



SOCIAL MEDIA

Best Practices

Best Practices for Personal Social Media Use by Teachers and Other Educators

1. Know and comply with your district or school policy regarding social media. This informs you of what is expected in terms of professional behavior and is likely to be the cited reason for discipline as opposed to the controversy your speech sparked.
2. Do not friend or follow students. This blurs the distinction between your teacher and private citizen roles and having students below the age of 18 on your personal account could be misinterpreted. This also may compromise your professionalism in the classroom and may result in the photos you post being shared among students. Think twice about friending parents of students.
3. Do not list your school on your profile. This highlights your role as a teacher and blurs the distinction as to your private citizen status.
4. Do not geo-tag your posts with your school location. This makes it easy for students and parents to locate your social media networks. Do not post during work hours or using school equipment or networks.
5. Never complain about or even discuss your job online. Many courts have considered this an important fact in concluding that you are not talking about a matter of public concern, but merely discussing an internal employment grievance. Using an official school social media account when you want to post on work related matters underscores the private citizen nature of your personal account.
6. Never post photos of students or discuss your students, even if you do not name them. Doing so may run afoul of federal or state privacy laws and also blur the distinction as to your private citizen status.
7. Set your privacy settings on the most restrictive setting. For Facebook, that means “friends only.” A “friends of friends” setting means your posts may appear on student pages. For Twitter and other similar accounts, require your permission before someone may follow you. Privacy policies are frequently changing, so keep up to date on the latest versions. The default setting on most social network accounts is public.
8. Be careful what you retweet or “like.” Fair or not, what you like, retweet or favorite is interpreted as an endorsement or support for the original post. It is for this reason that many journalists include a disclaimer on their social media platforms that read “like’s and retweets do not constitute an endorsement.”
9. Include a disclaimer in your profile that notes you are speaking as a private individual, not as a teacher or on behalf of your employer. This does not give you a free pass to say whatever you wish, but it is one fact that reinforces your private citizen status.
10. Do not utilize an account or make an online comment using a pseudonym thinking it will guarantee you anonymity. Many social networking platforms such as Yik Yak and Reddit promise anonymity, but at the end of the day true anonymity in the Internet age is a myth. There are simply too many ways a person’s true identity may be discovered.

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