

Platte County R-3 School District
Electronic & Social Media
Guidelines, Expectations & Best Practices

Platte County R-3 School District recognizes the educational value in the use of various electronic (i.e., email, text messages, instant messaging, etc.) and social media (i.e., Facebook, twitter, etc.) communication tools to engage students, parents and the community. The District also recognizes that the line between public/private and personal/professional is blurred and ever-changing in the digital world. The District encourages open, honest, professional dialogue with our students and parents.

The district provides all staff with a District e-mail and all teachers with a District website. These should be the primary means of electronic communication, but can be supplemented with other forms of electronic communication as outlined below. While these electronic communication tools are important and convenient, remember that face-to-face communication or a simple phone call is the best option to work through concerns or difficult situations.

Employees should also note that all social media/communication sites (even personal sites) can fall under the Staff/Student Relations board policy GBH and GBCB Staff Conduct. can be included in your evaluation or used as grounds for disciplinary action.

An excerpt from GBH which specifically addresses social networking includes:

Staff members may not:

1. Knowingly allow students access to the staff member's personal social networking website or webpage that discusses or portrays sex, nudity, alcohol or drug use or other behaviors associated with the staff member's private life that would be inappropriate to discuss with a student at school.
2. Knowingly grant students access to any portion of the member's personal social networking website or webpage that is not accessible to the general public.
3. Post information about identifiable students on a personal website or webpage on a social networking site without the permission of a supervisor.

Staff members who engage in any of the above behaviors or in any other conduct that intrudes on a student's physical or emotional boundaries without a valid educational or health purpose will be disciplined, up to and including termination of employment.

First, does the communication pass the TAP test?

Electronic communication with students and parents should always be **T**ransparent, **A**ccessible, and **P**rofessional as defined below.

- **The communication is transparent.** ALL electronic communication between staff and students/parents should be transparent. As a public school district, we are expected to maintain openness, visibility and accountability in regards to all communication.
- **The communication is accessible.** ALL electronic communication between staff and students/parents should be considered a matter of public record, part of the District archives, and/or may be accessible by others.
- **The communication is professional.** ALL electronic communication from staff to students/parents should be written as a professional representing the Platte County R-3 School District. This includes word choice, tone, grammar, and subject matter that model the standards and integrity of a Platte County Schools professional. Always choose words that are courteous, conscientious, and generally businesslike in manner.

Guidelines for District Website pages

Currently, the District hosts a website for District personnel to share information, accomplishments, announcements, etc. with our students and community. Each building/program has an assigned webmaster to update and keep that site current. All certified staff members are required to have a teacher website through the District's main website. The minimum information required on this site includes, staff member name, educational biography, class schedule to include the best time and method to reach staff member. The District encourages staff to expand the information shared and utilize the webpage to their fullest advantage. Most important, always keep the page current. If staff members choose to have additional links or websites, those sites will need to be approved by their supervisor and be secondary to the District's website.

- If using student photos, make sure to NEVER use students that we have not received prior permission from parents/guardians.
- If using student photos, you may use first name ONLY to identify students.
- If posting links to outside educational websites, please include the following disclaimer:
 - "This page contains links to outside sources. The Platte County R-3 School District is not responsible for any content housed/published on those sites/servers."

Using photos in electronic/social networking sites

Caution is shared for all social media/electronic mediums when posting photos to your pages. Please make sure we have a signed directory release from the student's parent before posting. Each building should keep a log of those students/staff that do NOT wish for their photos to be shared. It is also recommended that students' names NOT be associated with photos. Use first names only or cutlines that highlight the event/activity and omit names.

