

# Salisbury Township School District Guidelines for Guiding Staff, Students and Parents in Use of Social Media



## What is social media?

Social media is defined as any form of online publication or presence that allows end users to engage in multi-directional conversations in or around the content on the website. (*Online Matters*) A large percentage of Internet traffic is using social media. Social media includes but is not limited to Facebook, MySpace, Ning, Twitter, Second Life, YouTube, blogs, wikis, social bookmarking, document sharing and email.

## What is the purpose of these guidelines?

Businesses are beginning to understand the importance of providing employees with a clear understanding of how to best use social media. Most schools have been late to develop such understandings for their staff, students, parents and community. The purpose of this document is to provide the Salisbury Township School District learning community with guidelines for safe, appropriate and effective use of social media tools related to school. Much of the information in this document is based on material previously produced by the [Social Media Guidelines wiki](#), [Calhoun Intermediate School District](#), and the [New York City Department of Education](#) and is being used under the [Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike 3.0 United States License](#).

## Guidelines for Staff

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### Be Transparent

How you represent yourself online is an extension of who you are. Do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else's identity or misrepresenting your own identity. Be honest about who you are, where you work and what you do.

### Always a School Employee

The lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred in the digital world. Even when you have a disclaimer or use a different user name, you will always be considered a District employee. Whether it is clearly communicated or not, you will be identified as working for and sometimes representing the school in what you do and say online. Always write in the first person and make it clear that you are speaking for yourself and not on behalf of the District.

### Use a Disclaimer

When referencing the District, include a disclaimer on any personal social media site. The disclaimer should say something similar to this: "The opinions and positions expressed on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the Salisbury Township School District's positions or opinions." This standard disclaimer does not exempt employees from their responsibilities as explained in these guidelines.

### School Values

Represent the District values. Express ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. All communication should be done in good taste. Build trust and responsibility in your online relationships. Do not denigrate or insult others



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including students, staff, administrators, parents, or other districts. Refrain from using ethnic slurs, innuendos, obscenity or any other inappropriate content.

## **Build Community/Positively Represent the School District**

Represent the District and the students and parents you serve in the best light. Respect the privacy of others. Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about students or colleagues (including administrators) nor the District in general. Negative comments about people may amount to cyber-bullying. Your posts and comments should help build and support the school community. Do not comment on nor forward unsupported information, i.e. rumors. You are responsible for what you post, so be certain it is accurate and supports the school and District. If you are about to publish something that makes you hesitate, wait a day, review the guidelines and talk to a colleague or supervisor. Once posted, it is difficult to take it back.

## **Share your Expertise**

Write what you know and be accurate. Add value to the discussion. Post something useful. Provide worthwhile information and perspective. The District's most valuable asset is its staff represented by its people and what you publish may reflect on the school. Speak in the first person with your own voice and perspective.

## **Respect and Responsible**

Employees, parents, and students reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Be respectful of the opinions of others in your posts or comments. You are responsible for the content you post. Consider the words used to tag content in a social bookmarking site. Consider the avatar you select. Do your tags, descriptions, and your image portray you in a professional manner?

## **Own and Correct Mistakes**

If you make a mistake, admit the mistake and correct it quickly. Clearly state if you have corrected a previous post. Even though damage may be done, it is best to admit your mistake and correct it. Apologize if appropriate.

## **Confidential Information**

Online postings and conversations are not private. Do not share confidential information whether it is internal school discussions or specific information about students or other staff. What you post will be seen by others and will be online for a long time. It can be forwarded or shared in just a few clicks. Do not write about colleague or students without their permission.

## **School Logos**

Do not use any school logo or image without permission.

## **Posting Photos or Movies without Permission**

Do not post photos or movies of fellow employees without their permission. Do not use photos or movies taken at school without permission. Do not post photos or movies that contain students without parent consent.



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## **Responding to Negative Comments and Criticism**

How you respond to a negative comments or criticism will say more about you and your character than what you post. If you delete a negative post, it discourages open communications. When publicly criticized or receiving a negative comment, first, stay cool and don't reply in haste. Express your view in a clear, logical way. Don't get personal and if you made a mistake, admit it and move ahead. It is not uncommon for a negative response to be answered by some other person, who supports your view. When in doubt, it's best to ignore a comment and not give it credibility by acknowledging it with a response publicly; perhaps a face-to-face meeting would be more appropriate.

## **Respond and Post Regularly**

Post regularly. Don't post to your blog and then not post for three weeks. Readers won't have a reason to follow you if they can't expect new content regularly. Respond to other's posts. Answer questions; thank people even if it's just a few words. Make it a two-way conversation!

## **Spell Check and Abbreviations**

Blog and wiki posts should be well written. What you post will be online for the world to read. Follow writing conventions including proper grammar, capitalization, and punctuation. Be cautious about using common abbreviations. While your circle of friends may understand what you are saying, you may have readers from across the world who won't understand. When in doubt, define the abbreviation at least once in a post or include a definitions page on your site.

