

4.15 Social Media

4.15.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the orderly operation of the district's schools by establishing standards for the operation of school district social media accounts and personal social media accounts, and to differentiate between personal and School Related social media accounts and those accounts controlled by the district.

4.15.2 Delegation of Responsibility

The Public Information Office will develop procedures to implement and enforce this policy.

4.15.3 Definitions

1. Discriminatory or Harassing Comments – comments or imagery that attack or mock an individual due to his/her real or perceived race, color, national origin/ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation or religion, or which otherwise constitute bullying.
2. Limited Public Forum – a government operated location where the public may comment and post online, subject to viewpoint neutral guidelines.
3. Non-public Forum – a government operated location where the public may not comment or post online; free expression by the public is restricted regardless of message or viewpoint.
4. School-Sponsored Social Media Account (School-Sponsored Account) – a social media account, regardless of platform, that is operated by or on behalf of a school district employee or School Board member, or their designee in his/her professional capacity, or on behalf of a school sponsored organization or group, and that is designed to further the educational mission of the school district by communicating with members of the school district community and the general public.
5. School-Related Organizations and Groups Social Media Account (School-Related Account) – a social media account, regardless of platform, that is operated by or on behalf of a volunteer, student, parent, alumnus, or other member of the public on behalf of a school-related organization or group, including but not limited to a PTO, Booster Organization, etc. school-related social media accounts are operated by volunteers as outlined above and not operated by school district employees or School Board members as a part of their primary employed function.
6. Personal Social Media Account (Non-School Account) – a social media account, regardless of platform, that is operated by a school district employee or School Board member for his/her personal use, including personal professional development. A personal social media account is not regularly used to promote or communicate about school district events or activities, or the activities of students nor identifies the individual as an employee of the district.
7. Social Media – forms of electronic communication, such as Internet applications and websites for social networking and microblogging, through which users create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content, such as videos. Current social media platform examples include Facebook, MySpace, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, Tik-Tok, Vimeo, YouTube, Flickr, Twitch, Twitter,

Snapchat, WhatsApp, etc. Personal websites, web logs (blogs), wikis, online forums, virtual worlds, video-sharing websites and on-line gaming are also included in this definition.

4.15.4 Guidelines

Establishing a School-Sponsored Social Media Account

- Approval must be obtained from the Public Information Officer prior to creating any DCS social media presence. Notify the DCS Public Information Office when you create an official social media presence.

School-Sponsored Social Media Accounts

- School-sponsored social media accounts must remain professional, and consistent with the educational mission of the school district at all times. The operators of school-sponsored social media accounts are responsible for ensuring that content is accurate and stays current. Postings should be fact-checked and spell checked.

Account Ownership

- School-sponsored social media accounts are owned by the school district, and operated by school district employees or School Board members on behalf of the school district. The Public Information Officer or his/her designee shall maintain a list of all school-sponsored social media accounts, along with a list of credentials to access all school-sponsored accounts. It is the responsibility of the individual who creates the school-sponsored social media account to report the account's credentials to the Public Information Office.

Photos, Videos, & Livestreams of Students

- School-sponsored social media account operators may post photographs, videos, and livestreams of students engaged in the educational process or at school-related events unless the student's parents/guardians have opted the student out of FERPA's directory information sharing, or if parents/guardians have declined to sign the district's media release form. The operators of school-sponsored social media accounts are responsible for complying with this provision.

Public Comments

- All school-sponsored social media accounts shall operate as a limited public forum, where the public may comment publicly on the posts – subject to certain guidelines.
- Account operators must have the profanity filter set to “Strong” on Facebook and Instagram and hide any inappropriate comments. Postings and comments of an inappropriate nature or containing information unrelated to official or district business must be reported and/or deleted promptly.

- Operating as a limited public forum, school sponsored social media accounts are moderated and all comments are subject to review by Dothan City School moderators. All DCS social media accounts shall include a prominent link and additional information to the following comment guidelines, posted on the school district's website. While comments will not be edited or screened for viewpoint, DCS reserves the right to remove any comment that includes any of the following:
 - - Points unrelated to the purpose and subject of the main post.
 - Complaints, concerns, or confidential information about individual students or employees.
 - Advertising or promotional materials.
 - Copyrighted material posted without the express consent of the copyright holder.
 - Words that constitute a criminal act or that solicit others to commit a criminal act.
 - Fraud or defamation.
 - Personally abusive language that is inherently likely to provoke a violent response.
 - Words that present a threat to any person's health or safety.
 - Threats of violence.
 - Obscenity or illegal material.
 - Comments that do not meet reasonable standards of civility and decorum (see below).

Civility and Decorum

Comments that do not meet reasonable standards of civility of decorum may be removed. Commenters are reminded that this is a public-school system website and that students – most of whom are minors – are one of its main intended audiences. Students check DCS social media frequently and should not be exposed to comments that are likely to cause them emotional distress or that would be inappropriate in the school environment. Commenters are expected to refrain entirely from profanity, personal insults, and personal attacks against any person.