Text Messaging

Nearly every student has a cell phone today and the use of text messaging is rising sharply. This form of communication is typical between individuals and can be highly personal. Since texting is such a quick and convenient way of communication, a simple message may lead to an extended texting conversation that can get "off topic." **That said, staff members should be aware that text messaging between a staff member and an individual student can easily be misinterpreted by a parent.**

If a teacher/coach/sponsor plans to use texting for immediate and urgent contact with students/team members, they must be transparent about such use. Staff members should not text message individual students but should create mass texts or distribution groups that will include others in all communication. Staff is encouraged to always include another adult in these groups as well. At the beginning of the school year or season staff/coaches/sponsors should inform parents that he/she may be using text messages to communicate. Invite parents/guardians the opportunity to be included in the distribution group.

Facebook (District level)

Platte County R-3 School District has a district-wide business Facebook account maintained by the School-Community Relations Coordinator. This system-wide presence highlights the activities and accomplishments of all schools and departments. It is actively monitored throughout the day and updated daily. The site has been enabled for greater security measures.

If a building/program/unit wishes to have something posted to the District Facebook, please contact Tina Zubeck with the information.

Facebook (Building Level)

If a building/program/unit wishes to create a Facebook page, the building principal/supervisor is responsible for monitoring information and keeping it current. It is a reflection of the District and should be maintained in a professional manner. Building/program/unit sites should NOT allow posts to wall or comments. Make sure the settings provide for this protection.

Facebook (Fan Pages or Groups)

Many classrooms, projects, teams, etc. may want to utilize the powerful communication tool that Facebook offers. A Facebook fan page, not a Facebook group, can be appropriate as a supplemental method of communicating electronically with student groups and parents if it is set up correctly. A teacher or sponsor may only create a Facebook Fan Page if their district-provided website has been developed and is current.

Unlike Facebook groups, Fan pages are visible to unregistered students and parents and thus indexed and easier to find. Your presence on Facebook should be a page, not a profile. Facebook groups are appropriate for individual classes but not for entire schools. Only set up a Facebook page or group if you have time to visit it once a day to monitor comments and other feedback. Follow the guidelines below in creating a Fan Page. Follow the same District guidelines for the posting of student pictures on the District website pages.

- Make sure that your settings do NOT allow fans to be able to post comments, photos, videos or links to your wall or posts and that only you have control over the content.
- Use your Platte County Schools e-mail address to register as contact for the page so that any feedback or comments on the page are sent to the District, not to your personal e-mail account.
- Notify your building principal, Athletic Director, and School Community Relations Coordinator of your plans. One of these individuals must be an administrator on all Facebook Fan Pages.
- Notify parents and students of your intent to use a Facebook fan Page to communicate information to the group as a supplement to your other methods and that these pages contain commercial advertising that is not endorsed by the District.
- Add the Platte County R-3 School District Facebook page to your page's "likes" by clicking on "Add to My Page's Favorites." Be very careful about any other pages you select for your page to "like," because these can be interpreted as endorsements.
- It is recommended to try to post at least once a week. Try not to post more than twice a day.
- Make sure to include the District's Posting Guidelines on your Fan Page.
 - We welcome your comments as a means of sharing your own experiences, suggesting improvements or chiming in on the conversation. To keep our page focused, we have set some comment guidelines.
 1. This page is moderated and all comments are reviewed by the Platte County R-3 School Community Relations Coordinator
 2. To ensure exchanges that are informative, respectful of diverse viewpoints and lawful, we will not allow comments that are or include:
 - Off Topic. We will delete comments not related to the subject of the page entries.
 - Spam. Comments focused on selling a product or service will not be posted.
 - Personal Attacks. If you disagree with a post, we'd like to hear from you. We do ask that you refrain from personal attacks or being disrespectful of others.
 - Illegal. Laws that govern use of copyrights, trade secrets, etc., will be followed.
 - Language. Comments including but not limited to: profane or provocative language, hateful, racially or ethnically offensive or derogatory content, threats, obscene or sexually explicit language will be deleted.
 - Links to outside websites. We will not allow fans to include links to websites for any purpose.

