

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY**

### **PURPOSE.**

The Westmont Hilltop School District recognizes the prevalence of Social Networking in personal and professional communications. This policy addresses employees' use of such networks, including: personal websites, web logs (blogs), wikis, social networks, online forums, virtual worlds, and any other kind of social media.

The District takes no position on employees' decisions to participate in social media such as that described above, and is cognizant of the constitutional protections afforded to employees speaking as private citizens on matters of public concern. However, employees are reminded that they are professionals and are representatives of the District and the community in all aspects of their lives. At all times, including the course of communications via social media, employees should conduct themselves publicly in accordance with the responsibilities of public service. This policy is intended to assist the employee in making good decisions when communicating and obtaining information online in accordance with District policy.

### **GUIDELINES.**

#### **Interaction with Students through Blogs and Social Networking**

Employees are required to maintain a professional relationship with their students at all times and are prohibited from becoming friends and/or communicating with students via personal accounts on social media networks. Further, employees should not engage students on either the employee's or the student's blog or social networking page regarding any other matter. Employees should not participate in student social networking group pages or utilize these pages to communicate with students in a personal capacity when they know or should have known that students are involved and participating.

Only school-sponsored websites, wikis, email addresses or other District -sponsored means should be utilized for communications with students and/or parents. In the event an employee receives a communication or request from a student or parent addressed to the employee's personal account, the employee should respond via other means that are District -sponsored.

#### **Identification and Authorship**

The District encourages employees to be honest about their identity when utilizing social media. Tracking tools enable supposedly anonymous posts to be traced back to their authors. Employees should not pretend to be another person in order to pursue personal communications or agendas, and are prohibited from doing so when communicating

about District matters of private or internal concern regarding the District, its staff, students or operations.

Employees are prohibited from acting as a spokesperson for the District or posting comments as a representative of the District without express consent. Any employee who chooses to identify him or herself as a District employee on any social media network or offers any comment on any topic related to the District, while on any social media network, is directed to include a disclaimer providing that follows:

*"The views expressed [in the social media format] are mine alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Westmont Hilltop School District."*

### **Monitoring and Liability**

Employees should understand the public nature of the Internet and should understand that the District is free to view and monitor employees' public websites, blogs, or other public internet communications at any time, without consent from the author of such communications. Furthermore, as representatives of the District, employees are reminded that students, parents, and other partners of the District community are able to view any public communication or private social media communication made accessible to them by District employees.

Social media users may be held responsible and subject to discipline for commentary that references the District, its staff, students, or operations in an inappropriate or illegal manner. In general, social media users should further be aware that they may incur liability arising from commentary deemed to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous, or obscene (as defined by law).

Social media users should take responsibility and monitor their own social media applications on a regular basis in order to review and approve any and all comments that may appear. Any inappropriate, offensive, obscene, or illegal comments or spam should be deleted or removed as soon as reasonably practical by the employee.

Employees should not permit students to comment on their personal social networking page or on their blog.

### **Prohibited Conduct**

Employees are hereby advised that any and all District -related information published by the employee on their blog or social networking sites must comply with the District's Acceptable Use and Personal Conduct Policies, in all cases other than speech that is made as a private citizen, on matters of purely public concern. Further, the employee must comply with confidentially obligations imposed by law, including HIPAA and FERPA. Employees must respect all copyright laws and must reference or cite all

sources as required by law. Under no circumstances may the employee use District logos, mascots, or images on a personal social media account, profile, site, or blog without express written consent. The use of images or photographs of students on a personal blog or social networking webpage are absolutely prohibited.

Under no circumstances should employees discuss situations involving employee or student discipline on social media networks or sites. As a general guideline, employees should not post anything that they would not want to read in a newspaper or on a billboard.

Employees should not use the District's name to promote or endorse any product, cause, or political party or candidate.

### **Conduct in the Use of Social Media**

Under no circumstances shall the use of social networking activities interfere with the employee's work obligations.

Employees should be aware that even privacy settings are not fool-proof. Search engines can turn up posts and pictures years after they have been published to the internet. It is recommended that employees keep their status as professionals and representatives of the District in mind at all times when communicating via social media.

Employees should use care in posting or publishing photos of themselves. Only pictures that they would be comfortable sharing with the parents of District students or their employer should be posted.

Employees should monitor pictures posted by their friends, utilize appropriate privacy settings, and monitor any tagging of their names to ensure that a search for the employee's name does not bring up inappropriate or unauthorized images of the employee.

### **Discipline under this Policy**

Violation of this policy will result in discipline as appropriate, up to and including termination, in accordance with all applicable District disciplinary policies and procedures.

Employees will be held responsible for the disclosure, whether purposeful or inadvertent, of confidential or proprietary information, information that violates the privacy rights of others.

Exceptions to this policy may be recognized in instances where employees' speech is made as a private citizen, on matters of purely public concern, where appropriate and where otherwise required by law.

### **Preservation and Compliance with Applicable Law**

Nothing in this policy shall be interpreted in a manner that violates an employee's civil or other rights as set forth in state and federal law.