

How to Create Social Media Guidelines for Your School

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Social media

is fast becoming as ubiquitous as the air we breathe.

In recent months, many schools and districts around the country have taken steps to create social media policies and guidelines for their students and staff. In my work with several districts to draft these documents, I have seen many approaches that work well, and some that don't.

That said, there is no silver bullet for administrators; every school, district, and state has a different set of circumstances. With that in mind, here are some steps that will help you determine the best approach for your own community. —Steven Anderson (@web2classroom)

1. Examine Your School Culture

When setting out on this journey, it is important to understand the prevailing beliefs about social media in your community.

Questions for Reflection

- How are social media products currently being used by students? By teachers? By administrators and parents? How can they be leveraged for better communication?
- What are the fears around social media in school?
- Are there any “bright spots” where social media is already being used successfully?

Resources and Case Studies

Social Media and Two-Way Communication (<http://bit.ly/ICLW9W>)

Connected Principals

Make the case for integrating social media into your school community.

Web 2.0 as a Force for School Transformation: A Tale of Six Districts (<http://bit.ly/Kz1Yug>) → PDF download

Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)

This executive summary can help you discover what other schools are doing.

Is Social Media Right for Your District? (<http://bit.ly/IV6be6>)

Sungard: K-12 Education Blog

This blog shares questions for educational leaders considering social media for their districts.

How Schools Are Using Social Media - Infographic (<http://bit.ly/JU8bVD>)

SocialTimes

Get statistics on classroom use and professional development.

Schools Use Social Media to Communicate With Students, Parents (<http://bit.ly/JfllZ>)

Tulsa World

A case study on how one district in Texas uses social media.

Ten Ways Schools Are Using Social Media Effectively (<http://bit.ly/HjZuB7>)

eSchool News

Educators from across the country share how they use social media.

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2. Organize a Team

This team should include educators who use social media in the classroom and those who do not. A district that I worked with recently chose to have a teacher and administrative representative from each grade level in the district, along with their heads of instruction and technology, school attorney, and two student representatives. You have to find a combination that works.

This team should be open and transparent in all their conversations and decision making, and be clear about their shared goal. Establish a website or webpage for the posting of notes, resources, and minutes from the meetings.

Questions for Reflection

- Does everyone on the team share the same goal?
- Is everyone committed to transparency?
- What is your time frame?

3. Research Phase

Your team should begin by evaluating the current policies that are already in place in your school or district. Many districts already have policies in place that cover the acceptable use basics -- so they only need to add guidelines to help crystallize learning opportunities. Because the social media landscape changes quickly, this is often the best approach.

Next, the team will want to examine the social media policies and/or guidelines from other institutions. You will want to involve your school attorney in the draft process to make sure that you are within your current local and state policies.

Questions for Reflection

- Which policies or guidelines would make sense for you to adapt?
- How should you use the feedback from your community to shape your decision making?

Resources

Making the Case for Social Media in Schools

(<http://bit.ly/9puo84>) *Edutopia*

This blog shares specific reasons for using social media in schools.

Social Media and Peer Learning (<http://bit.ly/IEZYsc>)

UC Berkeley School of Information

Howard Rheingold, a leading authority on the use of social media in schools, writes about why students should have access to these resources.

Five Steps to Build a Social Media Team (<http://bit.ly/IKdtAb>)

Social Media Today

This site is for businesses, but the steps described here can help you create your school team.

Resources

Acceptable Use Policies in the Web 2.0 and Mobile Era (<http://bit.ly/JfIVJI>)

CoSN

This document explains how schools can keep students safe.

Social Media Best Practices (<http://bit.ly/Jfm67C>)

Tufts University

This document shows how higher education institutions support the use of social media.

Pottsville Area School District Social Media Policy (<http://bit.ly/lmRT5c>)

→ PDF download

This is an example of a stricter school district policy.

Policy #470: Employee Use of Social Media (<http://bit.ly/IV862g>)

→ PDF download

Minnetonka Public Schools

Here is an example of an official school district social media policy.

Best Practices for Social Media Usage in North Carolina (<http://bit.ly/KvccOH>)

→ PDF download

NC Office of Governor

These guidelines describe how government agencies should use social media.

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Social Media Best Practices (<http://bit.ly/JUdsw0>)

Web 2.0 Classroom

Sample guidelines for the promotion and use of social media products by students and staff.

Online Database of Social Media Policies (<http://bit.ly/KPYOJA>)

Social Media Governance

Preview social media policies from various industries. Be sure to check "General Guidelines and Templates" for some useful downloads.

4. Draft Your Document and Incorporate Feedback

Now your team will take all the information you've gathered and create a document. This can be the most challenging part of the process and you can expect many drafts and revisions.

One district that I worked with posted their drafts to a school wiki, where anyone on the team could contribute. There were also opportunities for other teachers, administrators, and students to make comments or bring up other items for consideration.

Schedule meetings to talk to school staff, administrators, parents, and community members face-to-face.

Questions for Reflection

- How will you make your drafts available to the community?
- How much input do you want? Should you set limits to prevent overload?

5. Make Sure the School Attorney and School Board See the Draft

Your school attorney will ensure that you are not violating any current policies, laws, or ordinances. Your school board might want to review your document, and if you are changing policy, they will want to discuss and take a vote.

Questions for Reflection

- Does the document violate any current policies, laws, or ordinances?
- What do you need to do to get buy-in from your school board?

6. Introduction to the School Community

Now that all stakeholders have signed off on your policy or guidelines, it's time to roll it out to your greater community. Every member of your team should be tasked with talking to specific groups and/or schools. Take the time to educate your students, faculty, staff, parents, and community about what the document means to them. If you have been open and transparent from the beginning, this will be an easy step.

Questions for Reflection

- How will you introduce the policy or guidelines to your community? Will you hold meetings at all schools? Send emails?
- Do any major themes emerge in your community's feedback?
- What will you do if the guidelines are not well received?

7. Review Periodically

Your new policy or guidelines should be a living document and should be revisited often. Social media products change. Your culture will change. Policies will change. Your team needs to look at your document at least annually to determine whether it is working and whether any adjustments need to be made.

Resources

The following are some resources on establishing social media policy and/or guidelines.

Creating Social Media Guidelines

(<http://bit.ly/HDox7j>)

Edutopia

In this blog, I shared how one school in my district created a set of social media guidelines for students and teachers.

8 Social Media Strategies For Your Classroom

(<http://bit.ly/JOjv4x>)

Getting Smart

A great overview of the various social media platforms, their strengths, and how to use them to engage students.

Lastly, here's my Diigo collection of over 80 articles, blog posts, and resources on social media in education. (<http://bit.ly/IYGOei>) Good luck! It can be a difficult journey, but it's well worth it.

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