



# Social Media Guidelines for Employees

# Introduction

The Pine Tree Independent School District recognizes the importance of transparent, ongoing dialogue between the district and its stakeholders. Today's stakeholders are deeply engaged in electronic forms of communication, and many educators have turned to email, websites, blogs, text messaging, and social media to communicate with both students and parents. Although the Brenham Independent School District encourages the use of electronic media for communicating, employees must use caution and always exercise the utmost professionalism. The use of social media can easily blur the lines between professional and personal identities.

In addition to the professional standards practiced each day during interactions with students in a face-to-face environment, there are also professional standards and expectations that must be upheld online. Although electronic means of communicating are dynamic, mobile, and quickly reach their audience, they may, in some circumstances, not meet the public and professional standards for communicating with students and parents. It is crucial to keep in mind that information produced by district employees in the context of their work is a reflection on the entire district and is subject to the district's Acceptable Use Policy and Board Policy.

Employees of the Pine Tree Independent School District have a responsibility to the school system, colleagues, and students to depict a level of professionalism in all communications. Employees are role models for students and are viewed as leaders within our community. Please always remember that the district's standards of behavior are high.

The Pine Tree Independent School District has developed the following guidelines to provide direction for employees who choose to utilize electronic forms of communication. These guidelines offer professional recommendations and best practices for communicating via electronic media. This guide is intended to assist employees in using digital tools in a professional, safe, and responsible manner.

## Professional Use of Social Media

Employees administering a social media account on behalf of a district class, team, club, group, department, organization or school, or the district, are expected to:

- Provide the district office and/or a direct supervisor with login credentials and administrator rights to the account.
- Post only things that directly relate to the class, team, club, group, department or building, or to the school or district. Employees should not promote outside organizations on district social media accounts unless there is a direct relationship to the district.
- Respect state and federal trademark, copyright and fair use laws when posting to social media, and uphold standards of web accessibility to the highest extent practicable.
- Monitor comments posted to social media pages on a regular basis.
- Follow the district Acceptable Use Policy and restrict the use of district computers and other technology for educational and professional purposes only.
- Post information that is factually accurate and free of grammatical or spelling errors.
- Take responsibility for anything “liked” or shared via social media when representing the district, as this can be construed as an endorsement. Do not share a link without fully reading it first.
- Adhere to all terms and conditions of individual social media sites or electronic messaging applications.

## Personal Use of Social Media

When interacting with others on social media, employees are expected to follow the same behavioral standards they would in other communications. Employees are reminded of the following:

- A personal social media account is not an appropriate venue to interact with students, parents or guardians.
- Confidential information (including, but not limited to, student addresses and telephone numbers) should never be posted or solicited online.
- Employees are expected to refrain from reporting, speculating, discussing or giving any opinions on district topics or individuals that could be considered sensitive, confidential or disparaging.
- If you identify yourself as Brenham Independent School District staff member online, it should be clear that the views you express are not necessarily those of the district.
- Guidelines regarding the use of student photographs or likenesses, information and classwork apply to social media and other online publications or venues.

- Think before you post — regardless of your privacy settings, assume anything you post is public information. Don't post anything you wouldn't feel comfortable saying publicly.

## **Social Media Guidelines**

### **Always a School Employee**

The lines between public and private, personal and professional, are blurred in the digital world. Regardless of whether it is clearly communicated, you will be identified as an employee of the school district in what you do and say online. If you don't want it on the 6 o'clock news, don't share it online.

### **School Values**

Always represent school district values. Express ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. Consider carefully what you post through comments and photos. A violation of these guidelines could be regarded as a form of professional misconduct and may result in disciplinary action.

### **Manage Relationships Carefully**

Employees are prohibited from establishing personal relationships with students that are unprofessional and thereby inappropriate. Do not fraternize with students as though they are your peers or friends.

### **Build Community/Positively Represent School**

Represent the school district and the students and parents you serve in the best light. Under no circumstances should offensive comments be made about students or colleagues (including administrators) or the district in general. Your posts and comments should help build and support the school community. Do not comment on or forward unsupported information (rumors). You are responsible for what you post, even if it's on a personal page, so be certain it's accurate and supports your organization.

## Own and Correct Mistakes

If you make a mistake, admit the mistake and correct it quickly. Share your error with your supervisor, human resources and the communications department so they can help address the issue effectively. Even though damage may be done, it is best to admit your mistake and correct it.

