

OPENING A NEW ACCOUNT

Before you create a social media account for school use, you'll need to do some planning. If you've already been using social media in schools, great! Bring your account up to policy, such as by ensuring you have approval, registering it, linking it with your district email, etc. The policies and procedures related to social media and electronic communications are 4026, 4026P, 2022 and 2022P.



Get approval from your principal and **register your account**. You can register at <http://goo.gl/forms/SQkES5HbPj>. If the network allows, **add your principal** as an admin on your page/group/account. Prepare to share information about:

- why you plan to use a social media platform and what your goals are
- what the likely risks are and how you will reduce them
- what you'll post and who your primary audience is
- how you'll make time to post and engage your network
- if you've explored other tools that may help you achieve the same goals
- how you'll **notify parents if you're communicating with students**, and how you'll help them understand how you will use social media

Once you create an account, **clearly identify yourself**. Use your district email to set up the account (or switch the email address associated with the account, if possible), and/or provide a district email address as a contact on the account. Write that you are a district employee on your social media profile.

Anything you post or receive online regarding the business of the district may be considered a public record. That can mean comments, replies or direct messages. Metadata (such as time and date of creation or location information) is also a part of the public record.. **You are responsible** for ensuring you can retrieve that information if we get a public records request. If you use popular networks, such as Twitter, Facebook or Instagram, help is here. After you register your account, expect to see an email from ArchiveSocial. It just takes a couple clicks from there to set up your archive.





Keep personal accounts personal. Keep separate accounts for professional use. If you're using your personal account for district business, it's no longer personal. It's subject to all the laws and policies governing a professional account.

- Do not communicate with students **using your personal accounts**. But always **maintain professional boundaries**. And get **written permission** from a student's parent or guardian before you post pictures of students on personal accounts. If you use student photos for school use, make sure that each student does not have restricted directory information.
- Make it clear that your opinions don't represent the district's views. Just know that readers may still associate your personal account with the district.
- Use appropriate privacy settings and examine what you post online. Recognize that even private social media communications can become public. A parent may be a friend of a friend who can see your account.

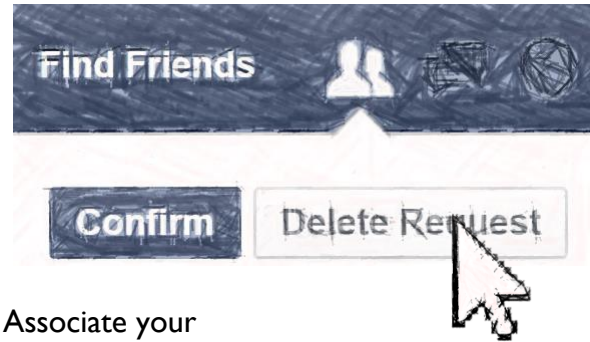
Visit washingtonea.org/social for more tips on protecting your personal account.

Although *you* may understand what's proper, your students may not. Be sensitive to the appearance of impropriety.



Professional boundaries are especially important on social networks. The often informal nature of the conversation can blur the boundaries. This is one reason we require staff to **maintain**

separate personal and professional accounts. Associate your professional account with a district email address. Keep the content professional in tone.



You should not “friend” students on your personal account. Avoid private messages on professional accounts. Avoid both improper communications, as well as the appearance of improper communications.

Set Clear Expectations

You can take more steps to help clarify the professional nature of your relationship. Don't “friend” or “follow” students in a way that allows you to see their private profile information. Tell students at the start of a term that you will not follow/friend any students. Letting them know early can help prevent feelings of rejection. Tell them the account is for school business only. If you see them post anything inappropriate, you may be obligated to report it.

Many networks allow you to communicate without seeing students' private profile information. For example, members of Facebook pages and groups can't see private profile information. (Unless, of course, they are “friends” outside the group.) On Twitter, if you don't follow a student, you can't see their tweets or receive private, direct messages.



POSTING ON YOUR PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNT

Help to show students and the community what being a good digital citizen looks like. It's OK to be conversational. You should be human and authentic in your online interactions. Use the same professional and ethical standards you use when communicating face-to-face at school.

Write like you would for a publication. That means use proper spelling and grammar. Write in a way that's easy to understand. Make sure that what you say is true and verified. Respect copyright laws and give people credit when needed. Readers have high expectations of education employees.



