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ready-to-use NEWS

School board tips for professional online activity

Many school board members have personal social media accounts. Facebook and Twitter make it easy to broadly communicate to your community and have numerous benefits. They are widely used by board members for election campaigns, to stay updated on educational issues and district news, and they are useful for keeping in touch with personal and professional contacts.

Board members are free to use their personal social media accounts for personal opinion, expression and engagement; however, as public officials, their use requires caution and thoughtfulness. While not district employees, school board members represent the district, and a controversial post can take away from the educational focus of a school or district.

Recent news headlines involving school board members highlight the fact that board members need to be aware of the responsibility of their office. While board members are allowed to have personal and political opinions, the public finds it challenging to differentiate between a post made by an elected official and one made by a private citizen. A board member's "hat" never comes off. Board members' actions and words reflect on the school district, whether positive or negative.

Read examples in the following news stories:

"Peninsula school board member faces criticism for social media posts on race, Capitol riot"
www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/community/gateway/g-news/article248957894.html

"School board member's social media under fire"
<https://pamplinmedia.com/pt/9-news/499490-400450-lethal-force-school-board-members-social-media-under-fire>

"Newark residents condemn school board president's disparaging remark during public meeting"
<https://newark.chalkbeat.org/2021/1/29/22256487/newark-school-board-josephine-garcia>

Social media policy

It is a good idea for every school district to have a social media policy. If you do not have a policy or if your policy needs a refresher, Edutopia's "How to Create Social Media Guidelines for Your School" is a step-by-step guide full of resources, policy examples and case studies to set your school board up for social media success. The guide takes you from organizing a policy team to sharing policy drafts with the community and an attorney.
www.edutopia.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/edutopia-anderson-social-media-guidelines.pdf

For sample board policies, see Highline School District's social media guidelines for staff, students and school board members: www.highlineschools.org/about/board-policies/series-4000.

For subscription information, contact WSSDA at (800) 562-8927 or (360) 493-9231.

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Social media guidelines

Everyone needs a reminder to keep social media posts considerate and respectful. However, school board members are under additional scrutiny and should follow these tips:

- Set privacy settings on personal social media accounts. On Facebook, turn off facial recognition, hide your full profile from search engines and limit who sees your photos and posts.
- Know copyright laws. Just because you found a quote or picture on Google search, doesn't mean you have permission to use it. Stanford University provides a basic summary of copyright law here: <https://fairuse.stanford.edu/overview/faqs/copyright-basics>.
- Post thoughtfully and keep it positive. Don't vent on the internet. Reserve your frustrations for in-person conversations. If you don't want the post on the front page of the local paper, don't post it.
- Fact-check your posts. Before you reshare or retweet a post, check the post for accuracy with FactCheck.org (www.factcheck.org) or Snopes (www.snopes.com).
- Avoid liking controversial posts and/or pages. If your privacy settings aren't set, anyone can see your entire Facebook activity, including "liking" a post.

Virtual board meetings

Board members should also be aware of the effect of their behavior at board meetings. An extreme example is the recent resignation of an entire board in California after board members were heard making disparaging remarks while broadcasting live (<http://abcn.ws/3qlignA>). There have also been other headlines this past year of board members making offensive comments during a board meeting or not complying with mask requirements or social distancing.

Because of the pandemic, most school board meetings are still online and accessible to anyone with internet access. A board member's words, attire, body language and facial expressions are visible to all viewers and are recorded as public record.

Follow these best practices for board meetings:

- Make regular eye contact with the camera. The community wants to know you are listening.
- Dress professionally as you would for an in-person meeting. This tells the community that you respect their time and attention.
- Comply with COVID-19 requirements for your county. If your board is meeting in-person, follow the mask and social distancing guidelines.

Above all, remain calm and think before you speak, post or tweet. The community is looking to school boards to guide our community through this pandemic.

Additional resources:

Connect Safely - The Educator's Guide to Social Media

www.connectsafely.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/eduguide.pdf

How to Use Facebook Privacy Settings

www.consumerreports.org/privacy/facebook-privacy-settings/

"Social Media Do's and Don'ts for Board Members"

<http://bit.ly/3ec1vZI>