

Guidelines for Using Social Media in USD 231

Gardner Edgerton School District is proud to provide its employees with the access and support they need to tap into the power of social media in an educational environment. Social media sites can offer educators:

- Efficient communication with parents and/or students
- A relevant online environment to engage and challenge students
- Opportunities to teach responsible digital citizenship
- Real-time feedback and collaboration from anywhere in the world

Gardner Edgerton School District recognizes that many of our staff, students, parents and community members are active social media users. As a school district, we also incorporate social media as part of our communication strategy. USD 231 currently has an active Facebook page and Twitter account that shares district/student accomplishments, event notices, school cancellations, etc. throughout the school year.

The purpose of these guidelines is to help you to participate online in a respectful, relevant way that protects your reputation, and the reputation of USD 231, and that respects the relationship between teachers and students.

As professionals, school district employees must agree to follow the district Technology Use Policy adopted by the Gardner Edgerton School District Board of Education. Consult the Board Policy Index on the district website, www.usd231.com for policy language.

For the purposes of this document, social media includes, but is not necessarily limited to, social networking and media sharing sites such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Flickr, Tumblr, and YouTube. It also includes blogs, comments on web sites, discussion forums, and any other activity online involving connecting or communicating with other users.

These guidelines complement, but do not replace, any existing policies regarding the use of technology, computers, e-mail and the Internet that are in place at Gardner Edgerton School District.

Your Personal Responsibility

We encourage responsible participation in social networking sites, subject to existing policies concerning the use of social media during work hours and other applicable policies, including, but not limited to those concerning non-discrimination, anti-harassment, anti-bullying, and copyright/fair uses. We ask that you carefully consider the very public forum you are participating in and act in a way that properly represents both your professional reputation and the Gardner Edgerton School District. Express your ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. Seek to build trust and responsibility in your relationships. Avoid insulting others, including students, staff, parents, our extended school community, or other school districts. Do not use racial slurs, innuendos, obscenity or other inappropriate content. Avoid posting, sharing, commenting, or otherwise engaging in rumors or unsupported information. Represent the District and the students and parents you serve in the best light. Your posts and comments should help build and support the school community. You are responsible for what you post.

Communications that would be deemed inappropriate or actionable, whether they occurred inside or outside of the classroom, do not become acceptable merely because they are made online. Always bear in mind that once posted, you cannot take it back. Some specific guidelines we ask you to consider:

- **Use common sense when posting online.** While these guidelines are in no way intended to limit or infringe upon your rights under the National Labor Relations Act (“NLRA”) to comment upon the workplace, it remains good practice to never post anything that would embarrass you or Gardner Edgerton School District, or would call your professional reputation into question.
- **You are personally responsible for the content you publish online.** “Content” includes personal comments, links, photographs, audio or video, and content created by other users that you choose to share or re-post.
- **Be mindful that any content you publish will be public for a long time.** Not only can your content show up in Google and other search engines, but the FTC allows private corporations to store publicly accessible Facebook posts for a period of some seven years to be used in employee background checks made by current or potential employers. Moreover, even posts that are “private” may be subject to discovery in legal actions.
- **You should also be mindful that once something is posted, you cannot take it back.** In most instances deleting content will not make it disappear. Deleted content can still show up in online searches. Or, with the click of a button, other users can take a screenshot, re-post, or share your content with others. Even if you share your content with a very limited number of people, nothing prohibits your contacts from sharing the information you post.
- **Before you post or share content, ask yourself if you would want to see that content in the newspaper or on the evening news?** Would you feel comfortable if your content was read by colleagues, your students, parents, the School Board or, in worst case, be subpoenaed in a lawsuit? If the answer is “no” then the content is best not shared.

