

Social Media Guidelines for Employees of The Varnett Public School

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Personal Use of Social Media such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn & Instagram

In the rapidly-expanding world of electronic communication, social media can mean many things. The term "social media" includes all means of communicating or posting information or content of any sort on the Internet, including to an employee's own or someone else's website, blog, journal, diary, personal website, social networking or a chat room as well as any other form of electronic communication.

All employees of The Varnett Public School are expected to serve as positive ambassadors for Varnett and to remember they are role models to students in this community. Because readers of social media networks may view the employee as a representative of Varnett, employees should consider the following guidelines on any social media networks.

- Varnett employees are personally responsible for all comments/information they publish online.
- An employee's online behavior should reflect the same standards of professionalism that the employee uses face-to-face, and be in accordance with the highest professional standards.
- Photographs relating to alcohol or tobacco use may be deemed inappropriate. An employee's social networking practices can widely be interpreted as an extension of his or her personality, professional life and work environment. If it would seem inappropriate to put a certain photograph on the classroom wall, assume it would be inappropriate to post the same image online.
- When contributing online, an employee must not post confidential student information.
- Employees are discouraged from sharing or copying, pasting and posting images of students that originate from Varnett's official media pages, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram.
- Employees shall not use obscene, profane or vulgar language on any social media network.
- Employees must ensure that postings do not violate Varnett policies. For example, inappropriate postings that may include discriminatory remarks, harassment and threats of violence, bullying or similar inappropriate or unlawful conduct will not be tolerated and may subject an employee to disciplinary action up to and including termination.
- A Varnett employee is prohibited from representing himself or herself as a spokesperson for Varnett unless that person has been designated to do so. If Varnett is the subject of the content the employee is creating, he or she must be clear that the views are personal and do not represent those of Varnett.

- Any Varnett employee should weigh whether a particular posting puts his or her effectiveness as a teacher or other school employee at risk.
- An employee must assume that students, their parents or an administrator visits the employee's site.
- Electronic communication with students should always be transparent, accessible and professional:
 1. Transparent – maintain openness, visibility and accountability;
 2. Accessible – consider all electronic communication to be a matter of record;
 3. Professional – Use correct grammar and tone, choose appropriate subject matter and use words that are courteous and respectful.

An employee of Varnett is responsible for setting the appropriate security and privacy settings for both professional and personal social media use. Be sure that the settings are such that any personal content may be viewed only by the employee's intended audience.

Varnett may view and monitor an employee's posted content at any time without consent or previous approval. Where applicable, employees may be asked to disclose to VPS the existence of and to provide Varnett with access to an employee's website, blog or other personal social media network as part of an employment selection, promotion or disciplinary process.

Social Media Friendships

Engaging in personal social-networking friendships on Twitter, Facebook or other social networking sites is prohibited with students, and strongly discouraged with parents or guardians of students. Varnett procedures and practices discourage an employee from "friending" students or parents on the employee's personal pages. An employee should remember that people classified as "friends" have the ability to download and share the information with others, even if that information has been deleted.

Texting

It is inappropriate to use e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging or social networking sites to discuss with a student a matter that does not pertain to school-related activities. Appropriate discussions would include the student's homework, class activity, school sport or club or other school-sponsored activity. Electronic communications with students are to be sent simultaneously to multiple recipients, not to just one student, except where the communication is clearly school-related and inappropriate for persons other than the individual student to receive (for example, e-mailing a message about a student's grades).

Sources: Texas Workforce Commission, National Education Association, Houston Independent School District, Social Media Guidelines, Baltimore City Public Schools, Minnetonka (Minn.) Public Schools