

Milton Town School District

Procedure

G102P: SOCIAL MEDIA

INTRODUCTION

The Milton Town School District (MTSD) acknowledges that online activities, particularly social media, are playing an increasingly important role in the lives of all people involved with the District. Students, staff, and community members all use social media to various degrees to stay connected and share information. Sites like Facebook and Twitter are increasingly becoming the standard platform of information dissemination, being an integral part of daily social activity. This landscape is rich with opportunities to expand education, but can also be a minefield of unintended consequences.

Participation in social media is a personal choice. The purpose of this procedure is neither to encourage nor to dissuade the use of social media, but rather to set down some guiding principles, and to ensure that all participants make informed decisions. As technology evolves over time, these guidelines will need to be reviewed regularly and adapt to suit the needs of the school community. Free speech protects those who want to participate in social media, but some courts have ruled that schools can discipline teachers and students if their speech, including online postings, disrupts school operations. All use of Internet services and social media through the District's Internet connection and on MTSD-controlled web portals is subject to the terms of the Acceptable Use Policies governing students and staff, in addition to the guidelines set forth in this procedure.

ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA

Unless otherwise specified, social media is any Internet-based service which allows people to connect in an interactive manner. These services include, but are not limited to: Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, blogs, wikis, message boards, and chat.

Each service comes with its own set of privacy features. However, for the most part Internet users should assume there is no privacy for online communications. Some services make your information public by default; others, like Facebook, will allow you to set privacy settings, but still allow those outside of your "friends" list to view information you post regardless. And at any time, participants with access to your information can print it out, copy and paste into an email, make screen captures of the information, or save and distribute it in other forms.

Be very aware of the cost of free internet services. Their operational income comes from selling advertising and data on their participants. When you choose to use a free internet service, you are paying not with money but with data about yourself and your online activities.

I. USE BY FACULTY AND STAFF

A. PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

(1) When participating in online discussions about the District, you must identify yourself as an employee, but indicate that your views are your own, and not necessarily

representative of the school. As a professional employed by or affiliated with MTSD, you are a trusted member of the community. For better or worse, your personal activities conducted in public reflect upon you and the District.

(2) Employees participating in social media are responsible for any content that they publish online. Your online behavior should reflect the same standards of honesty, respect, and consideration that you use face-to-face. Any activity that happens online, even when in a private forum, can be made public (printing, screen-capturing, copy and pasting), can be part of an online archive (e.g. www.archive.org), and/or can be less private than you are led to believe (Facebook). Therefore, you are encouraged to use discretion and proper judgment when posting online at all times. When posting, even on the strictest settings, employees should act on the assumption that all postings are in the public domain.

Remember your association and responsibility with MTSD in online social environments. If you identify yourself as an MTSD employee in your social profile, ensure your profile and related content is consistent with how you wish to present yourself with colleagues, parents, and students. How you represent yourself online should be comparable to how you represent yourself in person.

(3) Do not say anything online that you would not feel comfortable seeing published in the paper. Before social media, we would “vent” about office frustrations with friends and colleagues in private conversations at home, on the phone, or in a social setting. However, many of our social conversations have now transitioned to online forums, such as Facebook, with those same friends and colleagues. As noted above, any comment made through electronic means has the ability to be taken, in part or whole, in context or not, and spread in a wide array of formats. Therefore, before you post any criticisms, regardless of how constructive they are, take a moment to reflect what would happen if that post were shown to your building administrator.

B. POSTING OF STUDENT ACTIVITIES AND INFORMATION

We are understandably proud of our students, and when sharing activities with them it is tempting to post photos of the students, work they have done, or quotations that you have heard, on social media.

(1) Positive quotations, without students’ last names, are acceptable. Do not post any negative, derogatory, or otherwise ill-suited material about students.

(2) You are not allowed to post photos of students and student work on your *personal* accounts. You are, however, allowed to publish them on MTSD-controlled forums if you have student and parent permission forms (e.g. school website, classroom blog or wiki). The Registrar maintains a file of student media permissions.

(3) Never post any confidential information online, except through a school-approved medium that is protected in accordance with school policy, and meets federal guidelines for student privacy and protection. Your administrator will have specific information regarding which services are safe for sharing confidential information.

II. USE BY STUDENTS

Due to the wealth of new social media tools available to students, student products and documents have the potential to reach audiences far beyond the classroom. This translates into a greater level of responsibility and accountability for everyone. Below are guidelines students should adhere to when using web tools in the classroom.

