

## NYC Department of Education Social Media Guidelines

### A. Introduction/Purpose

1. Social media technology can serve as a powerful tool to enhance education, communication, and learning. This technology can provide both educational and professional benefits, including preparing New York City Department of Education (“DOE”) students to succeed in their educational and career endeavors.
2. The Chancellor is committed to ensuring that all DOE stakeholders who utilize social media technology for professional purposes, including staff and students, do so in a safe and responsible manner. The DOE strives to create professional social media environments that mirror the academically supportive environments of our schools.
3. These Social Media Guidelines (“Guidelines”) provide guidance regarding recommended practices for professional social media communication between DOE employees, as well as social media communication between DOE employees and DOE students.
4. In recognition of the public and pervasive nature of social media communications, as well as the fact that in this digital era, the lines between professional and personal endeavors are sometimes blurred, these Guidelines also address recommended practices for use of personal social media by DOE staff.<sup>1</sup>

### B. Definition of Social Media

Social media is defined as any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication, including, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, internet websites, internet forums, and wikis. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, and Flickr.<sup>2</sup>

1. **Professional social media** is a work-related social media activity that is either school-based (e.g., a DOE principal establishing a Facebook page for his/her school or a DOE teacher establishing a blog for his/her class), or non-school-based (e.g., a DOE office establishing a Facebook page to facilitate the office’s administration of a Chancellor’s Regulation).
2. **Personal social media** use is a non work-related social media activity (e.g., a DOE central administrative employee establishing a Facebook page or a Twitter account for his/her own personal use).

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<sup>1</sup> These Guidelines do not address student-to-student communication via social media. The DOE’s Bill of Student Rights and Responsibilities sets forth expected standards of behavior with respect to student communication. The DOE’s Discipline Code establishes the range of disciplinary options and guidance intervention that can be used when students engage in misconduct involving social media.

<sup>2</sup> These Guidelines do not address the professional use of third-party collaboration tools for purposes other than social media. Further guidance from the DOE addressing the use of third-party collaboration tools is forthcoming.

## C. Applicability

These Guidelines apply to DOE employees. The DOE will take steps to ensure that other DOE stakeholders, including DOE vendors, DOE volunteers, and DOE independent contractors are informed of these Guidelines.

## D. Professional Social Media Use

### 1. **Maintenance of Separate Professional and Personal E-mail Accounts**

DOE employees who decide to engage in professional social media activities should maintain separate professional and personal email addresses. As such, DOE employees should not use their personal email address for professional social media activities. The professional social media presence should utilize a professional email address and should be completely separate from any personal social media presence maintained by the DOE employee. Regular and continuous use of a personal email address for professional purposes, including social media use, will result in DOE considering the email address, and the corresponding use of that address, as a professional account.

### 2. **Communication with DOE Students**

DOE employees who work with students and communicate<sup>3</sup> with students through professional social media sites<sup>4</sup> should follow these guidelines:

- a. Professional social media sites that are school-based should be designed to address reasonable instructional, educational or extra-curricular program matters;<sup>5</sup>
- b. Professional social media sites that are non-school based should have a reasonable relationship to the mission and function of the DOE office creating the site;
- c. Each school year, DOE parents<sup>6</sup> will be notified about the professional social media activities their children will be invited to participate in. We will inform parents of the purpose and nature of each professional social media account their children will access and will instruct parents to contact the school with any questions or concerns;
- d. To the extent possible, based on the social media site being used, DOE supervisors or their designees should be given administrator rights or access to the professional social media accounts established by DOE employees;
- e. DOE employees will be required to obtain their supervisor's approval before setting up a professional social media presence;
- f. Supervisors and their designees are responsible for maintaining a list of all professional social media accounts within their particular school or office; and

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<sup>3</sup> The term "communicates", as used in this Guidance, refers to activity, including, but not limited to, "friending," "following," "commenting," and "posting messages" using social media sites.

<sup>4</sup> The term "site" and "sites" refer to an online social media account or usage.

<sup>5</sup> On school-based professional social media sites that involve DOE students, DOE employees should use the sites for professional purposes. DOE employees are not to review any personal social media accounts created by their students.

<sup>6</sup> The term parent means the student's parent or guardian, or any person in a parental or custodial relationship to the student. This includes: birth or adoptive parent, step-parent, legally appointed guardian, and foster parent.

