickr.

- a. Professional social media is a work-related social media activity that is either school-based (e.g., a principal establishing a Facebook page for his/her school or a teacher establishing a blog for his/her class), or non-school-based (e.g., an office establishing a Facebook page to facilitate the office's administration).
- b. Personal social media use is a non work-related social media activity (e.g., a central employee establishing a Facebook page or a Twitter account for his/her own personal use).

### 3. Applicability

These Guidelines apply to all Owen County School employees.

### 4. Professional Social Media Use

- a. **Maintenance of Separate Professional and Personal E-mail Accounts** Owen County Schools employees who decide to engage in professional social media activities should maintain separate professional and personal email addresses. As such, Owen County School employees should not use their personal email address for professional social media activities. The professional social media presence should utilize a professional email address and should be completely separate from any personal social media presence maintained by the Owen County Schools employee. Regular and continuous use of a personal email address for professional purposes, including social media use, will result in Owen County Schools considering the email address, and the corresponding use of that address, as a professional account.
- b. **Communication with Owen County Students**

Owen County employees who work with students and communicate (following, friending, commenting, and posting messages) with students through professional social media sites should follow these guidelines:

- Professional social media sites that are school-based should be designed to address reasonable instructional, educational or extra-curricular program matters;
- Professional social media sites that are non-school based should have a reasonable relationship to the mission and function of the Owen County administrative office creating the site;
- Each school year, Owen County School parents will be notified about the professional social media activities their children will be invited to participate in. We will inform parents of the purpose and nature of each professional social media account their children will access and will instruct parents to contact the school with any questions or concerns;
- To the extent possible, based on the social media site being used, Owen County supervisors or their designees should be given administrator rights or access to the professional social media accounts established by Owen County School employees;
- Owen County school employees will be required to obtain their supervisor's approval before setting up a professional social media presence;
- Supervisors and their designees are responsible for maintaining a list of all professional social media accounts within their particular school or office;
- Professional Owen County School social media sites should include language identifying the sites as professional social media Owen County school sites. For example, the professional sites can identify the Owen County School, department or particular grade that is utilizing the site.

#### **c. Guidance Regarding Professional Social Media Sites**

- Owen County School employees should treat professional social media space and communication like a classroom. The same standards expected in the classrooms are expected on professional social media sites. If a particular type of behavior is inappropriate in the classroom, then that behavior is also inappropriate on the professional social media site;
- Owen County School employees should use privacy settings to control access to their professional social media sites to ensure that professional social media communications only reach the employees' intended audience. However, Owen County School 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. As a result, employees have an individualized responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site being utilized;
- Professional social media communication should be in compliance with existing Owen County School 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;
- No personally identifiable student information may be posted by employees on professional social media sites, including student photographs, without the consent of the students' parents; and
- Students who participate in professional social media sites may not be permitted to post photographs featuring other students.

#### **d. Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites**

- Employees using professional social media have no expectation of privacy with regard to their use of such media. The OCBOE will regularly monitor professional social media sites to protect the school community;

- OCBOE supervisors, or their designees, such as webmasters, are responsible for monitoring their employees' professional social media sites. The monitoring responsibilities include reviewing the professional social media sites on a regular basis. If supervisors discover questionable communications or behavior on professional social media sites, the supervisors are required to contact the appropriate authorities for assistance. If Owen County School employees decide to create a professional social media site and they are notified of questionable communications or behavior on their site, they are required to contact the appropriate authorities as well as their supervisor for assistance.
- Owen County administrators reserve the right to remove, disable, and provide feedback regarding professional social media sites that do not adhere to the law or Owen County Schools regulations or do not reasonably align with these Guidelines;
- 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. If the default setting for comments is turned on, the comments on the site must be monitored on a daily basis;
- When establishing professional social media sites, supervisors and employees should consider the intended audience for the site and consider the level of privacy assigned to the site, specifically, 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 Owen County 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; and
- Owen County administrators should maintain a detailed log of all reported non-compliant communications as well as any violations that are otherwise brought to the administrator's attention.

**e. Press Inquiries**

Any press inquiries received via professional social media sites should be referred to the Owen County School District's Director of Curriculum and Instruction.

**5. Personal Social Media Use**

**a. Communication with Owen County Students**

- In order to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students, Owen County school employees should not communicate with students who are currently enrolled in Owen County schools on personal social media sites. This provision is subject to the following exceptions: (a) communication with relatives and (b) if an emergency situation requires such communication, in which case the Owen County employee should notify his/her supervisor of the contact as soon as possible.

**b. Guidance Regarding Personal Social Media Sites**

- Owen County employees' public online activities should adhere to the EPBS Professional Code of Ethics.
- As a recommended practice, Owen County 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 an individualized responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site being utilized;
- Owen County employees should not "tag" photos of other Owen County employees, or Owen County volunteers without the prior permission of the individuals being tagged;
- The posting or disclosure of personally identifiable student information or confidential information via personal social media sites, in violation of Owen County Acceptable Use Policy (08.2323) is prohibited; and
- Owen County employees should not use the Owen County District logo in any postings and

should not link to the Owen County website or post Owen County material on any personal social media sites without the permission of the superintendent or designee.