## **Copyright and Fair Use**

Respect copyright and fair use guidelines. Share what others have said by linking to the source and using embedded content. Be sure to cite your source when quoting. When using a hyperlink, confirm the link goes where it should and that the content is appropriate. It is recommended that all online content be licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial Share Alike 3.0 United States License](#).

## **Personal Information**

Be careful about sharing too much personal information. People often share information such as their pet name, their parents and children's names, where they grew up, and more. This information has been used by hackers to guess passwords! If you share that you will be out of town, a criminal may use this to target your home for a burglary. Be smart and don't share too much about yourself online.

## **Video**

YouTube is becoming an increasingly popular place to share personally created movies. You are responsible for all you do, say, and post online including video. Anything you post online should represent you in a professional manner as others will see you as connected to the District.

## **Staff-Student Relations**

In November 2009, the Salisbury Township School District School Board adopted an updated Policy 815:



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Acceptable Use of the Internet. In this policy, the Board articulated the District's position on staff-student online relationships:

*While the District understands the value of current social networking tools, it strongly discourages employees from developing virtual relationships with students through social networking tools beyond the District program. The use of District technology for social networking with students beyond the District program is prohibited.*

## Email

The Salisbury Township School District requires all communications by employees to students or parents to be professional, acceptable in content to any reasonable person, and limited to information that is school-related or is acceptable to both student and parent.

Email between employees and students and parents shall be executed through the school provided email application. Email must conform to school email norms.

## Guidelines for Students

Because of the wealth of new social media tools available to students, student products and documents have the potential to reach audiences far beyond the classroom. This translates into a greater level of responsibility and accountability for everyone. Below are guidelines for student use of social media tools in the Salisbury Township School District.

1. Be aware of what you post online. Social media venues are very public. What you contribute leaves a digital footprint for all to see. Do not post anything you wouldn't want friends, parents, teachers or a future employer to see.
2. Follow the school's code of conduct when writing online. It is acceptable to disagree with someone else's opinions. However, do it in a respectful way. Make sure that criticism is constructive and not hurtful. What is inappropriate in the classroom is inappropriate online.
3. Be safe online. Never give out personal information, including, but not limited to, last names, phone numbers, addresses, exact birthdates, and pictures. Do not share your password with anyone besides your teachers and parents.
4. Linking to other websites to support your thoughts and ideas is recommended. However, be sure to read the entire article prior to linking to ensure that all information is appropriate for a school setting.
5. Do your own work! Do not use other people's intellectual property without their permission. **It is a violation of copyright law to copy and paste other's thoughts.** When paraphrasing another's idea(s) be sure to cite your source with the URL. It is good practice to hyperlink to your sources.
6. Be aware that pictures may also be protected under copyright laws. Verify you have permission to use the image or that it is under Creative Commons attribution.
7. How you represent yourself online is an extension of yourself. Do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else's identity.
8. Blog and wiki posts should be well written. Follow writing conventions including proper grammar, capitalization, and punctuation. If you edit someone else's work be sure it is in the spirit of improving the writing.



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9. If you encounter inappropriate material that makes you feel uncomfortable, or is not respectful, tell your teacher right away.

## **Guidelines for Parents and Community**

The Salisbury Township School District recognizes the benefits of engaging parents, community and students through currently popular social media tools. Communicating with the District through social media enables users to communicate with the District in a direct and meaningful way. Please be aware that when engaging with the District over social media, users are agreeing to the following guidelines:

### **Commenting on Salisbury Township School District Social Media Sites**

Salisbury Township School District shares relevant information, links, images and video with the public through external social media websites. Comments made by the public to these sites are reviewed and, while comments will not be edited by District personnel, a comment may be deleted if it violates the comment guidelines described here.

- Comments should be related to the posted topic for the District's social media page or post. Salisbury Township School District social media accounts are not meant for comments that do not directly relate to the purpose or topic of the social media website.
- You are subject to the Terms of Service (TOS) of the host site (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Information (links, photos, videos, etc.) you share with or post to official Salisbury Township School District pages is also subject to the TOS of the host site and may be used by the owners of the host site for their own purposes. For more information, consult the host website's TOS.
- Salisbury Township School District social media accounts are not open to comments promoting or opposing any person campaigning for election to a political office (including School Board), or promotion or advertisement of a business or commercial transaction.
- The use of obscene, threatening or harassing language is prohibited.
- Personal attacks of any kind or offensive comments that target or disparage any ethnic, racial, age, or religious group, gender, sexual orientation or disability status are prohibited.
- Comments advocating illegal activity or posting of material that violates copyrights or trademarks of others are prohibited.
- This comment policy is subject to amendment or modification at any time.

### **User-Created Content**

Users are welcome to submit or post content, including links, photographs and videos, to an official Salisbury Township School District site. Users may only post their own, original content. Reproduced or borrowed content that reasonably appears to violate third party rights will be deleted.