## Confidential Information

Online postings and conversations are not private. Do not share confidential information whether it is internal school discussions or specific information about students or other staff. What you post will be seen by others and can be forwarded or shared in just a few clicks.

## Spell Check and Abbreviations

Follow writing conventions including proper grammar, capitalization, and punctuation. Be cautious about using abbreviations, acronyms, and jargon. When in doubt, define the abbreviation at least once in a post or include a definitions page on your site.

## Using Content That Isn't Your Own

Do not utilize protected works. Just because an image, song, movie, etc. is available in a search online does not mean you can use it freely. Use work that is available under Creative Commons, a way that allows you to use certain photos without getting written permission from the owner. Always give credit to the owner of the work when necessary. When using a hyperlink to outside sources, be sure that the content is appropriate and adheres to the Brenham Independent School District Acceptable Use Policy.

## Rules of Engagement

This is a social networking page designed to communicate Pine Tree ISD's social news. Pine Tree ISD reserves the right to delete or remove a post that violates any of the following rules:

- No profane, threatening, harassing, bullying, vulgar, obscene or discriminatory material.
- No material that is likely to disrupt the learning environment.
- No comments that portray students and/or staff in a defamatory, abusive, or generally negative tone.

- Respect copyrights and fair use laws; no plagiarism - give proper credit for other's work.
- No comments or posts that do not show proper consideration for other's privacy or are likely to offend or provoke others.
- No spam or unsolicited advertisements–i.e. repeatedly posting the same comment or comments that are simply advertising/promoting a service or product.
- No content that violates or promotes the violation of school rules.
- No political lobbying.

## What does the Employee Handbook say?

### Technology Resources

#### *Policy CQ*

The district's technology resources, including its networks, computer systems, e-mail accounts, devices connected to its networks, and all district-owned devices used on or off school property, are primarily for administrative and instructional purposes only. Limited personal use is permitted if the use:

- Imposes no tangible cost to the district
- Does not unduly burden the district's technology resources
- Has no adverse effect on job performance or on a student's academic performance

Electronic mail transmissions and other use of technology resources are not confidential and can be monitored at any time to ensure appropriate use.

Employees are required to abide by the provisions of the district's acceptable use agreement and administrative procedures. Failure to do so can result in the suspension of access or termination of privileges and may lead to disciplinary and legal action. Employees with questions about computer use and data management can contact the Director of Technology, Todd Yohn.

### Personal Use of Electronic Communications

#### *Policy CQ, DH*

Electronic communications includes all forms of social media, such as text messaging, instant messaging, electronic mail (e-mail), Web logs (blogs), electronic forums (chat rooms), video-

sharing Websites (e.g. YouTube), editorial comments posted on the Internet, and social network sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram). Electronic communications also includes all forms of telecommunication such as landlines, cell phones, and web-based applications.

As role models for the district's students, employees are responsible for their public conduct even when they are not acting as district employees. Employees will be held to the same professional standards in their public use of electronic communications as they are for any other public conduct. If an employee's use of electronic communications interferes with the employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties, the employee is subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment. If an employee wishes to use a social network site or similar media for personal purposes, the employee is responsible for the content on the employee's page, including content added by the employee, the employee's friends, or members of the public who can access the employee's page, and for Web links on the employee's page. The employee is also responsible for maintaining privacy settings appropriate to the content.

An employee who uses electronic communications for personal purposes shall observe the following:

- The employee shall not use the district's logo or other copyrighted material of the district without express, written consent.
- The employee may not set up or update the employee's personal social network page(s) using the district's computers, network, or equipment.
- The employee shall limit the use of personal electronic communication devices to send or receive calls, text messages, pictures, and videos to breaks, meal times, and before and after scheduled work hours unless there is an emergency or the use is authorized by a supervisor to conduct district business.
- An employee may not share or post, in any format, information, videos, or pictures obtained while on duty or on district business unless the employee first obtains written approval from the employee's immediate supervisor. Employees should be cognizant that they have access to information and images that, if transmitted to the public, could violate privacy concerns.
- The employee continues to be subject to applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative regulations, and the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators, even when communicating regarding personal and private matters, regardless of whether the employee is using private or public equipment, on or off campus. These restrictions include:

- Confidentiality of student records. [See Policy FL]
- Confidentiality of health or personnel information concerning colleagues, unless disclosure serves lawful professional purposes or is required by law. [See Policy DH (EXHIBIT)]
- Confidentiality of district records, including educator evaluations and private e-mail addresses. [See Policy GBA]
- Copyright Law [See Policy CY]
- Prohibition against harming others by knowingly making false statements about a colleague or the school system. [See Policy DH (EXHIBIT)]

See Electronic Media between Employees and Students, below, for regulations on employee communication with students through electronic media. Employees are held financially responsible for any lost or damaged electronic equipment issued by the District.

