Use of Social Media for LPS Staff

The use of social media as a communication tool for individuals and organizations shifts the reality of what is reasonably accepted use of technology.

This document does not answer every question, but frames the topic in a way that can be applied to many situations, specifically addressing questions from staff members.

What is Social Media?
What is the LPS Policy on this?
Cyberbullying
Should I be using Facebook or Twitter professionally?
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How do I protect my privacy?
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Do social networking sites offer any sort of professional development?

What is Social Media?

Social media refers to any website where you can create a profile of yourself, customize the information you and others see, and users can "connect" with each other in some way. Some of the more popular social networking sites are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, SnapChat, Instagram, Google+, Periscope and Pinterest.

What is the LPS Policy on this?

Above and beyond the civil and criminal laws that City, County, State and Federal agencies oversee, policies and regulations regarding the professional behavior of LPS employees have been in place as long as teachers and other staff have been employed by the public. Regulation of professional performance and ethical behavior is the purview of building administration, the Human Resources department, and the LPS Board of Education.

LPS School Board Policy 4780 specifically addresses ‘Professional Boundaries and Staff Relationships with Students,’ a topic that deals directly with staff use of text messaging, social media, email and other electronic communications between staff and students. You should take the time to read this document in its entirety. It addresses a number of key topics, concluding with this statement:

“Material that employees post on social networks that is publicly available to those in the school community must reflect the professional image applicable
to the employee’s position and not impair the employee’s capacity to maintain the respect of students and parents or impair the employee's ability to serve as a role model for children”

In other words, if you use these publically accessible online tools poorly, it can cost you your job.

A few other LPS Policies, Regulations or Guidebooks specifically deal with the use of technology and social media:
- LPS Instructional Policy 6441
- LPS Regulation 3972.1
- LPS Certificated Personnel Handbook

A thorough review of LPS rules and behavior expectations is helpful in clarifying overall performance and behavior expectations. These Policies help guide your behavior in any situation -- in your classroom, gymnasium, parking lot, off school grounds or online.

**Should I be using social media AT ALL?**

LPS does not tend to dabble in people's personal lives, unless or until they become publicly accessible. Once your personal activities interfere with your ability to conduct yourself professionally, it becomes LPS's business.

**Should I be using social media PROFESSIONALLY?**

Lincoln Public Schools recognizes the power of connecting teachers, students, families, the community and educational professionals through social media. LPS does not require nor restrict proper staff use of social media.

LPS Communications advocates for using social media as a possible part of a Communications strategy for a school or department. As such, LPS Communications provides setup, support and training for social media accounts.

Lincoln Public Schools shall have administrator access to any official school or district-wide department social media accounts. Staff may use their own social media accounts to advocate for their curriculum, demonstrate student abilities and provide other positive communication. However, these staff accounts are not official school accounts. Staff should understand the social media account is theirs, and not the school district’s or the schools’ account, and staff alone are responsible for using it appropriately and professionally.
Be aware that you should NEVER use your LPS username and password when registering for accounts on non-LPS websites. While convenient, this practice is highly insecure and compromises all of your professional work. If you have done so, it is incumbent upon you to change both your username and password for the non-LPS site, and ask Computing Services for help in resetting your LPS password.

**Whenever possible, use LPS tools.**

It's a great idea to use LPS provided tools for electronic communication with students instead of non-LPS tools.

Imagine a situation in which a student **ALLEGES** that you said or did something inappropriate. If you are using an LPS hosted or supported tool, (like your teacher laptop instead of a cell phone, or your Zimbra or Synergy account instead of a Facebook message) there is a chance LPS can support your claims that you did NOT say or do that thing.

If you are using a non-LPS tool the district may have no way to assist you in your defense. Your lawyer would likely have to contact the company that created the tool you used to request the logs of your use.

**What will a search reveal?**

It may not be YOUR first instinct, but for students and parents the first place they turn when they want to know more about something or someone is a web search. This might be via Google, or one of the various search engines dedicated to finding information about people. Even if you have never used a "social media" site, there may be some background information out there on you. You may view this as a good thing or a bad thing, depending upon what that search turns up.

Search the web for yourself. Did you show up in the results? Are you comfortable with what appeared? This is what is known as your "digital footprint" and you may have more control over it than you think. We'll discuss ways to protect certain information, and promote the information you want out there.