- **Special care should be taken when posting personal photographs.** Remember, your social networking site is an extension of your personality and professional reputation. All photographs should be posted with the assumption that they could end up in the public realm. As an employee of this district, content you post may not include provocative photographs, sexually explicit messages, content showing or promoting the excessive or irresponsible consumption of alcohol or use of drugs, or any activity students are legally prohibited from doing. Remember, even with privacy settings in place, your content could be seen by students or parents or find its way into the public realm.
- **The lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred in the online world.** When you are online, you may be connected to colleagues, students, parents and the school community. Sometimes those connections may be direct and obvious. Other times the connections may be indirect or via mutual connections. You should ensure that content associated with you is consistent with your work at Gardner Edgerton School District. Your online behavior should reflect the same standards of honesty, respect, and consideration you apply offline.
- **Protect your privacy. You are responsible for understanding and controlling privacy settings on each social network you use.** Always assume default settings will make your profile and any content you share publicly accessible. You should also understand that even with maximum privacy settings in place, content can still find its way in to the public domain.
- **Use your personal email addresses on social networking sites and while engaging in other off duty social media activities.** At no time, except with prior consent, should you claim to be speaking or issuing opinions on behalf of Gardner Edgerton School District. In instances where there could be confusion, you must add a disclaimer stating that views and content are exclusively your own and not representative of Gardner Edgerton School District.
- **National Labor Relations Act.** While the Gardner Edgerton School District respects the rights of its employees to exercise their rights under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), employees should not make any derogatory statements about colleagues or students or other comments that would reflect badly on your professional reputation or the reputation of Gardner Edgerton School District. Notwithstanding the foregoing, you may make comments in the exercise of your rights under the NLRA. You are ultimately responsible for your comments and Gardner Edgerton School District recommends that you thoughtfully consider your rights and responsibilities prior to posting.
- **Student/Staff Protection.** Do not post photos or videos that contain identifying information concerning any students without prior parental approval. Confidential student or personnel information should not be posted online. Be sure not to violate any provision of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.
- **Do not use any school logo or image without permission.**
- **Do not create any social media account, blog, or website, intended to represent Gardner Edgerton School District without prior approval from district administration.** It is important for us to protect the district's brand, ensure certain brand standards and content guidelines are maintained, and ensure any new accounts fit overall communications and education standards established by the district.

Employee-Student Relations

The district recognizes the role that communication and collaboration between employees and students plays in the educational process and experience. The district further recognizes that the advancement of electronic communication and social media technologies creates greater opportunity for interactions between employees and students, and provides these additional guidelines for your own and our students' protection.

- **Employees are never under any obligation to accept friend or follower requests from any student, or to use personal social media accounts to engage with students or participate in district projects.** In addition, you should bear in mind that unless your account has privacy settings correctly configured, everything you post may be publicly accessible to your students whether you are connected to them or not.
- **Employees must exercise great care in connecting with students on any social media channels.** Do not send permission-based friend or follower requests to students, for example Facebook friend requests. Use discretion and carefully consider the guidelines provided by the district before accepting any permission-based friend or follower requests received from students. It is Gardner Edgerton School District's recommendation that if an employee decides to accept friend or follower requests received from students that they should accept all such requests, and not selectively limit their interactions to what could be perceived as a few preferred individuals.
- **Any employee-student communications or relationships via social media should be of an appropriate, educational, and professional nature, have content that is appropriate for both the communications medium and the audience addressed, and must not violate any provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.** With each communication, ask yourself if it's something you would feel comfortable being printed in the newspaper, read by parents, colleagues, or the School Board. As with any content, always assume any communication can easily end up in the public realm. Employees who are connected to or communicate with students via social media must understand they may be granting those students access to all content in their personal social media profiles and should consider the guidelines the district has provided to ensure students are protected from exposure to inappropriate content or content that might compromise the employee's professional reputation.
- **Employees are also responsible for ensuring any relationship and all dialogue with the student is kept professional in its nature and for immediately reporting to the district any inappropriate communication received from a student.** This is as much for your protection as the student's. Any content or communication generated either by you, or by a student, which would be inappropriate in the classroom should also be considered inappropriate when shared via social media.

The district recognizes there may be certain limited exceptions to these guidelines, such as a student being a family member or relative, or in those instances where an employee's interaction with a student is as a result of certain extra-curricular activities such as Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, religious organizations or other similar relationships.

Social Media Information Sharing Form: <https://goo.gl/forms/jpcUHJZbl1RIUDVU2>

