



SVSD Guidelines for Educators Using Social Networking Sites

Social networks are rapidly growing in popularity and use by all ages in society. Many staff members use social networking as a personal tool to connect with friends and family; some are also beginning to use it as a professional/educational tool. Social networking is a powerful tool that has the potential for some wonderful educational applications. However, just as in life, what is appropriate in one's personal and private life is not always appropriate

in an educational setting.

The district recognizes the value of student/teacher/parent interaction on educational networking sites (e.g. social networking sites dedicated to professional activity/collaboration/networking). Collaboration, resource sharing, and student/teacher, student/student, and teacher/parent dialog can all be facilitated by the use of networking tools. Such interactivity outside of the school walls can greatly enhance face-to-face classes.

Since social networking is relatively new to many staff members, we wanted to provide some guidelines for maintaining a clear line between personal social networking and professional/educational social networking. Both have a valued place in our increasingly digital lives.

Your Online Identity

As educators, we have a professional image to uphold, and how we conduct ourselves online impacts this image. As reported by the media, there have been instances of educators demonstrating unprofessional conduct while engaging in inappropriate dialogue about their schools and/or students, or posting pictures and videos of themselves engaged in inappropriate activity online. Mistakenly, some educators feel that being online shields them from having their personal lives examined. Online identities are very public and can cause serious repercussions if behavior is careless.

Friending

One of the hallmarks of online networks, both personal and educational, is the ability to "friend" others – creating a group of others that share interests and personal news. The district discourages staff members from accepting invitations to *friend* students within personal social networking sites. When students gain access into a staff member's network of friends and acquaintances and are able to view personal photos and communications, the student-teacher dynamic is altered. By friending current students, staff members provide more information than one should share in an educational setting. It is important to maintain a professional relationship with students to avoid relationships that could cause bias in the classroom. Many staff members only friend former students. Of course, until a student has graduated, he/she is really still a part of our educational setting. Social networking can be a great way to stay connected to students after they have graduated, and staff members should use their best judgment when friending students who have graduated.

Of course, the potential for "friending" parents of students also exists and can create some awkwardness for educators who want to maintain a clear line between their private and professional lives. Those who find themselves in the delicate position of either "unfriending" parents who are already a part of their social network, or not accepting requests for friendship can use the following language to help them out: "Our district has recently provided us with some guidelines to help us navigate the line between our personal and professional on-line activities. I use my Facebook account solely within the realm of my personal life and would like to maintain that personal/professional distinction. In the spirit of maintaining that distinction I need to not "friend" parents of students."

The following are recommended practices.

Recommendations for professional/educational social networking by staff:

- Let your administrator, fellow teachers and parents know about your educational network.
- When available, use district-supported networking tools.
- Do not say or do anything that you would not say or do as a teacher in the classroom. (Remember that all online communications are stored somewhere.)
- Have a clear purpose and outcomes for the use of the networking tool, and establish a code of conduct for all network participants.
- Adhere to district guidelines when posting student pictures and using student names.
- Pay close attention to the site's security settings and allow only approved participants access to the site.
- Feel free to contact an Instructional Technology Coach if you'd like help and feedback.

Recommendations for personal social networking by staff:

- Do not accept students as friends on personal social networking sites. Decline any student-initiated friend requests and do not initiate social networking friendships with students.
- Use your best judgment when friending former students AFTER they have graduated.
- In general, do not friend parents of students.
- In general, do not post to or update your page during work hours. Yes, you may be on your lunch break, but others who see your page may inaccurately infer that you are social networking when you should be teaching.
- Remember that people classified as "friends" have the ability to download and share your information with others. You don't have control over who they share your information with.
- **Post only what you want the world to see.** Imagine your students, their parents, or your administrator visiting your site. It is not like posting something to your web site or blog and then realizing that a story or photo should be taken down. On a social networking site, basically once you post something it may be available, even after it is removed from the site.
- Visit your profile's security and privacy settings. At a minimum, educators should have all privacy settings set to "**only friends**". "Friends of friends" and "Networks and Friends" open your content to a large group of unknown people. Your privacy and that of your family may be a risk.



Recommendations for all social networking:

- Do not use commentary deemed to be defamatory, obscene, proprietary, or libelous. Exercise caution with regards to exaggeration, colorful language, guesswork, obscenity, copyrighted materials, legal conclusions, and derogatory remarks or characterizations.
- **If a staff member learns of information on a social networking site that falls under the mandatory reporting guidelines, they must report it as required by law.**
- Stay informed and cautious in the use of all new networking technologies.

Resources

- Should Students and Teachers be Online Friends?, Cheri Lucas http://www.education.com/magazine/article/Students_Teachers_Social_Networking/
- A Teachers Guide to Using Facebook, Bernadette Rego <http://www.scribd.com/doc/16957158/Teachers-Guide-to-Using-Facebook-Read-Fullscreen>
- Social Networking Best Practices for Educators, <http://www.willard.k12.mo.us/co/tech/Document/SocialNetworkBestPractices.pdf>
- Connections for Learning: a White Paper. Saywire, 2009

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