Think before you post and respect your online community. Your posts should add value to the conversation. Share your knowledge. Be authentic, respectful and relevant.

Post when you're calm. Impassioned posting can lead to skipped words, misunderstandings, and worse: regret. Stop. Breathe. Re-read. If anything about a post makes you hesitate, don't send it. Remember, you're setting an example for students.



DOs

People LOVE photos, and are more likely to read, share, and like posts with photos. Just ensure that you respect people's privacy.

Steer clear of politics and business. Your posts may not promote a business. You also cannot express support or opposition for any political candidates or ballot propositions (even district levies).

Be consistent. If you start posting daily, keep posting daily. It helps to create an editorial calendar. Keep a list of post ideas and important events or dates that you'll need to talk about, and schedule those posts.

Own your errors. Transparency is important. Own up to your mistakes, correct them quickly, acknowledge the error, apologize if you need to and move on.

Protect confidentiality. Federal law (FERPA) protects information such as, but not limited to, student grades or discipline records.

DON'TS

Don't break any laws.

Don't bully or harass others, damage someone's reputation or make discriminatory remarks.

Don't post things that could cause others harm, such drug recipes, etc.

Don't reveal identifying information (such as photos or last names) about staff or students without their (or their parent's) consent.

Don't discuss students in public forums.



MODERATING THE CONVERSATION

We value two-way communications, and social media tools can help us invite conversations. Most comments on school social media sites will be positive and easy to reply to. But negative ones happen.

You can't just delete away the things you don't like (more on this [later](#)). It's best to err on the side of free speech. You wouldn't ignore and walk away from a concerned parent at your school door. Be as polite and professional online as you are in person.



How to respond well is not always clear. Often, you will have to make judgements based on the situation. These tips may help you craft a reply:

- Respond. Ignoring the comment implies to all your readers that you don't care. Respond quickly, but don't post in anger.
- Listen to what the commenter says and take note of their key points. Empathize with them and acknowledge their concerns. People want to feel heard.
- Be brief in your reply. You don't want a lengthy battle in public, but don't be dismissive either. Invite them to talk privately about their concerns with the appropriate person.
- On a page dedicated to a school or department, personalize your post by signing it.
- Turn negatives into positives by showing people how we overcome challenges. Recognize when someone is right and apologize if you need to. Ask others if this is a widespread problem and resolve to fix it. Tell commenters about ways they help support positive change.
- Some people can't be pleased. Agree to disagree. Thank them for sharing. Move on.



Remember that everyone else is reading your reply. A response to a negative comment can show that we care about their concerns. If we show that we listen and respond, we build trust beyond a single commenter.

On rare occasion, it's OK to delete a *clearly inappropriate* comment. Generally, the comment must be clearly inappropriate to all who see it, such as something obscene or commercial spam. **You cannot remove a comment just because it's critical, you disagree or just don't like it.** It must clearly **meet one of the criteria in our policy** (which are outlined in the disclaimer below). However, even before deleting a clearly inappropriate comment, you should contact Community Relations. We may need to archive it for public records retention.

Setting expectations about commenting can help prevent commenting tension. For any network or site that allows you to moderate public comments, **add the following disclaimer** (or a link to it) on your site:

The District reserves the right to remove inappropriate comments posted on social media it has created or owns and remove comments that are not relevant to the topic of the specific forum. Inappropriate comments include content that:

- has obscene language or sexual content
- threatens or defames any person or organization
- violates the legal ownership interest of another party
- supports or opposes political candidates or ballot propositions
- promotes illegal activity
- promotes commercial services or products
- is not topically related to the particular posting
- contains contents that promote, foster, or perpetuate discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, age, religion, gender, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, national origin, physical or mental disability, or sexual orientation

The District will not, however, remove otherwise permissible comments based on the user's viewpoint on a topic or issue raised by the District. Any content posted to this site may be subject to public disclosure under the Washington State Public Records Act, ch. 42.56 RCW.

Just posting a disclaimer isn't enough. You'll need to remind people of the commenting guidelines on a regular basis. Do it at least once a year. If you've recently needed to delete clearly inappropriate comments, it may be a good time for a reminder.

