Social Media Use

Introduction

Digital communication and social media have the potential to play a crucial role in extending and enhancing education. Park West School Division recognizes the value of utilizing new technology tools, including social media, for inquiry, investigation, and innovation to enrich the learning experience. Social media can support instructional practices and contribute to the development of professional learning networks.

Park West School Division endorses the use of social media for knowledgeable and responsible interaction, emphasizing the importance of maintaining professional boundaries at all times.

A key point of emphasis is limiting the use of student images on social media. The promotion of school and divisional events, activities, and programs does not require frequent use or overuse of student images.

Social media sites are public platforms, and even with privacy settings, there is a risk that images and content may be viewed by a broader audience than intended. This could compromise the privacy of students and their families.

Definitions

Social Media refers to a diverse set of online tools facilitating communication and information sharing, such as instant messaging, mobile apps, software applications, online communities, and websites. It also encompasses freely accessible online tools for producing, posting, and interacting using text, images, video, and audio.

Online Content includes, but is not limited to, blogs, social networks, wikis, message boards, chatrooms, forums, electronic newsletters, and other online services permitting information/content sharing.

Professional Use pertains to an employee's use of social media to advance a program or function of Park West School Division as part of their job responsibilities or for professional development specific to their role.

Personal Use involves an employee's use of social media for non-employment purposes. Employees are advised not to identify their connection with Park West School Division in any area of their personal accounts.

Professional Use of Social Media

Recommendations and Guidelines:

- Any social media use related to work or school involving students and/or Park West School Division employees is considered professional use, requiring adherence to professional codes of conduct and relevant Division policies.
- Understand that an online presence contributes to both personal and professional reputation.
- Maintain a positive and professional image that aligns with the values of the school and the Division.
- Maintain awareness that all information posted on social media may become part of the public domain.
- Uphold professionalism by avoiding blended personal and professional accounts and conducting all student-related communication exclusively on approved platforms.
- Social media interactions with students should serve an educational purpose, and personal information exchange should adhere to privacy laws.
- Employees must obtain prior authorization from school administration before creating or operating social media accounts for classrooms, departments, teams, or school events to ensure they meet approved and monitored platform standards. The Division reserves the right to access, restrict, limit, or prohibit any school-related account.
- To the greatest extent possible, limit the use of personal devices for capturing student images to reduce potential privacy and security risks associated with personal devices.
- Regularly monitor comments and interactions on posts containing student images. Take prompt action to address any inappropriate comments or behavior.
- Exercise caution in posting content, considering equity and inclusivity-related board policies, and avoiding disclosure of confidential or proprietary information.
- Be aware of and respect cultural sensitivities regarding the sharing of images, especially in diverse communities.
- Integrate lessons on digital citizenship into instruction to educate students about responsible social media use.

Responsibilities:

- Employees are solely responsible for managing their professional-use accounts and ensuring compliance with privacy and confidentiality standards.
- The Division endorses password-protected social media tools for e-learning and collaboration, and teachers must respect the terms and conditions of these services.
- Understand that publishing on social media constitutes a public record, and employees should expect no privacy in any circumstances.

Point of Emphasis – Use of Student Information on Social Media

Recommendations and Guidelines:

- Limit the use of student images on social media. Only share student images on an occasional basis and when necessary and for educational or celebratory purposes.
- Consider additional safeguards when using student images, such as blurring or cropping, or using images in which students are shown from a distance or in a large group.
- Publish only the first name unless full-name consent is obtained.
- Respect and implement any requests for non-disclosure of student images.
- Limit information about school field trips or off-site activities to protect student safety.
- Consider using secure places for sharing images with a "members only" section, ensuring privacy. Examples of this would include online interfaces such as Seesaw.
- Review social media sites' terms and conditions regarding photo and video usage before consenting to the posting of student or school-related images.
- Because livestreaming occurs in real time and does not allow for pre-broadcast editing, cropping, or blurring, staff must take proactive steps to protect students with media non-disclosure restrictions while ensuring they are not unnecessarily excluded from school activities. A student with a media restriction must not be identifiable in a livestream. If this cannot be guaranteed, the event must not be livestreamed. Private or password-protected streaming platforms may only be used for students with media restrictions if explicitly discussed with and approved by the family in advance. or off-site tournaments or games, staff must check for livestreams ahead of time, request camera accommodations from the host school, confirm off-camera seating for spectators, and notify the family in advance of the stream and safeguards in place.