**Who is your audience?**

The most important thing to understand about the internet is that everything you do online leaves a digital footprint. Whether it is a Facebook profile update, a school web page, an Amazon review, or simply leaving a comment on a newspaper article, the text and images you put on the internet are there for posterity.
Remember, conduct that adversely impacts or otherwise interferes with school purposes can impact your employment. This is also true of how you use the internet. Under Policy 6441, school “Technology resources includes, without limitation, computers and related technology equipment, all forms of social media, E-mail or electronic communication and the Internet.” And, under Regulation 3972.1 acceptable use relates to the use of school networks, servers and all on-site or remote access through school accounts. (Remember, your teacher laptop and school Internet account is LPS owned and there are no privacy rights or expectations when using the same.)

Many people do not realize the level to which their personal and professional lives overlap online. Students, parents and community members will come across bits and pieces of your digital footprint. While you might say "I only meant for my college friends to see that Facebook picture.", your students and their parents don't care what your intent was. They became your audience the moment the page loaded. THEIR perception is YOUR reality.

In online social networks, the lines between public and private and personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as an LPS employee, you are creating perceptions about your expertise and about LPS by the general public - and perceptions about you by your colleagues and Administration. Make all of us proud. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with professional standards and ethics.

**How do I protect my privacy?**

It is acceptable to use LPS technology equipment, networks, servers or school accounts for social media accounts dedicated strictly to educational use. In the same light, it is not acceptable to post information to your own personal accounts. In some cases, it’s not possible to completely separate the two accounts. Facebook, for example, requires using a personal account to create and log in to a professional Page.

Consider that the default privacy settings for sites like Facebook allow anyone on the internet (including Google) to see all of your comments, status updates and pictures. Every social media site has some form of safeguards you can use to determine who can see what information about you. It is imperative to your professional career that you understand and actively utilize these privacy features. Don't be a victim of what Google finds out about you.

**Photos & Videos**

You should be aware that pictures and videos other people take, label with your name, and post to Facebook will show up on YOUR wall, as though they were taken and posted by you. Be aware of this when you change your privacy settings, as it can be prevented.
Be aware that re-posting photos, videos or other content could lead to an assumption of ownership. This is problematic because it may infringe upon someone’s trademark or copyright. Always be sure you know the content’s owner in order to avoid any legal troubles caused by ignorance or naiveté. For example, you should not post a video that uses a song by a professional recording artist, even if everyone else is doing it. LPS Communications has a music library with several options for you to consider and use properly.

Should I “Friend” or “Follow” my students?

The short answer is no. It is not a good idea. However, there are appropriate ways for teachers to interact with students in Facebook if that is a tool you desire to take advantage of for instructional purposes.

Few people would be concerned with social media if it were just another avenue for sharing information with students. It is not. By design, these sites encourage connections, offering tools and opportunities to build relationships. Teachers do this every day in face--to--face situations with students. Why is Facebook any different?

The first difference is that normal daily interactions happen in the mostly open public spaces we call schools. When a teacher forms a relationship with a student online (and yes, “friending” a student is a type of relationship,) it lacks that transparency. People may be concerned about where conversations could progress because of the potential disinhibition experienced by both young and old alike when they interact outside of the social cues provided by traditional face-to-face interactions, such as in classrooms. Classmates, the potential to be interrupted, facial expressions, professional clothing, proximity, even circadian rhythms offer us overt and covert clues as to how to behave in that environment. Without these inputs, many people (of any age) will say or do things that the same person would never consider doing at school.

Not all of the concern lies in relationships developing inappropriate emotion or intimacy. In fact, that may be the least of your concerns as the adult in the scenario. Connecting as a “friend” in a social media site offers increased levels of access to personal information that you lose control of the moment a student sees it. This might be your address, birthday, pictures, family names, status updates, religious preferences, or a host of other information that could be used as a weapon against you in the wrong hands. Teenagers are still learning how to control their emotions and make good decisions in their lives. Consider the trust you are placing in that young person’s hands.