(1) **Your use of social media is bound by the District's Acceptable Use Policy.** Among other things, you are required to use appropriate language and conduct when posting to school-related services. Social media venues including wikis, blogs, photo and video sharing sites are very public. What you contribute leaves a digital footprint for all to see. Do not post anything you wouldn't want friends, enemies, parents, teachers, or a future employer to see.

It is acceptable to disagree with someone else's opinions, however do it in a respectful way. Make sure that criticism is constructive and not hurtful. What is inappropriate in the classroom is inappropriate online.

Additionally, the Acceptable Use Policy mandates that you must not share your password with any other students, nor are you allowed to use another person's account. Impersonation of another person is a serious offense.

(2) **Be safe online; do not share personal details with anyone you do not know in real life.** Never give out personal information including, but not limited to, last names, phone numbers, addresses, exact birthdates, and pictures.

(4) **When linking to other websites, ensure that all content on that website is appropriate for school.** Linking to other sites to support your thoughts and ideas is recommended, but those sites must be fit for viewing in a classroom setting.

(5) **Do not use other people's intellectual property without their permission.** It is a violation of copyright law to copy and paste other's thoughts. When paraphrasing another's idea(s), be sure to cite your source with the URL. Be aware that pictures may also be protected under copyright laws. Verify you have permission to use the image or it is under Creative Commons attribution.

(6) **Bullying, threats, intimidation, teasing and ridicule against other students, faculty or staff is unacceptable, even if the posting happens off of school grounds.** Any online posting, regardless of whether or not it was created during school or on an MTSD-controlled website, is a violation of student conduct rules if it affects the school climate. Students using online services to harass or disrupt others may be subject to discipline from the school. Students are not allowed to post any personal or confidential information about others on social media without that person's express consent.

III. SOCIAL MEDIA IN THE CLASSROOM

When used correctly, social media can add value to the classroom. It allows school members to stay in contact with each other, collaborate easily, and improve camaraderie. Consider using controlled, private social media (“gated communities”) such as Google+ through the school’s MyMTSD portal.

(1) Your students must meet terms-of-service requirements to participate. Students using social media and internet tools must meet certain requirements in order to participate; these requirements vary from service to service, and are derived from the federal regulations in CIPA and COPPA. In general, students who are 12 and under are barred from accessing social media sites, except those designed specifically for these age groups. Students 13-17 can participate only with parental approval. Students 18+ are free to create their own accounts. District employees are not allowed to encourage students to participate without meeting the guidelines for minimum age and parental consent.

(2) Social media, as an extension of the classroom, must follow all existing school rules and guidelines. There are times where classroom social media will cross into personal social media, through use of linked accounts, demonstration of hobbies and interests, etc. Anything considered inappropriate for the classroom remains inappropriate in online forums.

(3) Ensure that you receive proper value from participation in social media in the classroom. Social media sites like Facebook are rife with games, chat areas, and non-educational content. It can be more difficult to stay on-task with the “noise” of social media services. Evaluate your methods for use of social media to address minimizing distractions and maximizing educational productivity.

(4) If you would like access to social media for the classroom, please speak with your principal if the social media sites are blocked by the school’s internet filter. To request a permanent bypass for the filter, your principal will need information on the site being used and its purpose.

(5) School-related e-mail needs to be exchanged through the school’s e-mail system of record, due to federal archiving requirements. Currently FirstClass is our system of record for staff. Other email systems are available, including Google Apps for Education and internal messaging systems integrated into services such as Global Classroom; however these school-related messaging systems should only be used in a limited fashion so long as FirstClass is our system of record.

For your own protection, personal email accounts should never be used by staff for school purposes. Any account used for school communication can be subpoenaed by the court for legal proceedings, personal or otherwise. Where possible, configure additional messaging systems to automatically forward messages to the @mtsd-vt.org email account.

IV. “FRIENDING” BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND STUDENTS

There is a complex set of circumstances involved on social media when two accounts become associated. These types of associations go by many different names and allow for many different levels of access to personal information. Common terms for an association between two individuals’ accounts are: friending (Facebook), following (Twitter), circles (Google+). We will use the term “friending” in this document to indicate an association between two accounts that allows for some level of information sharing.

(1) The Milton Town School District discourages staff to “friend” students on social media.

There are a many factors that affect the appropriateness of this type of access. Some of these factors include: the frequency and appropriateness of staff’s personal posting; the frequency and appropriateness of students’ personal posting; the nature of the relationship between the staff person and the student; the opinion and involvement of the parents in social media.

