

Worcester Public Schools

Proposed Policy Regarding Employee Use of Social Media, Websites, Blogs, and Other Online Social Tools

I. Purpose

The Worcester Public School District recognizes the importance of technology and the use of modern online tools as a means to educate our students. The District also acknowledges that it has an obligation to protect student data and to maintain professional boundaries between our staff and the community. Everyone working for the District is a public employee and has an obligation to represent themselves responsibly within the community. Employees at all levels are role models for our students, both within the school and out in the community. This policy addresses staff's use of online tools such as websites, social networks, forums, virtual environments, and other online social tools. The District does not prohibit staff from using social media tools for personal use, but such use is prohibited during the work day except on breaks or when authorized by the principal, Superintendent or designee. In addition, the District prohibits posting any information online that violates state or federal laws or District policies.

II. Statement of Policy

The School Committee recognizes the importance of social media for its employees, and acknowledges that staff has the right under the First Amendment, to speak on matters of public concern. Further, this policy is not meant to infringe on the rights of both union and non-union employees to engage in lawful, concerted activities under MGL Ch. 150E for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection on social media sites. However, the School Committee will regulate the use of social media by employees, including employees' personal use of social media, when such use:

- interferes or disrupts the work of the school district
- is used to harass coworkers or other members of the school community
- creates a hostile work environment
- breaches student or employee confidentiality, including but not limited to posting data, documents and photographs
- crosses professional conduct or professional boundaries as defined in the Superintendent's annual bulletins.
- implies that the employee is acting as an agent of the school district by referencing school or district images, logos, official names, or proprietary property

Employees who violate this policy may face discipline up to and including termination, consistent with School Committee policies and/or collective bargaining agreements, if applicable.

III. Definition

Public social media networks are defined as online tools that allow interaction between one or more parties through postings, comments, or messages.

IV. Requirements

All Worcester Public employees are expected to act professionally. Those viewing social media sites may view the employee as a representative of the school and/or the District. This is especially true when the employee is referring to the District, its schools, students, families, programs, activities, employees, or volunteers. The District requires employees to observe the following rules on any social media networks:

- A. The employee must not post any information online that violates state or federal laws or District policies.
- B. Employees should not use their Worcester Public School's email address for communications on public social media networks that have not been approved by the District.
- C. Employees may not act as a spokesperson for the District or post comments as a representative of the District, except as authorized by the Superintendent or the Superintendent's designee.
- D. Employees may not disclose information on any social media network that is confidential or proprietary to the District, its students, or employees or that is protected by data privacy laws.
- E. Employees may not use or post the District logo on any social media network without express written permission from the Superintendent, or designee.
- F. Employees may not post images of students on any social media network without written parental consent, except for images of students taken at public events
- G. When referring to the District, its schools, students, families, programs, activities, employees, or volunteers on any social media network, employees must be professional in all communications (text, images, or other). Employees shall not engage in communications or conduct that is harassing, threatening, bullying, libelous, or defamatory, or that encourages illegal activity or the inappropriate use of alcohol, use of illegal drugs, or sexual behavior, or an act recognized as discriminatory under the law.
- H. The District recognizes that students, staff, or other members of the public may create social media sites representing clubs, teams, or other student groups within the District. When employees choose to join or interact with these social networking sites, they do so as a de facto representative of the District.
- I. Employees have responsibility for maintaining appropriate employee-student relationships at all times and have responsibility for addressing observed inappropriate behavior or activity on these social media networks.

An employee who is responsible for a social media posting that fails to comply with the rules and guidelines set forth in this policy may be subject to discipline, up to and including termination.