## 6. Applicability of Owen County Schools Policies and Other Laws

- a. These Guidelines provide guidance intended to supplement, not supersede, existing Owen County BOE policies. Users of professional social media sites are responsible for complying with all applicable federal, state and local laws, including, but not limited to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) (<http://business.ftc.gov/privacy-and-security/children%E2%80%99s-privacy>), Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/index.html>), and intellectual property laws.
- b. These Guidelines are not designed to serve as a code of conduct for social media use. However, all existing Board of Education policies, regulations and laws that cover employee conduct may be applicable in the social media environment.

## 7. Additional Inquiries

This document is meant to provide general guidance and does not cover every potential social media situation. Should any questions arise, please consult the Frequently Asked Questions segment or contact the superintendent or designee. As these Guidelines address rapidly changing technology, the BOE will regularly revisit these Guidelines and will update them as needed.

## 8. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### **Why is the BOE issuing guidance regarding social media?**

- Social media technology offers many educational benefits. The BOE is issuing this guidance to provide recommended practices for employees to take advantage of this technology in a manner that encourages professionalism, responsibility, safety and awareness.
- In addition, these Guidelines provide recommended best practices for employees who use social media for personal communications.

### **What if BOE employees are already using social media for either professional or personal purposes?**

- Professional social media use: OCBOE 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 altered or 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: OCBOE employees who use social media for personal purposes should take steps to remove current Owen County students, subject to the exceptions listed in the Guidelines, from those sites. Additionally, employees should review all of the Social Media Guidelines and FAQs to ensure familiarity with the recommended practices.

### **What are some common types of 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.
- **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."
- **Networking** - These sites allow people to connect with each other around common interests, pursuits and other categories.

- **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.

**What should OCBOE employees who want to develop professional social media for their classroom, school, or office do?**

- Employees should review the Social Media Guidelines and FAQs periodically to ensure that they are familiar with their contents and are aware of any updates.
- Employees should research and familiarize themselves with the social media site they intend to utilize. 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. Where possible, we recommend that OCBOE employees establish group pages, rather than individual profiles, for educational purposes.

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

- Professional social media sites will be reviewed and monitored by school principals. The specific level of review required for each professional social media site will depend on the particular characteristics of the social media site. Sites that are interactive, for example, those that allow comments and posting, will need to be monitored more closely. Other factors that will impact the frequency include the level of privacy assigned to the site, specifically, whether the site is a private network (for example, limited to a particular class) or a public network (open to anyone within the school or a larger group within the Owen County community). Employees who decide to establish professional social media sites can engage in a voluntary review of their specific site on a regular basis.

**Do these Guidelines apply to Owen County students?**

- These Guidelines do not address student-to-student communication via social media. The Owen County Discipline Code establishes the range of disciplinary options and guidance interventions that can be used when students engage in misconduct involving social media.

**How should OCBOE employees respond to “friend” requests by current Owen County students on their personal social media sites and accounts?**

- If OCBOE employees receive a request from a current Owen County 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. As a OCBOE employee, the agency’s Social Media Guidelines do not permit interactions with current Owen County 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**

**May OCBOE employees using social media for personal use communicate with OCBOE colleagues?**

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

**Why is it a recommended practice to have separated 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 OCBOE employees. In this context, this separation is intended to clarify that professional social media and personal social media are different. Professional social media is work-related and may involve employee-to-student communication. Personal social media is not work-related, and subject to certain exceptions noted in the Guidelines, does not involve employee-to-student communication.

**May Owen County parents, students and employees provide feedback on these Guidelines?**

- Yes. The OC technology committee welcomes feedback regarding these Guidelines and the FAQs. Because technology changes rapidly, the OC technology department plans to review and update its guidance as necessary. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please forward them to [carrie.wilhoite@owen.kyschools.us](mailto:carrie.wilhoite@owen.kyschools.us)

**Will Owen County parents be notified regarding their children's social media use for school-related activities?**

- Yes. Owen County schools will notify parents if their child is invited to participate in professional social media activities and we will provide information describing the professional social media sites that will be available to their child. Parents who have questions or concerns about their children's use of social media for school purposes should contact the school for more information.

**What should Owen County supervisors and their designees, who are responsible for monitoring professional social media, do when they discover or receive a report of inappropriate activity?**

- A OCBOE supervisor who discovers or receives a report of inappropriate or questionable content posted on a professional social media site should contact the appropriate authorities for assistance, in accordance with existing DOE reporting requirements. Depending on the circumstances, the appropriate authorities may include, but are not limited to: Owenton Police Department
- 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 a OCBOE supervisor.

**How can Owen County employees and supervisors determine what constitutes confidential information or personally identifiable student information that should not be posted or disclosed?**

- Contact the Director of Technology of Owen County Schools