Further, adults often do not fully realize that friending is a two way street when it comes to additional access to personal information. There is an expectation that as a professional educator, and more than that -- an adult, you would act if you were presented with information that is potentially dangerous or illegal. This is an easy concept to get your head around in your
classroom, but what will you do when that high school student you friended posts photos on Facebook that clearly show them holding an alcoholic beverage? Or when a third-party does, but they show up on YOUR page because you are friends? What about that slightly too revealing phone picture a 17-year-old’s friend posts as a joke? Are you knowledgeable of your state’s laws on possession of child pornography? A funny snapshot of egging someone’s house or stealing a street sign – is it “just teens being teens”, or have you now seen evidence of an activity that is legally and/or socially inappropriate? Did the activity happen during school hours, or after school – or does it matter when the activity took place? Do you tell the counselor, or their parents, or pretend you did not see it at all? Friending a student may not give you a peek at the life of a teen, it may instead pick you up and put you in the passenger seat of their life. Are you prepared to deal with that? It is a big deal, and some states have passed laws governing teacher/student communication online.

Make students your fans!

Hopefully that addresses some of the reasons you might not want to create two-way relationships by friending your students in sites like Facebook. However, there are still legitimate reasons that you might want to involve the tool in your practice as a teacher.

As a teacher you know that increased engagement is borne from meeting your students “where they are at”. If they are in Facebook, any content you can present to them in a “native” environment might help build bridges. You can still use Facebook to do this without ever friending a single student. LPS Communications and Computing Services have found safe and appropriate ways to separate personal and professional use on social media, and are an appropriate resource for staff.

Other Tips

Even if you never use Facebook with students, there is a good chance that you will eventually use a social media tool professionally. Here are some general tips from folks who have been doing it for a while:

● Cultivate a positive web presence. When your next prospective employer, or the parents of your students Google you, THIS is what they will see.

● Every post or status update includes a time and date stamp. These say a lot to the people who view them. (“Is she posting to Facebook during WORK??” “I can think of ten things they should be doing instead of Tweeting right now!”)

Negative, snarky, or whinney posts or updates send a clear message to your audience. If all you can think of is negative, consider not saying anything at all. Or, if you are looking for a group to
share your emotions with, go out of your way to set up security features that block Google from indexing your feelings for eternity.

**Always pause to think before posting.**

If it gives you pause, *pause*. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit 'send.' Think about the individuals that might read it and imagine their reactions. Take a minute to figure out what's bothering you, then fix it. If you're still unsure, you might want to discuss it with a building Administrator. Ultimately, what you publish is yours. -You own what you say, and will be responsible for it. So be sure before you post.

Likewise, social media accounts allow you to share or retweet other people's posts. Despite any statement you might include (retweets are not endorsements), you are essentially "owning" the information you are passing along, and it reflects upon you. Likewise, saying "my views are my own and not those of my employer" is essentially meaningless when studied from the 'professional conduct' parts of policy and handbook, not to mention from a legal standpoint.

**Do social networking sites offer any sort of professional development?**

Yes! Many believe that Twitter is one of the most important tools we've ever seen for developing a Personal Learning Network (PLN). A major component of Facebook is the ability to participate in interest based groups. Many of these groups are professionally focused. These tools offer you an opportunity to follow the thoughts of other professionals, and seek feedback on issues you face. By participating in this digital conversation, you can develop an interest based community that helps you grow as an educator.

Social networks are only as good as the people you follow. If you are not seeing the value, try following new people or joining different groups. Furthermore, go out of your way to give back to the discussion when possible. Whether you know it or not, people value your opinion. It would not be a community if everyone just sat and stared at each other.

**How to use social media effectively as a public school employee**

Show your audience what learning looks like in the schools. Many have never been in our schools, or haven't been inside a real classroom recently. If they see videos showing students working on a hands-on activity and demonstrating learning, it will create a positive image in their mind. If they see and hear students acting inappropriately or using swear language, it creates a negative view for them, and one that is hard to overcome. Review all videos and
photos before posting them. When in doubt, leave it out. Also, be sure that any student shown in a photo or video has proper parental permission paperwork filed in the school office.

**YOU are representing US.**

When you use the internet as an Educator, you are representing ALL of us - Lincoln Public Schools, your building, and all Teachers, as a profession.

You are creating perceptions about your expertise and about LPS for the general public. Be sure that all content associated with you is consistent with your work and with professional standards and ethics.

Be a digital role model. Use your position with LPS to model appropriate digital citizenship for your students and/or community.

- Be honest, polite, apolitical and considerate.
- Disagree respectfully.
- Use proper grammar and conventions when possible.
- Do not engage in digital bickering.
- Respect copyright and provide citation or password protection as needed.
- Be aware of confidentiality concerns at all times.

Don't allow your personal online activities to interfere with your job performance or leave a stain on the reputation of your colleagues.

When YOU look bad, WE all look bad. When you look GOOD... we all learn from you.