Personal Use of Social Media

Recommendations and Guidelines:

- Employees may engage in personal social media use on personal time, but must exercise sound judgment and due care, as off-duty conduct may be relevant to their professional standing and suitability to teach.
- Employees should maintain a clear distinction between professional and personal social media use through separate accounts.
- Employees should consider the importance of maintaining professional boundaries on social media to sustain public trust.
- Employees should refrain from using offensive language or engaging in harassing, threatening, or defamatory communication.
- Employees must decline or ignore friend, follow, or connection requests from current students on personal social media accounts. Employees are strongly advised to exercise caution regarding connections with parents/caregivers to maintain professional objectivity.

Exceptions:

- Appropriate exceptions to the platform restrictions above may be authorized in unique circumstances where necessary to support student safety, accessibility, well-being, or learning needs, provided that such communication is pre-approved by school administration and parents/caregivers are or advised of it.
- Pre-Existing Relationships: Exceptions to personal social media connection restrictions apply only where there is an existing family or personal relationship outside of the school context (e.g., an employee's own children, relatives, or family friends), provided professional conduct standards are maintained at all times.

Liability:

- Park West School Division assumes no liability for direct or indirect damages arising from employees' personal social media use.

Monitoring:

- The Division may view and monitor an employee's public social media presence at any time without consent. Significant violations may result in disciplinary action, including termination.

Additional Information

Student Use of Personal & Wearable Devices:

- Student access to social media and online platforms during school hours, including via cell phones, smart watches, smart glasses, and other wearable technologies with cell phone-like functions, is governed by the Division's Acceptable Use of Technology and Cell Phone policies.

Family Engagement:

- Park West School Division encourages parents and guardians to actively participate in monitoring their child's online activities. We believe that parental involvement is essential in promoting safe and responsible social media use among students. We encourage parents and guardians to learn of the risks and benefits of social media and encourage open communication with their children about their online experiences.

Reporting Mechanisms:

- Park West School Division encourages reporting any incidents of inappropriate social media use or policy breaches. Employees, students, families, and community members are encouraged to report such incidents promptly to the school principal or using other appropriate reporting channels. Reports will be handled promptly and confidentially, and appropriate actions will be taken to address the concerns raised.

Data Protection and Privacy Compliance:

- Park West School Division prioritizes the protection of personal information shared on social media platforms and implement measures to safeguard data privacy and security. Any data collected or processed through social media channels will be handled in accordance with applicable privacy laws and our internal policies.

Digital Literacy:

- Park West School Division recognizes the importance of digital literacy and responsible social media. Schools are encouraged to integrate digital literacy education and lessons on responsible social media use into the curriculum across all grade levels. Our goal is to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to critically evaluate online information, engage in respectful online communication, and make informed decisions about their digital footprint.

Community Guidelines:

- Park West School Division asks that community members engaging in school or divisional posts on social media platforms do so in a respectful manner. We encourage all users to adhere to promote a positive online environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and meaningful interactions are fostered.

Review, Communication, and Updating

- To ensure the effectiveness and relevance of this administrative procedure, Park West School Division includes provisions for regular review and updates. We commit to conducting periodic reviews of the policy to reflect changes in technology, social media platforms, and relevant legislation.

- In accordance with Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning directives, this administrative procedure is communicated directly to all employees, students, and families, and is maintained in a publicly accessible location on school and divisional websites.