

## Social Media Tips for Education Professionals

Whether you're just considering becoming involved with social media or you've already established an identity on one or multiple sites, you need to use these channels wisely. OEA has developed the following guidance on how best to use social media. The suggestions and best practices offered here are designed to help protect you both personally and professionally.

1. **DO:** First and foremost, know the privacy settings of every channel you use and keep abreast of any changes to them (see Additional Resources below). You have to decide for yourself what level of privacy is right for you, however OEA recommends sharing only with people you know personally. For instance, on Twitter we recommend blocking your tweets so only individuals you approve can see them. Taking just a few minutes to establish strict online settings will go a long way toward keeping what you post restricted. Additionally, try to be "anonymous" whenever possible. Don't include information that could put your identity at risk.
2. **DO:** That said, understand that there's no such thing as a truly "private" post. Once you publish something through social media, you lose a degree of control over your message. Be certain before you post something that you are prepared to share it with a potential audience of millions. Even if you set your privacy settings appropriately, to be shared only with people you know, your posts can still be captured via screenshot, printed, or copied and pasted into an email and shared beyond who you intended to see it. Online archival systems can also save information even if you delete a post.
3. **DON'T** count on the First Amendment to save you. Teacher free speech rights are fairly limited: their speech is protected only if they speak out as citizens on "matters of public concern" and their speech doesn't disrupt the school. So matters of personal concern, e.g. social activities, partying, personal gripes, etc., are not protected. To date, there have been only three court cases involving teachers who claimed that their First Amendment rights were violated by being punished because of their postings on social networking sites. The teachers lost every case. Tenured teachers have far greater job security than probationary teachers: they can't be fired except for "just cause," and they don't need to rely on the First Amendment for protection.
4. **DO:** Learn the Ohio Department of Education's Licensure Code of Professional Conduct for Ohio Educators, available online: <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Teaching/Educator-Conduct/Licensure-Code-of-Professional-Conduct-for-Ohio-Ed>
5. **DO:** Find out if your school or district has an Acceptable Use Policy for the Internet and/or social media. Make sure everything you do online is in keeping with these and other pertinent policies, as well as state and federal laws and regulations. You will be held responsible for what you post both by your school and legal entities. If your school doesn't have an official policy, take this opportunity to help develop one (see Additional Resources below for example policies).
6. **DO:** Keep work and play separate. Regardless of your school or district's policy, never use school property for personal communications. Do not use social media at school. Do not log onto your email on the school's computer. Do not bring your laptop to school and access the school's network. Better yet, just don't bring it to school. And don't access your personal email or send texts on your mobile device using the school's Wi-Fi.
7. **DON'T** post anything that you would not say or do in as a teacher in the classroom. Refrain from profanity, obscenity or anything that depicts you in an unfavorable light, including, but certainly not limited to, any images with you drinking, using drugs, in questionable settings, with disreputable companions, in inappropriate attire, or engaging in illegal activities.

8. **DON'T** vent online. Under no circumstances should you ever tell stories about work that include personally identifiable details, such as full names, job titles, addresses, phone numbers, pay, or other information protected by state and federal privacy laws. Even eliminating any specific information about your situation and/or presenting it as a hypothetical puts you at risk.
9. **DON'T** post anything related to a student, no matter how harmless you think it is. Never counsel a student online. Never post photos of students.
10. **DO:** Keep a clear distinction between your personal and professional identities online. Don't friend students, parents, and people you only know professionally, or otherwise connect with them through your personal account. If you want to use social media professionally to allow students, parents, and colleagues to follow your professional postings, create a separate account for this and maintain appropriate boundaries and language at all times, or else use a social network designed specifically for connecting professionally, e.g My Big Campus, Edmodo or The Educator's PLN.
11. **DON'T** accept an online relationship with anyone who you do not know offline. This is true for everyone, not just educators. Don't assume Facebook friends of your friends are safe. One Facebook spam victim lamented, "I just befriended her 'cause the other guys we know did." Once friended, spammers can direct users to fraudulent sites that download antivirus software to your hard drive that enable a hacker to remotely control a computer. They also gain access to personal information on your profile and in your posts that may seem innocuous, but give hackers hints as to your passwords and usernames, as well as the answers to common security questions, which they can then use to hack your personal accounts online, like your bank account.
12. **DON'T** join groups that may be considered unprofessional or inappropriate, and leave any such group that you are already a member of.
13. **DO:** Monitor your own internet presence so you're aware of content posted by others about you or content posted by an imposter posing as you. Create a Google alert to notify you when anything about you has been posted. Monitor comments that are posted to your page and your friends' photographs. Delete inappropriate language or content. If someone "tags" you in an inappropriate photograph, remove the tag and ask the friend to take the photo down.
14. **DO:** Lastly, use your best judgment. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, think about why that is and you'll probably see that something needs to be changed or left unsaid entirely. If you're still unsure, feel free to discuss it with your Labor Relations Consultant. You are responsible for what you post or publish in any form online.

It does require some effort to use social media sites as an education professional (though most of these are steps everyone should be taking), but if we keep our participation secure and appropriate to our roles as professionals, we can enjoy all the benefits they have to offer.

## Additional Resources

Facebook Privacy Settings and Tools: <http://on.fb.me/Zlkhgx> and <https://www.facebook.com/about/basics/>

Twitter Safety and Security Settings: <http://bit.ly/13xKQgd>

YouTube Policies, Safety, and Reporting: <http://bit.ly/1aWVzsy>

Pinterest Basics: <http://bit.ly/ZLOQwl>

Flickr Privacy and Sharing: <http://bit.ly/15IsUC>

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

How to Create Social Media Guidelines for Your School: <http://bit.ly/Lx3bJV>