

## **EMPLOYEE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

### **Administrative Procedure**

#### **A. PURPOSE**

Garrett County Public Schools (GCPS) recognizes that schools and employees may be interested in developing a social media presence to communicate with students and parent(s)/guardian(s) beyond the normal school day; to improve a school's ability to reach out to students, parent(s)/guardians and the local community; and/or to provide reasonable or necessary updates on school programs, course offerings, and extra-curricular activities. Employees are required to comply with the following procedures when creating or developing a social media presence for professional use purposes.

#### **B. BACKGROUND**

The purpose of authorized social media used by GCPS employees is for conducting school system business and the fostering of the legitimate exchange of information among and between staff, parent(s)/guardian(s), and the community at large regarding instruction, programs, services, and activities. GCPS reserves the right to remove inappropriate content posted on any GCPS-regulated social media site at the school system's discretion at any time. GCPS may further make insertions disclaiming opinions or authorship of any statement posted on any GCPS regulated social media site.

It is not the intent of GCPS to monitor any social media site, work-related or non-work-related. However, should an occasion arise in which GCPS receives an allegation of inappropriate employee conduct by way of a social media site, and should this allegation cause concern for the safety and well-being of students, staff, and other stakeholders, GCPS reserves the right to conduct an administrative review of the complaint and/or refer the matter to the appropriate law enforcement or governmental agency. Such action on the part of GCPS should not be considered the norm.

#### **C. DEFINITIONS**

##### **1. Social Media Site**

*Any online or Internet-based platform that allows interactive communication between persons or entities on social networks, blogs, websites, application software, Internet forums, and wikis.*

##### **2. Professional Social Media Presence**

*Access and use of social media sites for a bona fide work-related purpose, whether school-based or non-school-based.*

### 3. Personal Social Media Presence

*Access to and use of social media sites by employees for non-work-related purposes, including establishing the employee's own personal presence on social media sites.*

In these instances, the employee's presence is not as a representative of GCPS. Further, the employee is not authorized to communicate in his or her employee capacity with GCPS students, vendors or contractors with GCPS, parent(s)/guardian(s), volunteers or other stakeholders on social media sites in the employee's personal capacity.

### 3. Improper or Inappropriate Communication

*Any communication between employee and student, regardless of who initiates the communication, that may be viewed as derogatory, sexual or lewd in content, threatening or harassing, discriminatory, fraternizing or suggestive in nature.*

Photos or symbols exchanged between employees and students conveying the same message are also improper or inappropriate, even if no words are used.

### 4. Misuse of Social Media

*Whether on or off school grounds, the use of social media in a manner that demeans, condemns or berates others, including students and staff; incites violence of any kind, embarrasses, defames, harasses or bullies others, including students and staff; or in any manner violates any Board Policy, Administrative Procedure, or local, state or federal laws.*

### 5. Students

*Current GCPS students.*

### 6. Staff or Staff Member

*Any full, part-time, temporary, or substitute employee; coach, emergency coach, or volunteer coach; or any non-sport extra-curricular advisor of GCPS.*

## **D. PROCEDURES**

### 1. Professional Use of Social Media

- a. Professional Social Media sites must adhere to all federal, state and local laws, policies, and procedures for employees of GCPS. Employees must comply with Board of Education of Garrett County (Board) Policy 190, entitled "Equal Opportunity," at all times when using social media.
- b. Employees interested in developing a GCPS-related professional social media presence—whether accessed from an GCPS computer, tablet, mobile device, or not—must receive permission from their administrators or supervisors in developing the site and are required to provide their supervisor with administrative rights to access the professional social media site, which may be regularly monitored by supervisors and administrators to ensure compliance with

the Administrative Procedure 347.35, entitled “Acceptable Use of Computers and Telecommunications,” and all other applicable laws, policies, and procedures.

- c. Professional Social Media sites developed by school-based employees for schools shall offer parent(s)/guardian(s) and students general access to the site and the school shall provide annual notifications to parent(s)/guardian(s) and students about the site’s existence along with the kinds of materials that may be accessed via the site.
- d. Employees are prohibited from using Professional Social Media sites in any manner to demean, condemn or berate others, including other employees and students; incite violence of any kind; embarrass; defame; sexually harass; harass; or bully others, including other employees and students (“harassment,” “sexual harassment,” “bullying,” and “intimidation” are defined by Board Policy 453, entitled, “Prevention of Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation,” and Administrative Procedure 453.1, also entitled “Prevention of Bullying, Harassment or Intimidation”) or in any manner which violates any other Board Policy, Administrative Procedure, or local, state or federal laws, whether inside or outside the professional work environment.
- e. Employees using Professional Social Media sites are required to maintain confidential employee information and the privacy of personal student records consistent with Board Policy 474.20, entitled “Protection of Pupil,” and Administrative Procedure 474.21, entitled “Confidentiality of Student Records.”
- f. Employees who use social media to communicate with students shall only communicate with students whose parent(s)/guardian(s) have given written authorization of and have access to their child’s use of the social media sites. Employees shall not use their professional social media presence to communicate improper or inappropriate messages with or about GCPS students.
- g. Employees, schools, and offices within GCPS who create a Professional Social Media site are required to monitor the site for compliance with Board Policy 760 entitled “Employee Use of Social Media,” and this procedure.

## 2. Personal Use of Social Media

GCPS recognizes that employees may also have a personal presence on social media sites and encourages employees who have such a presence to continue to adhere to Board Policies and Administrative Procedures in their personal use of the sites. Employees are prohibited from conducting personal use of social media sites during work hours or on GCPS devices. The following guidelines shall apply:

- a. Employees shall not use their personal social media presence to communicate improper or inappropriate messages or content with or about GCPS students, staff, parents, or other stakeholders.

- b. Employees shall not disclose student or employee records or other personal information regarding students or employees over a social media website, whether using their personal social media presence or their professional social media presence.
- c. Employees shall not post photos of any GCPS student to any personal social media site for any reason. Exceptions will be permitted where the student is a relative by blood, adoption, or marriage of the employee; or the employee has received permission to post from the parents or guardians of the student; and provided the photos are not improper or inappropriate.
- d. Employees shall not use their personal social media presence as a representative of GCPS or the Board of Education of Garrett County.
- e. Employees shall not post photos of other GCPS employees without their consent.
- f. In all cases, an employee is not authorized to use his or her personal or professional social media to embarrass, harass, annoy, or intimidate GCPS students, staff, parents, or other stakeholders.
- g. Employees are expected to monitor their own sites.

## **E. REPORTING MISUSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

1. When a staff member becomes aware of an incident that involves the misuse of social media, the staff member shall immediately report the incident to a school administrator who, in turn, will notify the Human Resources Department, unless the incident involves the safety or security of a student or staff member, in which case law enforcement will be called.
2. Students and staff are encouraged to report the misuse of social media, including communications or invitations to communicate with staff members over social media to GCPS administrators/supervisors.
3. Administrators/supervisors shall report all incidents of misuse of social media to the Human Resources Department for appropriate action, unless the incident involves the safety, security, or well-being of a student, in which case law enforcement will be called.

## **F. VIOLATION**

Employees' professional and personal use of Social Media may be monitored and investigated for violation of this procedure. Threats discovered on social media sites should

be reported to the Human Resources Department, other supervisory personnel, as appropriate, and law enforcement. Employees found to be in violation of this procedure may face disciplinary action up to, and including, dismissal, depending on the severity of the offense.