Twitter

Twitter is a social media tool that allows for timely updates and announcements to be sent to "Followers". The District hosts a site at <http://twitter.com/PlatteCountyR3>. Subscribers receive periodic posts of 140 characters or less via email and/or as messages to cell phones. Announcements are brief. If building/program/units want an announcement or activity shared through Twitter, please contact Tina Zubeck.

If building/program/unit wish to create Twitter accounts, please notify Tina Zubeck for further instruction.

Blogs

Blogs are useful for posting information or essays and allowing comments. It allows discussion to be posted and then solicits feedback in an open forum. The District's website allows for two-way communication through blogs. Some guidelines for use in blogs are:

- Blog pages should be password protected.
- On blog pages, students and parents must register their name prior to posting.
- If using blog pages for student comment, notify parents of the purpose and the use of the page, along with safeguards in place to protect student confidentiality and guidelines for student use. Allow them the option of "opting out" and provide alternative options for their student.
- If using a blog page for student comment, notify students of the following guidelines:
 - This is a very public medium
 - How you represent yourself online is an extension of yourself
 - Report inappropriate content to your teacher
 - Students are subject to discipline for inappropriate online behavior
 - Online activities are an extension of the classroom
 - Do not post identifying information (such as last name or other personal information)

The District has drafted guidelines, expectations and best practices (attached) to serve as a guide in the electronic/social media arena. The examples listed are certainly not a complete list of these types of communication options, but just an example of some that are most currently used.. Employees are encouraged to offer suggestions or comments for improvement to the rapidly evolving world of social media. Employees are required to notify the District of all websites, social media platforms, and/or communication tools they utilize to communicate with parents, students or the classroom community.

Please remember first and foremost to let Board Policies GBH and GBCB guide your decisions.

Best Practices for Use of Social Networking Sites

The following are suggestions to assist you in creating, maintaining or participating in the various forms of communication and social networking sites available. This is not a comprehensive list and will continue to be updated. Your social networking pages are a reflection of you as a professional and as a member of the Platte County R-3 team. As such, inappropriate material can be included in your evaluation or be used in disciplinary action.

- Be accountable for the content on your profile and assume that everyone has access to your profile. You are personally responsible for what is on your site. Remember-online postings remain public for a long time. **YOUR STUDENTS WILL GOOGLE YOU!**
- Remind all other members of your network of your position as an educator whose profile may be accessed by current or former students, and to monitor their posts to your network accordingly. Conversely, be judicious in your postings to all friends, sites and act immediately to remove any material that may be inappropriate from your site whether you posted or someone else did.
- Staff should NEVER allow students to be their “friend” on social networking sites. If a friend request is received from a student, notify the administration and parents.
- Suggested sentence for staff to respond to “friend” requests on their personal Facebook page; *If you are a student or parent requesting to be my “friend” on Facebook, please do not be surprised or offended if I ignore your request. Recent legislation and as an employee of the Platte County R-3 School District, does not allow me to “friend” students on my personal Facebook page. I would encourage you to friend our school district’s Facebook page.*
- Avoid defamatory comments, obscene material, or proprietary information.
- Do not post or state anything that you would not state at the front of the classroom.
- Do not discuss students or other employees.
- Do not post images of students.
- Consider whether postings will adversely impact your ability to be a role model for students.
- Set privacy settings to carefully control individuals who will have access. Limit the types of information that your friends can view. Consider creating friend lists and set different permissions for different lists.
- Check your wall regularly.
- Consider creating a profile strictly for professional use.
- Use strong passwords that are different than others used.
- Do not post confidential student information (everything is confidential!).
- Recognize that many former students have online connections with current students, and that information shared between school adults and former students is like to be seen by current students as well.
- Report inappropriate colleague and/or student online behavior immediately to your administrator.
- When communication/blogging with students, get parent permission and/or signed student agreements.

Basic good rules of thumb:

- If you wouldn’t say or write it in front of your classroom, it is not appropriate to share in the electronic/social networking arena.
- If you would not want your grandmother to read this on the front page of the local paper, do not post or share through any electronic or social networking programs