

Policy

BOARD MEMBER USE OF INTERNET SOCIAL NETWORKS AND
OTHER FORMS OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Social Networking Websites

Board members will periodically review the importance of maintaining proper decorum in the on-line, digital world as well as in person. This review will give special emphasis to board members' use of Facebook and other social media. Examples of inappropriate behavior from other districts may be reviewed, as behavior to avoid.

When using social networks, board members are advised to:

- A. Make a clear statement that the posts represent the member's views or opinions and that the member is not speaking for the board;
- B. Not post anything that would violate any district policy for board members;
- C. Uphold the district's value of respect for any individual and avoid making defamatory statements about the board of education, the school district, employees, students, or their families;
- D. Not use or refer to their board of education title or position when soliciting for a business organization that he or she or any immediate family member has an interest in, as well as posting or referencing any confidential information regarding the board of education or the school district obtained through their board membership, unless authorized by law;
- E. Not respond to any postings regarding board of education or school district business or respond to any question or inquiry posted to the board member or posted on any social network regarding board of education or school district business and shall refer any such questions or inquiries to the superintendent to address.

Code of Ethics

Use of Facebook and other social media by school board members shall be consistent with the New Jersey Code of Ethics for School board Members, N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1.

- A. Board members will refrain from inappropriate conduct in making public statements on Facebook and social networking sites and will refrain from any disparagement of fellow board members or others on a personal, social, racial or religious basis. Board members shall not send messages that contain material that may be defined by a reasonable person as profane or obscene, messages that are racist, sexist or promote illicit, illegal or unethical activity.
- B. Board members will recognize that authority rests with the board of education and will make no personal promises on social media sites nor take any private action which may compromise the board.

Open Public Meetings Act

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Board members will not have online conversations that violate or to seek to circumvent the Open Public Meetings Act. Board members may not use online websites to communicate with one another about official board business.

Maintaining Confidentiality

Board members will exercise care not to divulge confidential information about students, school employees, or board business on social media sites. Board members (and employees) who have access to student information are prohibited from disclosing that information without the consent of the adult student or parent of a minor. In general, all records related to the individual student maintained by a school constitute confidential student records.

Board members will not expect that their online conversations will remain private. Discussion of investigations into school issues will not be conducted online. Extreme care shall be taken not to disclose confidential information related to students or employees while interacting online.

Open Public Records Act

If a personal website includes discussion of official board business, board members will be aware that the contents of that discussion will likely constitute a public record and the requirements under the public records law will apply. If the Board member posts comments on official business, that posting may create a public record and the board member will be responsible to meet the record retention requirements of the Open Public Records Act (OPRA).

School board members who use social networking sites shall take precautions to keep communications about official board business separate from private, personal communications.

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Key Words

Employee Conduct, Cell Phones, Text Messaging, E-Mail

Legal References: N.J.S.A. 18A:11-1 General mandatory powers and duties
N.J.S.A. 18A:12-21 et seq School Ethics Act
N.J.S.A. 18A:54-20 Powers of board (county vocational schools)
N.J.A.C. 6A:28-1.1 et seq. School Ethics Commission

Possible

Cross References: *1250 Visitors
*9000 Role of the board
*9010 Role of the member
*9020 Public statements
*9271 Code of ethics

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*Indicates policy is included in the Critical Policy Reference Manual.