

Personnel – Certified/Non-Certified

Social Media

The Board of Education recognizes the importance and utility of social media and networks for its employees. The laws regarding social media continue to evolve and change. Nothing in this policy is intended to limit an employee's right to use social media under applicable law, as it may evolve. The Board acknowledges, for example, that its employees have the right under the First Amendment, in certain circumstances, to speak out on matters of public concern. The Board will resolve any conflict between this policy and applicable law in favor of the law.

Ordinarily, the use of social media by employees, including employees' personal use of social media, will not be a legal or policy issue. While a policy cannot address every instance of inappropriate social media use, employees must refrain from social media use that:

- 1) Interferes, disrupts or undermines the effective operation of the school district;
- 2) is used to engage in harassing, defamatory, obscene, abusive, discriminatory or threatening or similarly inappropriate communications;
- 3) creates a hostile work environment;
- 4) breaches confidentiality obligations of school district employees; or
- 5) violates the law, board policies and/or other school rules and regulations.

The Board of Education, through its Superintendent, will adopt and maintain administrative regulations to implement this policy.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes
 The Freedom of Information Act
 53A-182b Harassment in the first degree.
 31-48d Employees engaged in electronic monitoring required to give prior
 notice to employees. Exceptions. Civil penalty.
 U.S. Constitution, Article I, Sections 3, 4, 14

Policy approved: November 21, 2017

PUTNAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Putnam, Connecticut

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The Board of Education therefore adopts the following regulation for the use of social media by Board of Education employees:

Definitions

- Social media includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and MySpace.
- Board of Education includes all names, logos, buildings, images and entities under the authority of the Board of Education.

Rules Concerning Personal Social Media Activity

1. An employee may not mention, discuss or reference the Board of Education, the school district or its individual schools, programs or teams on personal social networking sites, unless the employee also states that the post is the personal communication of the employee of the school district and that the views posted are the employee's alone and do not represent the views of the school district or the Board of Education.
2. Employees must refrain from mentioning other Board of Education employees or other members of the school community (e.g., parents or others) on personal social networking sites, without such individuals' express consent unless the employee is addressing an issue of public concern and the employee's speech falls under applicable constitutional protections pertaining to same.
3. Employees are required to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with students, parents, and colleagues. For example, it is not appropriate for a teacher or administrator to "friend" a student or otherwise establish special relationships with selected students through personal social media, and it is not appropriate for an employee to give students access to personal postings unrelated to school.
4. Unless given written consent, employees may not use the Board of Education's logo or trademarks on their personal posts. Please note that this prohibition extends to the use of logos or trademarks associated with individual schools, programs or teams of the school district.
5. Employees are required to use appropriately respectful speech in their personal social media posts, and to refrain from harassing, defamatory, abusive, discriminatory, threatening or other inappropriate communications. Such posts reflect poorly on the school district's reputation, can affect the educational process and may substantially and materially interfere with an employee's ability to fulfill his/her professional responsibilities.

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Rules Concerning Personal Social Media Activity (continued)

6. Employees are individually responsible for their personal posts on social media. Employees may be sued by other employees, parent or others, and any individual that views an employee's social media posts as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous or creating a hostile work environment. As such activities are outside the scope of employment, employees may be personally liable for such claims.
7. Employees are required to comply with all Board of Education policies and procedures with respect to the use of computer equipment, networks or electronic devices when accessing social media sites. Any access to personal social media activities while on school property or using school district equipment must comply with those policies, and may not interfere with an employee's duties at work.
8. The Board of Education reserves the right to monitor all employee use of district computers and other electronic devices, including employee blogging and social networking activity. An employee should have no expectation of personal privacy in any personal communication or post made through social media while using computers, cellular telephones or other electronic data devices that are the property of the school district.
9. All posts on personal social media must comply with the Board of Education's policies concerning confidentiality, including the confidentiality of student information. If an employee is unsure about the confidential nature of information the employee is considering posting, the employee shall consult with his/her supervisor prior to making the post.
10. An employee may not link a personal social media site or webpage to the Board of Education's website or the websites of individual schools, programs or teams; or post Board of Education material on a social media site or webpage without written permission of his/her supervisor.
11. All Board of Education policies that regulate off-duty conduct apply to social media activity including, but not limited to, policies related to public trust, illegal harassment, code of conduct, and protecting confidential information

Rules Concerning District-Sponsored Social Media Activity

1. If an employee seeks to use social media sites as an educational tool or in relation to extracurricular activities or programs of the school district, the employee must seek and obtain the permission of his/her supervisor prior to setting up the site.

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Rules Concerning District-Sponsored Social Media Activity (continued)

2. If an employee wishes to use Facebook or other similar social media site to communicate meetings, activities, games, responsibilities, announcements etc., for a school-based club or a school-based activity or an official school-based organization, the employee must also accompany with the following rules:
 - a. The employee must set up the club, etc. as a group list which will be “closed and moderated.”
 - b. Members will not be established as “friends” but as members of the group list.
 - c. Anyone who has access to the communications conveyed through the site may only gain access by the permission of the employee (e.g. teacher, administrator or supervisor). Persons desiring to access the page may join only after the employee invites them and allows them to join.
 - d. Parents shall be permitted to access any site that their child has been invited to join.
 - e. Access to the site may only be permitted for educational purposes related to the club, activity, organization or team.
 - f. The employees responsible for the site will monitor it regularly.
 - g. The employee’s supervisor shall be permitted access to any site established by the employee for school-related purpose.
 - h. Employees are required to maintain appropriate professional boundaries in the establishment and maintenance of all such district-sponsored social media activity.
3. Employees are required to use appropriately respectful speech in their social media posts on district-sponsored sites; and to refrain from harassing defamatory, abusive, discriminatory, threatening or other inappropriate communications.
4. Employees are required to comply with all Board of Education policies and procedures and all applicable laws with respect to the use of computer equipment, networks or devices when accessing district-sponsored social media sites.
5. The Board of Education reserves the right to monitor all employee use of district computers and other electronic devices, including employee blogging and social networking activity. An employee should have no expectation of personal privacy in any communication or post made through social media while using computers, cellular telephones or other data devices that are the property of the school district.
6. All posts on district-sponsored social media must comply with the Board of Education’s policies concerning confidentiality including the confidentiality of student information. If an employee is unsure about the confidential nature of information the employee is considering posting, the employee shall consult with his/her supervisor prior to making the post.

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Rules Concerning District-Sponsored Social Media Activity (continued)

7. An employee may not link a district-sponsored social media site or webpage to any personal social media sites or sites not sponsored by the school district.
8. An employee may not use district-sponsored social media communications for private financial gain, political, commercial, advertisement, proselytizing or solicitation purpose.
9. An employee may not use district-sponsored social media communications in a manner that misrepresents personal views as those of the Board of Education, individual school or school district, or in a manner that could be construed as such.

Disciplinary Consequences

Violation of this policy may lead to discipline up to and including the termination of employment consistent with state and federal law.

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