- g. Professional DOE social media sites should include language identifying the sites as professional social media DOE sites. For example, the professional sites can identify the DOE school, department or particular grade that is utilizing the site.

3. **Guidance Regarding Professional Social Media Sites**

- a. DOE employees should treat professional social media space and communication like a classroom and/or a professional workplace. The same standards expected in DOE professional settings are expected on professional social media sites. If a particular type of behavior is inappropriate in the classroom or a professional workplace, then that behavior is also inappropriate on the professional social media site;
- b. DOE employees should exercise caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using professional social media sites;
- c. DOE employees should use privacy settings to control access to their professional social media sites to ensure that professional social media communications only reach the employees' intended audience. However, DOE employees should be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the internet can easily become public. Furthermore, social media sites can change their current default privacy settings and other functions. As a result, employees have an individualized responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site being utilized;
- d. Professional social media communication should be in compliance with existing Chancellor's Regulations, DOE policies and applicable laws, including, but not limited to, prohibitions on the disclosure of confidential information and prohibitions on the use of harassing, obscene, discriminatory, defamatory or threatening language;
- e. No personally identifiable student information may be posted by DOE employees on professional social media sites, including student photographs, without the consent of the students' parents; and
- f. DOE students who participate in professional social media sites may not be permitted to post photographs featuring other students.

4. **Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites**

- a. Employees using professional social media have no expectation of privacy with regard to their use of such media. The DOE will regularly monitor professional social media sites to protect the school community;
- b. DOE supervisors, or their designees, such as webmasters, are responsible for monitoring their employees' professional social media sites. The monitoring responsibilities include reviewing the professional social media sites on a regular basis. If supervisors discover

questionable communications or behavior on professional social media sites, the supervisors are required to contact the appropriate authorities for assistance. If DOE employees decide to create a professional social media site and they are notified of questionable communications or behavior on their site, they are required to contact the appropriate authorities as well as their supervisor for assistance.<sup>7</sup>

- c. DOE supervisors reserve the right to remove, disable, and provide feedback regarding professional social media sites that do not adhere to the law or Chancellor's Regulations or do not reasonably align with these Guidelines;
- d. To assist in monitoring, as a recommended practice to the extent possible, the default setting for comments on professional social media sites should be turned off. If the default setting for comments is turned on, the comments on the site must be monitored on a daily basis;
- e. When establishing professional social media sites, supervisors and employees should consider the intended audience for the site and consider the level of privacy assigned to the site, specifically, whether the site should be a private network (for example, it is limited to a particular class or particular grade within a school) or a public network (for example, anyone within the school or a larger group within the DOE community can participate). It is a recommended practice for professional social media sites to be private networks, unless there is a specific educational need for the site to be a public network; and
- f. DOE supervisors should maintain a detailed log of all reported non-compliant communications as well as any violations that are otherwise brought to the supervisor's attention.

## 5. **Press Inquiries**

Any press inquiries received via professional social media sites should be referred to the DOE Office of Communications and Media Relations

(<http://schools.nyc.gov/Offices/mediarelations/default.htm>).

## **E. Personal Social Media Use**

### 1. **Communication with DOE Students**

In order to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students, DOE employees should not communicate<sup>8</sup> with students who are currently enrolled in DOE schools on personal social media sites. This provision is subject to the following exceptions: (a) communication with relatives and (b) if an emergency situation requires such communication, in which case the DOE employee should notify his/her supervisor of the contact as soon as possible.

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<sup>7</sup> Existing DOE reporting requirements must be followed. Depending on the circumstances, the appropriate authorities may include, but are not limited to: the Network or Cluster Leader, Borough Safety Directors, the Office of the Special Commissioner of Investigations, the Office of Special Investigations, the Office of Equal Opportunity, the Office of the General Counsel, the Senior Field Counsel, the New York City Administration for Children's Services, and the New York City Police Department.

<sup>8</sup> Examples of such communications include, but are not limited to, "friending," "following," "commenting," and posting messages.

