

# POLICY

SOMERSET COUNTY  
BOARD OF EDUCATION

<b>Date Submitted:</b> March 4, 2013	<b>Number:</b> 700-57
<b>Date Reviewed:</b>	
<b>Subject:</b>  Employees' Professional and Personal Use of Social Media	<b>Date Approved:</b> March 19, 2013
	<b>Date Revised:</b>
	<b>Date Effective:</b> March 19, 2013

## 1. PURPOSE

- A. 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 Somerset County Public School (SCPS) students to succeed in their educational and career endeavors.
- B. The Board is committed to ensuring that all stakeholders who utilize social media technology for professional purposes, including staff and students, do so in a safe and responsible manner. SCPS strives to create professional social media environments that mirror the academically supportive environments of our schools.
- C. This policy provides guidance regarding recommended practices for professional social media communication between employees, as well as social media communication between employees and students.
- D. 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. This policy also addresses recommended practices for use of personal social media by SCPS staff.

## 2. **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, and wikis.

- A. Professional social media** is a work-related social media activity that is either school-based (instructional) or non-school-based (administrative).
- B. Personal social media** use is a non-work-related social media activity.

**3. Applicability**

This policy applies to SCPS employees. SCPS will take steps to ensure that other stakeholders, including vendors, volunteers, and independent contractors are informed of this policy. Principals/designees, supervisors, the CFO, The COO, will share the policy with stakeholders with whom they work.

**4. Professional Social Media Use**

**A. Maintenance of Separate Professional and Personal Email Accounts**

SCPS employees who decide to engage in professional social media activities shall maintain separate professional and personal email addresses. As such, employees shall not use their personal email address for professional social media activities. The professional social media presence shall utilize a professional email address and shall be completely separate from any personal social media presence maintained by the employee.

**B. Communication with SCPS Students**

Employees who work with students and communicate with students through professional social media sites should follow these guidelines:

- (1). Professional social media sites that are school-based should be designed to address reasonable instructional, educational or extra-curricular program matters.
- (2). Professional social media sites that are non-school based (administrative) should have a reasonable relationship to the mission and function of the SCPS office creating the site.
- (3). Each school year, teachers will notify parents about professional media sites in which their children will be invited to participate. Teachers 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 teacher with any questions or concerns.
- (4). To the extent possible, based on the social media site being used, SCPS principals/designees shall be given administrator rights or access to the professional social media accounts established by employees.
- (5). SCPS employees will be required to obtain their principal's/designee's approval before setting up a professional social media presence to communicate with students.

(6). Principals/designees are responsible for maintaining a list of all professional social media accounts within their particular school or office.

(7). Professional SCPS social media sites should include language identifying the sites as professional social media sites. For example, the professional sites can identify the school, department or particular grade that is utilizing the site.

(8). Students who participate in professional social media sites may not be permitted to post photographs featuring other students.

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

(1). Employees should treat professional social media space and communication like a classroom and/or a professional workplace. The same standards expected in SCPS professional settings are expected on professional social media sites. If a particular type of behavior is inappropriate in the classroom or a professional workplace, then that behavior is also inappropriate on the professional social media site.

(2). Employees should exercise caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using professional social media sites.

(3). 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, 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.

(4). Professional social media communication should be in compliance with existing regulations, 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.

(5). 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.

### **D. Maintaining Appropriate Professional Social Media Sites**

(1). Employees using professional social media shall have no expectation of privacy with regard to their use of such media. If a principal/designee becomes aware of inappropriate

usage of professional social media, SCPS personnel are authorized to examine the aforementioned professional social media site.

(2). If principals/designees become aware of questionable postings on professional social media sites, they are required to contact the Superintendent/designee for assistance. If SCPS 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 their principal/designee for assistance.

(3). If there are inappropriate postings on a social media site, the principal/designee can request that the site be removed or disabled.

(4). When establishing professional social media sites, principal/designees 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 SCPS 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.

(5). The principal/designee should maintain a detailed log of all reported non-compliant communications as well as any violations that are otherwise brought to the his/her attention.

#### **E. Press Inquiries**

Any press inquiries received via professional social media sites should be referred to the Office of Public Relations.

### **5. Personal Social Media Use**

#### **A. Communication with SCPS Students**

Personal social media use between SCPS employees and SCPS students is discouraged. In order to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students, SCPS employees should limit personal social media communication and other postings with SCPS students. Appropriate personal social media communication between SCPS students and SCPS employees may at times be necessary but should be minimized. If necessary, the personal social media communication should be for appropriate reasons which maintain a proper relationship between the employee and the student. Inappropriate personal social media communication between SCPS employees and SCPS students is subject to disciplinary action. Communication with family members and communication prompted by an emergency situation are generally always permissible. The SCPS employee should notify the principal/designees of the emergency situation and subsequent communication.

## **B. Guidance Regarding Personal Social Media Sites**

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

(1). 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 an individualized responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site being utilized.

(2). Employees should not “tag” photos of other SCPS employees, volunteers, contractors or vendors without the prior permission of the individuals being tagged.

(3). 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 Board policies, regulations, and law.

(4). The posting or disclosure of personally identifiable student information or confidential information via personal social media sites is prohibited.

(5). Employees shall not use the SCPS logo in any postings, shall not link to the SCPS website, shall not post SCPS material on any personal social media sites and shall not represent that anything expressed is the opinion of SCPS and of its agents.

## **6. Applicability of SCPS Policies and Other Laws**

A. These Guidelines provide guidance intended to supplement, not supersede, existing Board policies, administrative regulations and laws. Users of professional social media sites are responsible for complying with all applicable federal, state and local laws.

B. This policy is not designed to serve as a code of conduct for social media use. However, all existing Board policies, administrative regulations and laws that cover employee conduct may be applicable in the social media environment.

**Legal References:** U.S. Const. amend. I; Children’s Internet Protection Act, 47 U.S.C. 254(h)(5); Electronic Communications Privacy Act, 18 U.S.C. 2510-2522; Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, 20 U.S.C. 1232g; 17 U.S.C. 101 *et seq.*; 20 U.S.C. 6777

**Board Policy References:** 500-14, 600-33, 700-27, 700-28, 700-56