(2) Staff choosing to “friend” students must be aware of the mandatory reporting requirements of their license. “Friending” students on social media may provide you additional access to information that would be relevant to mandatory reporting situations; ignoring this information may pose legal and licensure risks to the staff member.

(3) All participants should consider maintaining separate social media profiles for educational and private use if allowed by the site’s Terms of Service. This may be a recommended choice if you have ever or will ever post information about yourself, be it photos, statuses, videos, etc., that you would not want shown in the classroom. In addition, consider that sites like Facebook and social tagging services allow your “friends” to post these pieces of information about you, without your explicit consent, in a visible location.

V. PARENT SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Classroom blogs, wikis, and other social media are powerful tools that open up communication between students, parents, and teachers. This kind of communication and collaboration can have a huge impact on learning. The MTSD encourages parents to become engaged in their child(ren)’s learning, especially in an era where online tools are slowly replacing traditional lectures and textbooks.

(1) Parents have a right to view any online classroom activity. Parents wishing to view online activity should contact their child’s teacher if they would like to be added to any password-protected or privatized online classroom areas. Parents will not be given more than read-only access to school projects without teacher approval on a project-by-project basis.

(2) Teachers should keep a list of online activities in a visible and up-to-date form that parents can access easily. This can reside on a classroom website/blog/wiki, through newsletters, or other accepted communication methods.

(3) Parents without internet access may request printouts of online activities. If the material is in such volume or of a nature where printing would be difficult, parents may be directed to the public computer access at the Milton Town Library.

(4) Parents who are allowed to participate (not just view) online and social media activities must follow the same policies, procedures, and classroom rules that students and teachers must abide by. Parents who fail to conduct themselves in an appropriate and professional manner will forfeit the ability to actively engage in these options. Per sections II.(6) and I.B.(3) of this procedure, this includes using appropriate language and demeanor, and not posting personal or confidential information.

VI. USE BY THE SCHOOL/DISTRICT AS AN OUTREACH TOOL

Recognizing that social media is a vital tool in community outreach, the MTSD will utilize social media services under the following guidelines:

(1) There will be a small number of approved staff persons per school and in the District office who are authorized to create posts to MTSD-controlled social media profiles. In case of an emergency take-down request, the master login information for all social media and online tools used for school-related purposes must be housed in the District office. If there is a separate service used in the classroom for which the teacher created an individual account, the teacher must share that information with at least one other teacher and/or the District office.

(2) Social media posts will be respectful of all community members. Posts will not attack, blame, or demean any member of the community. Images used in posts will be tasteful, and permission from the students and parents will be obtained prior to posting student photos or images of student work,.

(3) Any sites linked to MTSD online profiles must fit the character of the District. They cannot contain vulgarity, nudity, questionable activities, or any content in violation of the Acceptable Use Policy.

(4) Anyone in the community is allowed to and encouraged to connect with the MTSD via social media. Any responses or posts that contain profanity or questionable materials that do not comply with the Acceptable Use Policy may be removed at any time by the MTSD. Repeated abuse of MTSD social media may result in someone being blocked from participation.

The MTSD recognizes that critiques are necessary to school improvement, and from time to time postings to social media may elicit critical comments from the public. District leadership will make choices whether or not to respond to criticism. Critical comments will not be removed by MTSD unless they are found to be in violation of the Acceptable Use Policy or of this policy.

(5) If a parent or member of the public tries to engage in conversation about a school matter (including but not limited to grades, custody, attendance, health, or behavior) via social media, no answers will be provided beyond directions to get in contact with the school's main office. Any such comments or requests for information may be removed from MTSD social media profiles if they violate student privacy.

VII. INCIDENT RESPONSE

(1) Students or staff found in violation of any of these rules will be handled on a case-by-case basis by School and District leadership, in accordance with policy.

(2) Community members in violation of terms in this and other policies will be handled on a case-by-case basis by School and District leadership. They may face termination of their ability to view or respond to MTSD social media or online services and even be subject to legal action.

REFERENCES

Portions of this policy were sourced from <http://socialmediaguidelines.pbworks.com>, under a Creative Commons license.

Date Warned: 5/20/13
Date Adopted: 6/12/13
Legal Reference(s): 47 USC § 254(h)(5) (Children's Internet Protection Act)
Cross Reference: Employee Computer and Internet Use (D100)
Student Computer and Internet Use (F100)
Student Conduct and Discipline (F1, F1P)
Copyright Compliance (G2)
Distance Learning Program (G101)