## 2. **Guidance Regarding Personal Social Media Sites**

DOE employees should exercise caution and common sense when using personal social media sites:

- a. As a recommended practice, DOE employees are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites. However, be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the internet can easily become public. Furthermore, social media sites can change their current default privacy settings and other functions. As a result, employees have an individualized responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site being utilized;
- b. DOE employees should not “tag” photos of other DOE employees, DOE volunteers, DOE contractors or DOE vendors without the prior permission of the individuals being tagged;
- c. Personal social media use, including off-hours use, has the potential to result in disruption at school and/or the workplace, and can be in violation of DOE policies, Chancellor’s Regulations, and law;
- d. The posting or disclosure of personally identifiable student information or confidential information via personal social media sites, in violation of Chancellor’s Regulations, is prohibited; and
- e. DOE employees should not use the DOE’s logo in any postings and should not link to the DOE’s website or post DOE material on any personal social media sites without the permission of the DOE Office of Communications and Media Relations.

### **F. Applicability of DOE Policies and Other Laws**

1. These Guidelines provide guidance intended to supplement, not supersede, existing DOE policies, Chancellor’s Regulations and laws. Users of professional social media sites are responsible for complying with all applicable federal, state and local laws, including, but not limited to the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) (<http://business.ftc.gov/privacy-and-security/children%E2%80%99s-privacy>), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/index.html>), and intellectual property laws.
2. These Guidelines are not designed to serve as a code of conduct for social media use. However, all existing DOE policies, regulations and laws that cover employee conduct may be applicable in the social media environment. These include, but are not limited to, Chancellor’s Regulations, the Conflicts of Interest Law, and Section 3020-a of the Education Law.
3. DOE employees who are mandated reporters<sup>9</sup> are required to abide by the same reporting responsibilities in a social media context.

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<sup>9</sup> Various Chancellor’s Regulations impose reporting requirements on DOE employees for issues such as child abuse, child maltreatment, school-related incidents and crimes, corporal punishment, verbal abuse, unlawful discrimination or harassment by DOE employees, student-to-student sexual harassment, and student-to-student bias-based harassment, intimidation, and/or bullying. For example, see Chancellor’s Regulations A-412, A-420, A-421, A-750, A-830, A-831, and A-832. Please note that all previous reporting requirements continue to be in force and will apply to behavior occurring within a social media context.

## G. Additional Inquiries

This document is meant to provide general guidance and does not cover every potential social media situation. Should any questions arise, please consult the Frequently Asked Questions segment or contact your DOE Senior Field Counsel. As these Guidelines address rapidly changing technology, the DOE will regularly revisit these Guidelines and will update them as needed.

## H. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### OVERVIEW

1. Why is the DOE issuing guidance regarding social media?
  - Social media technology offers many educational benefits. The DOE is issuing this guidance to provide recommended practices for employees to take advantage of this technology in a manner that encourages professionalism, responsibility, safety and awareness.
  - In addition, these Guidelines provide recommended best practices for employees who use social media for personal communications.

### GETTING STARTED

2. What if DOE employees are already using social media for either professional or personal purposes?
  - Professional social media use: DOE employees currently using social media for professional purposes should examine whether their use aligns with the Social Media Guidelines and these FAQs. Any use not consistent with these documents should be altered or amended within a reasonable period of time. We will answer any questions or address any concerns during training and feedback sessions. If employees have linked their social media site to a personal email address, they should transition the site to a professional email address.
  - Personal social media use: DOE employees who use social media for personal purposes should take steps to remove current DOE students, subject to the exceptions listed in the Guidelines, from those sites. Additionally, employees should review all of the Social Media Guidelines and FAQs to ensure familiarity with the recommended practices.
3. What are some common types of social media?
  - **Blogs** - Short for 'web-logs', these are sites that can function as ongoing journals with multiple entries. Typically, entries are categorized with 'tags' for easy searching. Most blogs allow for reader comments. Examples: *Blogger, Wordpress, TypePad.*
  - **Micro-Blogs** - These blogs allow for shorter content posts, typically with a limited set of typed characters allowed. Micro-blogs can be used for status updates and to quickly communicate information to 'friends' or 'followers.' Examples: *Twitter, Tumblr.*
  - **Networking** - These sites allow people to connect with each other around common interests, pursuits and other categories. Examples: *Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Ning.*

- **Photo/Video** - These sites allow people to share videos, images, slideshows and other media. Often these sites allow viewers to comment and share posted content. Examples: *YouTube, Vimeo, Flickr.*
4. What should DOE employees who want to develop professional social media for their classroom, school, or office do?
- Employees should review the Social Media Guidelines and FAQs periodically to ensure that they are familiar with their contents and are aware of any updates.
  - Employees should research and familiarize themselves with the social media site they intend to utilize. For example, if the proposed professional social media use involves students, employees are required to review the social media site's regulations and determine whether children under a certain age are allowed to use the site. In addition, employees should, for example, understand the default privacy and viewing settings for the social media site. Where possible, we recommend that DOE employees establish group pages, rather than individual profiles, for educational purposes.

