

**MARBLEHEAD PUBLIC SCHOOLS
SOCIAL NETWORKING POLICY FOR STAFF**

1. Acceptable Use Policy:

This policy is adopted in addition to, and not as a substitute for, the Marblehead Public Schools' ("MPS") Acceptable Use Policy, which governs use of the school district's technological resources. This policy applies to the use by MPS staff of social networking sites/social media, regardless of whether such use involves the district's technological resources or a staff member's personal resources. All activities, which are prohibited by the Acceptable Use Policy, are also prohibited by this policy, and those prohibitions are incorporated by reference herein.

2. General Concerns

The Marblehead Public Schools recognize the proliferation of online conversation between staff members and students. However, due to the nature of social networking sites, there exists a risk, without care and planning, that the lines between one's professional life and personal life will be blurred. Our staff should always be mindful of how they present themselves to the world, online and otherwise.

Should a staff member engage in any electronic communication with students, the school district is concerned, and the staff member should be concerned, that such activities have the potential to undermine the staff member's authority to maintain discipline and to remain truly objective with his/ her students. All activities in which a staff member uses social networking sites/social media must be undertaken in a way that minimizes this potential.

3. Expectations of Staff

With these concerns in mind, this Social Networking Policy sets MPS's expectations for staff members' use of social networks/social media, including but not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, personal email accounts, text message features of cell phones, use of blogs, and other electronic or technologically based communication systems.

1. **Establishing a Social Network Account:** Before endeavoring to establish any social networking account, staff members should familiarize themselves with the features of any account they choose to use. Staff members must:
 - a. Take specific steps to "privatize" the information placed online.
 - b. Assume responsibility if any information deemed "private" becomes "public."
 - c. Be aware of the fact that any information shared privately with an individual

could be re-distributed without explicit consent

- d. Understand that the same principles, which are applied to face-to-face communication, should be applied to online conversation.
- e. Remember that nothing posted online is ever truly "private."

2. **Separating Professional and Personal Identity:** The school district expects staff members to maintain a clear separation between their professional and personal lives. MPS staff members are strongly discouraged from using personal social networking accounts to communicate with parents and/or students for school-related/education-related communications. If choosing to utilize social media for school related purposes, staff members must create separate "professional use only" social networking accounts for use with students and their parents/guardians. In practice, this means:
 - a. Establish a professional social network identity that is separate from a "personal" identity.
 - b. Use a professional social network identity and account exclusively for communication with students on matters directly related to school/education matters. No school/education matters shall be the subject of communication on private social network accounts, unless the circumstances constitute an emergency involving the safety or welfare of another.
 - c. The "friends" associated with such a professional social network account should only be members of the educational community, such as administrators, teachers, students, and parents/guardians of such students.
 - d. Deny "friend" requests from individuals who do not fit into any of these categories.

3. **Student Privacy and Confidential Information:** Staff members will adhere at all times to student privacy rights and employee privacy rights to have their "education/student record", personal, personnel and medical information kept confidential. In practice, this means:
 - a. Information that is protected by law from disclosure to third parties will not be communicated online in a way that exposes such information to retrieval by those third parties.
 - b. Confidential student information may not be posted on the "wall," the "information" section, or through any part of that social network account that would be accessible to any other social network "friends" associated with that account.

- c. Private communication with a student through the educational social network account shall be conveyed only through the private email/message feature of the educational social network, so that only the student may view the message and respond to it.
4. **Archiving Communication:** Staff members should communicate with students and parents on school/educational matters only. In most instances, it is expected that staff members will use the district's email account for all school/education business keeping in mind that:
- a. Use of one's personal email account to discuss school/education information with students and parents is prohibited unless the circumstances involve an emergency, as referred to in paragraph 2b, above.
 - b. A staff member's use of his/her personal email account as opposed to an MPS account does not shield the information in such account from the provisions of the public records law or from discovery in litigation. It only prevents the archiving of such messages through the MPS automatic email archiving system, preventing staff members from taking advantage of the archiving system.
 - c. Any document, whether in tangible or electronic form, which is created or received by a public employee in his or her capacity as such, is subject to retention and perhaps disclosure under the public records law.
 - d. No matter what medium of communication a staff member selects, he/she must adhere to appropriate professional/student boundaries and document communications when appropriate. Staff members are a student's role model, not his or her "friend", and must act accordingly in the use of social networking sites/social media. All communications between a staff member and a student or his/her parents/guardians are subject to monitoring by the MPS.
 - e. Staff members remain mandated reporters. If a staff member receives information from a student or from anyone else which indicates that the student at risk, is abused, is neglected or is being harmed, the staff member is required by law to report such neglect or harm to the Department of Children and Family Services. The staff member must report his/her concerns to the building principal or designee as soon as possible.
5. **Free Speech Expectations:** This policy is not intended to infringe upon a staff member's right to speak publicly on matters of public concern, or to communicate with fellow members of their union on workplace issues, so long as such communication adheres to the standards for protection established by the United States Supreme Court, including but not limited to appropriate time, place and manner restrictions and does not

interfere with the performance of job duties or disrupt the MPS's ability to operate the school district and educate students.

- a. Although a staff member may be communicating regarding MPS matters or general education/school matters using his/her personal social networking account, the staff member must keep in mind that readers may assume that he/she is speaking as an employee of the school district and not as a private citizen and should communicate to the recipient that the views expressed are the personal views of the staff member.
 - b. Such restrictions are intended to preserve student confidentiality, maintain the staff member's status as an educator who should command and receive the respect of students, and be able to maintain order and discipline in his/her classroom.
6. **Code of Conduct:** Any conduct, whether online or not, that violates this policy, that reflects poorly upon the MPS, or that consists of inappropriate behavior may expose a staff member to discipline up to and including discharge.

Disclaimer: References to various social networks are not included to limit application of this policy to use of just those sites or programs. Given the rapid pace of technological change it is not possible to identify all proprietary or commonly named or identified means of such communications.

Legal Ref: M.G.L. Chapter 71 Section 42:

A teacher with professional teacher status, pursuant to section forty-one, shall not be dismissed except for inefficiency, incompetency, incapacity, conduct unbecoming a teacher, insubordination or failure on the part of the teacher to satisfy teacher performance standards developed pursuant to section thirty-eight of this chapter or other just cause.