

ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURE 444

Use of Social Media

The Limestone District School Board recognizes that emerging online collaboration platforms are fundamentally changing the way individuals and organizations communicate. In this digital world, the lines between public and private, personal and professional become blurred. All employees of the Limestone District School Board are responsible for their conduct when using social media channels and are therefore expected to act in a professional manner at all times in order to safeguard their online reputation and identity as well as that of the Limestone District School Board.

Breach of accepted ethical standards, which are care, trust, respect and integrity and the violation of this procedure, may result in disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. Even if your employment with the Limestone District School Board is not explicitly stated when using a social media site, your actions that are captured via posted images or videos, as well as commentary, can reflect on you, your colleagues, your school and/or the Board. The following is therefore intended to provide Limestone employees with practical guidance for responsible communications via social media channels.

1.0 SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINED

1.1 Social media constitutes the myriad of internet based tools and platforms that increase and foster the sharing of information, making the transfer of text, photos, audio, video, and other information in general almost effortless among users. Social media includes blogs, micro-blogs, wikis, social networks, and any other online collaboration, sharing or publishing platform, whether accessed through the web, a mobile device, text messaging, e-mail or any other existing or emerging communications platform.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 To establish practical, reasonable and enforceable guidelines by which the Limestone District School Board employees can conduct responsible, constructive social media engagement in both official and unofficial capacities.
- 2.3 To protect Limestone District School Board employees from violating Municipal, Provincial or Federal rules, regulations or laws through social media channels.

3.0 ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Limestone District School Board employees are personally responsible for all comments and information they publish online. Employees must be aware that what they publish will remain public for a long time and can never be totally erased. It is therefore also imperative that employees ensure their privacy is protected.

- 3.2 The following guiding principals have been developed to ensure employees are using social media channels appropriately and that employees understand the potential consequences of their online communications.
- 3.2.1 Online behavior should reflect the same standards of professionalism, respect, integrity and consideration that would otherwise be applied using face-to-face communication or interactions with students.
- 3.2.2 Through the use of social media, information is communicated and broadcasted to the world and therefore even with the strictest privacy settings in place, what is communicated online should remain within the boundaries of professional discretion. Comments expressed via social networking pages under what is deemed a ‘private conversation’ may still end up being shared into a more public domain, even with privacy settings on maximum, given that the privacy settings of other individuals cannot be controlled.
- 3.2.3 Comments related to the school and/or Board should always meet the highest standards of professional discretion. When posting, even on the strictest settings, employees should act on the assumption that all postings are in the public domain.
- 3.2.4 Before posting photographs and videos, permission should be sought from the subject where possible. This is particularly important where photographs of professional colleagues or students are concerned.
- 3.2.5 Before posting personal photographs, you should ensure the photos selected reflect a professional image as your networking site is an extension of both your personal and professional reputation. For example, photographs relating to alcohol may be deemed inappropriate.
- 3.2.6 Micro blogging (Facebook, Twitter etc.) comments made using such media are not protected by privacy settings. Employees should be aware of the public and widespread nature of such media and again refrain from any comment that could be deemed unprofessional.
- 3.2.7 Blogs, wikis and podcasts may be viewed as an extension of the workplace. What is inappropriate in the workplace should be deemed inappropriate online.
- 3.2.8 Employees must not post defamatory, libelous, vulgar, obscene, abusive, profane, threatening, racially/ethnically hateful or otherwise offensive or illegal information or material on any site under an identity that can be tied to your employment with the Limestone District School Board. This includes any posting under a screen name behind which is a profile, whether private or not, that includes your actual identity, whether or not that profile itself identifies you as an employee of the Board.
- 3.2.9 When contributing online you must never post confidential student, staff or Board information.

- 3.2.10 If you identify yourself as a Limestone District School Board employee, your profile and related content should be consistent with how you wish to represent yourself with colleagues, parents, and students.
- 3.2.11 Use of social media to speak on behalf of the Limestone District School Board must be approved through the Director's office.
- 3.2.12 Employees are responsible for ensuring that their online activities do not interfere with their job requirements. To this end, employees are not to be using social media for personal use during working hours/instructional time, unless on an approved break.
- 3.2.13 Employees are prohibited from using social media channels for evaluating the performance of their co-workers or students.
- 3.2.14 Employees are prohibited from using social media channels to publicly criticize or complain about the behavior or actions of students, staff, parents, community partners, vendors, suppliers or other members of the broader school community.
- 3.2.15 If an employee learns that they have posted in error or have communicated incorrect information, via their social media channel, they must take the necessary steps to correct the information immediately.

4.0 DISCLOSURE & DISCLAIMERS

- 4.1 If Limestone District School Board employees have identified themselves as such, they must include disclaimers within their personal blogs that the views are their own and do not reflect on the Board. For example, "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent the Limestone District School Board's positions, beliefs, opinions, or policies."
- 4.2 This standard disclaimer does not by itself exempt Limestone District School Board employees from a special responsibility when blogging. By virtue of their position, employees must consider whether the personal thoughts they publish may be misunderstood as expressing positions.
- 4.3 Classroom blogs do not require a disclaimer, but teachers are encouraged to moderate content contributed by students.
- 4.4 Since reputations are built on trust, employees are expected to disclose their identity and affiliation with the Board whenever discussing work topics via social media channels.
- 4.5. If an employee chooses to share an opinion on Board policy, procedures or practices, they may do so only if they precede their social media disclosure with a disclaimer acknowledging that their personal opinion does not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Board.

5.0 PRIVACY

- 5.1 Employees have a right to their personal privacy. They have the right to keep their personal opinions, beliefs, thoughts and emotions private. Employees are prohibited from sharing anything via social media channels that could violate another employee's right to privacy.
- 5.2 Examples of social media disclosures that may compromise an employee's or student's right to privacy include, but are not limited to, pictures, videos or audio recordings shared through social media channels without the permission of any single employee featured, the public disclosure of private facts or the disclosure of information gained through unreasonable intrusion.
- 5.3 At no time should any employee of the Board be sharing or communicating information about students, staff or other confidential business of the Board.

6.0 CONFIDENTIALITY

- 6.1 It is the responsibility of all Limestone employees to manage and protect confidential information. Disclosure of confidential information may result in legal fines, damages to reputation and/or lost productivity.
- 6.2 External social media channels should not be used for internal business communications among fellow employees. Although employees may disagree, social media channels should never be used to publicly air or discuss differences of opinion on internal matters.

7.0 APPLICATION

- 7.1 This procedure applies to all Limestone District School Board employees, volunteers, Trustees and third party contractors.
- 7.2 With respect to student-Teacher interactions online, please see Appendix A: OCT Professional Advisory: Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media.

8.0 COMPLIANCE

- 8.1 Failure to comply with this procedure may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal as well as civil or criminal penalties as provided by law.

Related Procedures:

Respect in the Workplace: Anti-Harassment & Discrimination
Violence in the Workplace

Equity and Inclusive Education
Discrimination, Harassment & Human Rights Violations
Professional Misconduct by Staff Members & Volunteers
Safe Schools
Municipal Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act
OCT Professional Advisory: Use of Electronic Communication and SocialMedia