Disclaimer

DCS is not responsible for and does not necessarily endorse or oppose any points made by commenters on any DCS social media channels. Commenters are solely responsible for their own comments and are urged to exercise good judgment, including but not limited to the rules and expectations set out above.

- Individual comments or posts that violate the above guidelines may be deleted or hidden (if possible given the social media platform) without further notice. Posts may not be deleted simply because they are critical of the school district, or because they promote an unpopular opinion, if the post otherwise complies with the above guidelines.
- School-sponsored social media account operators may not block users from accessing social media posts on the account. The Public Information Officer shall refer any user who repeatedly violates the above guidelines to the Superintendent for further investigation and potential legal remedies.

Tagging

- School-sponsored social media account operators may tag the social media accounts of educational applications, products, and services, so long as the district and its employees do not receive financial or other tangible compensation for the tag.
- One-to-one communication with a student shall be limited to approved methods of communication as provided by the district.

Accessibility

- All content posted to school sponsored social media accounts shall be accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- The Public Information Officer or his/her designee shall implement best practices using available technology to facilitate access to school-sponsored social media content whenever practicable.

Copyright

The copyright for all content posted to school-sponsored social media accounts must be either owned by the school district, licensed by the copyright owner, or not subject to copyright protection. The operator of a school-sponsored social media account is responsible for ensuring compliance with this provision. This is not limited to the use of music, book readings and etc.

Retweets/Reposts

- School-sponsored social media accounts may highlight social media posts by others by retweeting or reposting their messages, so long as the content of the retweet is furthering the educational mission of the school district.

School-Related Social Media Accounts

- School-related social media accounts are not operated or controlled by the school district. These accounts are privately created, operated, and maintained, and are not actively monitored by the district.

- School-related social media accounts may not use the school district's logo, unless given express written permission by the Superintendent or his/her designee.
- The school district encourages the operators of all school-related social media accounts to be good- faith ambassadors of the school district, and to operate these social media accounts in a manner that represents the school district in a positive light.

Personal Social Media Accounts

- Employees are expected to uphold the duties listed in Dothan City Schools Personnel Policy 5.1 as well as the Alabama Educator Code of Ethics in relation to their social media activity. Per the Alabama Educator Code of Ethics, unethical conduct is any conduct that impairs the certificate holder's ability to function in his or her employment position or a pattern of behavior that is detrimental to the health, welfare, discipline, or morals of students.
- The school district does not actively monitor personal social media accounts. Nonetheless, should the school district administration or School Board's attention be brought to an employee's personal social media post that demonstrates insubordination, cruelty, unlawful discrimination, other unlawful act(s), or that impedes the efficient and effective operation of the school district, the employee may be subject to disciplinary action.
- Employees may not publish DCS's or another employee's confidential or proprietary information.
- Employees should remember that they may be held personally liable for unsanctioned or irresponsible social media postings on social media websites and elsewhere. At its discretion, DCS may discipline an employee for unauthorized commentary, content, or images posted on social media websites on behalf of DCS that are inappropriate, disparaging, disruptive, defamatory, pornographic, harassing, libelous, infringing on copyright or privacy, or that create a hostile work environment. Additionally, employees shall not use social media to libel or defame the Dothan City School Board or students. Should an account be hacked and material presented by someone other than the employee, it will be the employees' responsibility to provide evidence demonstrating that the publication was made by someone who did not have permission to do so.
- Employees may not send, share, or post pictures, text messages, emails or other material that personally identifies district students and their families in personal social media, communications, or publishing without parent permission for the particular purpose. Employees may not use images of students, emails, student exemplars or work-product, or other personally identifiable student information for personal gain or profit.

- Employees are responsible for the information they post, share, or respond to online, and must be mindful that any content on the Internet may be accessible to anyone. Educators should consider the implications of joining an online social network, including whether they would be comfortable if someone sent information from their social media account to students, parents, or other staff members. To avoid jeopardizing their professional reputation, employees are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the privacy policies, settings, and protections on any social media platforms to which they choose to subscribe and be aware that information posted online, despite privacy protections, is easily and often accessible to district students and parents, and may be republished or reported to administrators. Employees should ensure privacy settings are customized to be as restrictive as possible to ensure that social media communications only reach the employee's intended audience.
- Existing policies and guidelines that cover employee conduct on district premises and at school-related activities similarly apply to the online environment in those venues. An employee engaging in inappropriate conduct, including the inappropriate use of social media during and after school hours may be subject to discipline. Additionally, the district may not be able to protect or represent employees who incur legal action in response to the employee's behavior on social media.
- **Friending/Following District Students** – Employees should not have online interactions with current district students on social networking sites outside of those forums dedicated to academic use. District employees' social networking profiles and personal blogs should not be linked to district students' online profiles. Additionally, district employees should use appropriate discretion when using social networks for personal communications and should limit this activity to off-duty hours. Educators should use caution when friending/following parents of students.
- **Contacting Students Off-Hours** – District employees should only contact district students for educational purposes and must never disclose confidential information possessed by the employee by virtue of his or her district employment.

4.15.5 Consequences for Violation of This Policy

Employees that violate this policy may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.