## **Electronic Communications between Employees and Students**

### *Policy DH*

A certified or licensed employee, or any other employee designated in writing by the superintendent or a campus principal, may use electronic communications with students who are currently enrolled in the district. The employee must comply with the provisions outlined below. Electronic communications between all other employees and students who are enrolled in the district are prohibited.

Employees are not required to provide students with their personal phone number or e-mail address.

An employee is not subject to these provisions regarding electronic communications with a student to the extent the employee has a social or family relationship with a student. For example, an employee may have a relationship with a niece or nephew, a student who is the child of an adult friend, a student who is a friend of the employee's child, or a member or participant in the same civic, social, recreational, or religious organization. An employee who claims an exception based on a social relationship shall provide written consent from the student's parent. The written consent shall include an acknowledgement by the parent that:

- The employee has provided the parent with a copy of this protocol;

- The employee and the student have a social relationship outside of school;
- The parent understands that the employee's communications with the student are excepted from district regulation; and
- The parent is solely responsible for monitoring electronic communications between the employee and the student.

The following definitions apply for the use of electronic media with students:

- Electronic communications means any communication facilitated by the use of any electronic device, including a telephone, cellular telephone, computer, computer network, personal data assistant, or pager. The term includes e-mail, text messages, instant messages, and any communication made through an Internet website, including a social media website or a social networking website.
- Communicate means to convey information and includes a one-way communication as well as a dialogue between two or more people. A public communication by an employee that is not targeted at students (e.g., a posting on the employee's personal social network page or a blog) is not a communication: however, the employee may be subject to district regulations on personal electronic communications. See Personal Use of Electronic Media, above. Unsolicited contact from a student through electronic means is not a communication.
- Certified or licensed employee means a person employed in a position requiring SBEC certification or a professional license, and whose job duties may require the employee to communicate electronically with students. The term includes classroom teachers, counselors, principals, librarians, paraprofessionals, nurses, educational diagnosticians, licensed therapists, and athletic trainers.

An employee who communicates electronically with students shall observe the following:

- The employee is prohibited from knowingly communicating with students using any form of electronic communications, including mobile and web applications, that are not provided or accessible by the district unless a specific exception is noted below.
- Only a teacher, trainer, or other employee who has an extracurricular duty may use text messaging, and then only to communicate with students who participate in extracurricular activity over which the employee has responsibility. An employee who communicates with a student using text messaging shall comply with the following protocol:
  - The employee shall include at least one of the student's parents or guardians as a recipient on each text message to the student so that the student and parent receive the same message; or

- The employee shall include his or her immediate supervisor as a recipient on each text message to the student so that the student and supervisor receive the same message.
- The employee shall limit communications to matters within the scope of the employee's professional responsibilities (e.g., for classroom teachers, matters relating to class work, homework, and tests); for an employee with an extracurricular duty, matters relating to the extracurricular activity.
- The employee is prohibited from knowingly communicating with students through a personal social network page; the employee must create a separate social network page ("professional page") for the purpose of communicating with students. The employee must enable administration and parents to access the employee's professional page.
- The employee shall not communicate directly with any student between the hours of 9:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. An employee may, however make public posts to a social network site, blog, or similar application at any time.
- The employee does not have a right to privacy with respect to communications with students and parents.
- The employee continues to be subject to applicable state and federal laws, local policies, administrative regulations, and the Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators, including:
  - Compliance with the Public Information Act and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), including retention and confidentiality of student records. [Policies CPC and FL]
  - Copyright law [See Policy CY]
  - Prohibitions against soliciting or engaging in sexual conduct or a romantic relationship with a student [Policy DHB]
- Upon request from administration, an employee will provide the phone number(s), social network site(s), or other information regarding the method(s) of electronic media the employee uses to communicate with any one or more currently-enrolled students.
- Upon written request from a parent or student, the employee shall discontinue communicating with the student through e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging, or any other form of one-to-one communication.
- An employee may request an exception from one or more of the limitations above by submitting a written request to his or her immediate supervisor.

- An employee shall notify his or her supervisor in writing within one business day if a student engages in an improper electronic communication with the employee. The employee should describe the form and content of the electronic communication.