## **MONITORING**

5. Who monitors professional social media sites and how frequently are they monitored?
- Professional social media sites will be reviewed and monitored by supervisors or their designees, such as a webmaster, on a regular basis. The specific level of review required for each professional social media site will depend on the particular characteristics of the social media site. Sites that are interactive, for example, those that allow comments and posting, will need to be monitored more closely. Other factors that will impact the frequency include the level of privacy assigned to the site, specifically, whether the site is a private network (for example, limited to a particular class) or a public network (open to anyone within the school or a larger group within the DOE community). Employees who decide to establish professional social media sites can engage in a voluntary review of their specific site on a regular basis.

## **STUDENT COMMUNICATION**

6. Do these Guidelines apply to DOE students?
- These Guidelines do not address student-to-student communication via social media. The DOE's Bill of Student Rights and Responsibilities sets forth expected standards of behavior with respect to student communication. The DOE's Discipline Code establishes the range of disciplinary options and guidance interventions that can be used when students

engage in misconduct involving social media.

7. How should DOE employees respond to “friend” requests by current DOE students on their personal social media sites and accounts?
  - If DOE employees receive a request from a current DOE student to connect or communicate through a personal social media site, they should refuse the request. The following language is one suggested response: “Please do not be offended if I do not accept or respond to your request. As a DOE employee, the agency’s Social Media Guidelines do not permit interactions with current DOE students on personal social media sites. If you do want to connect, please contact me through the school (or class) page at \_\_\_\_ [insert link].”

## **PERSONAL USE**

8. May DOE employees using social media for personal use communicate with DOE colleagues?
  - These Guidelines do not address communication between employees on personal social media sites. DOE employees who use personal social media are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites.
9. Why is it a recommended practice to have separate professional and personal social media sites and email addresses?
  - The reason for this distinction is to ensure separation between personal and professional spheres of online communication for DOE employees. In this context, this separation is intended to clarify that professional social media and personal social media are different. Professional social media is work-related and may involve employee-to-student communication. Personal social media is not work-related, and subject to certain exceptions noted in the Guidelines, does not involve employee-to-student communication.

## **FEEDBACK**

10. May DOE parents, students and employees provide feedback on these Guidelines?
  - Yes. The DOE welcomes feedback regarding these Guidelines and the FAQs. Because technology changes rapidly, the DOE plans to review and update its guidance as necessary. If you have any feedback or suggestions, please forward them to [SocialMedia@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:SocialMedia@schools.nyc.gov).

## **PARENTS**

11. Will DOE parents be notified regarding their children’s social media use for school-related activities?
  - Yes. DOE schools will notify parents if their child is invited to participate in professional social media activities and we will provide information describing the professional social media sites that will be available to their child. Parents who have questions or concerns about their children's use of social media for school purposes should contact the school for more information.



## REPORTING

12. What should DOE supervisors and their designees, who are responsible for monitoring professional social media, do when they discover or receive a report of inappropriate activity?
  - A DOE supervisor who discovers or receives a report of inappropriate or questionable content posted on a professional social media site should contact the appropriate authorities for assistance, in accordance with existing DOE reporting requirements. Depending on the circumstances, the appropriate authorities may include, but are not limited to: the Network or Cluster Leader, Borough Safety Directors, the Office of the Special Commissioner of Investigations, the Office of Special Investigations, the Office of Equal Opportunity, the Office of the General Counsel, the Senior Field Counsel, the New York City Administration for Children’s Services, and the New York City Police Department.
  - In addition, if other members of a school community find inappropriate material on a professional social media site, they are encouraged to report it to a DOE supervisor.
13. How can DOE employees and supervisors determine what constitutes confidential information or personally identifiable student information that should not be posted or disclosed?
  - If DOE employees and supervisors have any questions about what constitutes confidential information or personally identifiable student information, they should contact their Senior Field Counsel, the DOE’s Office of Legal Services at (212) 374-6888 or [asklegal@schools.nyc.gov](mailto:asklegal@schools.nyc.gov).