



**Communications and Community Relations**

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## 6.323 Staff Social Media Guidelines

Sarasota County Schools allows individual schools and district departments or leaders to use online social media to improve communication among the district, families, students, staff, stakeholders and other Sarasota County Schools community members. This document contains guidelines to ensure that participants in social media communications understand and follow procedures that will make the use of online social media a positive and productive experience for everyone involved.

### A. Definitions

- **“Social media”** includes the various online technology tools that enable people to communicate easily over the internet to share information and resources. Social media can include text, audio, video, images, podcasts and other multimedia communications. These media provide information from various published sources and allow for interaction through user-generated content.
- **“Official/Authorized Accounts”** include social media accounts owned and managed by a school or a district department that are authorized by the principal or cost center head, Executive Director and district Communications Department. Such as, a school Facebook page, Instagram or YouTube.
- **“Unofficial/Affiliate Accounts”** include school-based or affiliated-organizations social media accounts authorized by a principal or cost center head. Such as student clubs, teams, field trips, instructional courses, foundations, booster clubs, parent-teacher groups or other affiliated organizations.
- **“Technology”** includes computers, electronic tablets, e-readers, notebooks, the internet, telephones, cellular telephones, personal digital assistants, pagers, MP3 players such as iPods, USB drives, wireless access points (routers) or any wireless communication device.
- **“District Technology”** is technology owned or provided by the district.
- **“Personal Technology”** is any device owned and operated by the user or provided by a third party other than the District.

### B. Representative Social Media Sites

These guidelines pertain primarily to social networking sites, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>)
- Instagram (<http://www.instagram.com>)
- Twitter (<http://www.twitter.com>)
- YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>)
- LinkedIn (<http://www.linkedin.com>)

### C. Official/Authorized Accounts

Official/Authorized accounts are permitted for schools and district departments. Official/Authorized accounts must be approved by the principal and their executive director and authorized by the district Communications Department.

To request permission for an Official School or Department account, applicants must submit a Social Media Account Authorization Request Form 021-13-COM available on SharePoint under Forms/Communications.

The principal's signature indicates that they agree to accept responsibility for maintaining appropriate content on approved social media pages. Each cost center is limited to a total of four Official/Authorized accounts.

Official/Authorized accounts are intended to be two-way communication tools. Comments and feedback are invited and encouraged. We want to inform, engage and inspire our online audience through creative, relevant and relatable content. In addition, these accounts are intended to provide excellent customer service, connect with audiences on a human level, gain candid insights, instill transparency and build our communities.

**Official/Authorized social media accounts, including all content, are public records. Every posting made to the account must be retained. A system for record retention and response to public records requests is required and must be set up on all Official/Authorized social media pages.** The Communications Department will assist with that process prior to authorizing accounts. In addition, all Official/Authorized accounts must include the required disclaimer.

Each Official/Authorized Facebook account must include the district Communications Department as an administrator. Principals or cost center heads are also encouraged to be an administrator. Account designees will be added as Editors of Facebook pages and provided direct login information for other accounts. Principals or cost center heads are also encouraged to have login information. Monitoring and managing the account's content remains the responsibility of the social media designees and their principal or cost center head.

The Communications Department will manage District-level social media accounts, including District blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. The District reserves the right to disable any Official/Authorized account at any time.

No school or district office is authorized for use of TikTok, any successor platforms, or any other platform on the prohibited list as stated by the Florida Department of Management Services on any district or school owned device. No school or district department is allowed to use TikTok, or any successor platforms, to communicate or promote any school district, school, school-sponsored club, extracurricular organization, or athletic team.

The District retains the right to utilize TikTok, any successor platform, or any other platform on the prohibited list as stated by the Florida Department of Management Services if the user is a law enforcement officer and the use of the application is necessary to protect the public safety or conduct an investigation within the scope of his or her employment.

The District must request a waiver from the Florida Department of Management Services to allow designated employees to access and monitor TikTok, any successor platform, or any other platform on the prohibited list as stated by the Florida Department of Management Services on a government-issued device.

#### **D. Unofficial/Affiliate Accounts**

Unofficial/Affiliate social media accounts shall maintain a clear separation from any Official/Authorized accounts. Examples of Unofficial/Affiliate accounts include, but are not limited to, student clubs, teams, field trips, instructional courses, foundations, booster clubs, parent-teacher groups and other affiliated organizations. Principals may be responsible for some content on Unofficial/Affiliate accounts, including, but not limited to, directing that District policies regarding fundraisers and fees be appropriately reflected on social media sites. If using an official Sarasota County Schools logo or official school logo, text or additional graphics must be added to the logo to distinguish a clear difference between Unofficial/Affiliate accounts and Official/Authorized accounts.

**Unofficial/Affiliate accounts are not governed by nor receive the guided benefits of Official/Authorized accounts.**

If you would like to create an Unofficial/Affiliate account: connect with your principal or cost center head to get their approval. They will inform you of any additional information or actions they require. When the account is created, include the disclaimer "This is not an official account of [School Name or Sarasota County Schools]."

Staff members maintaining unauthorized accounts related to district activities will be required to deactivate the account until their principal or cost center head approves the account. Failure to get approval may be subject to disciplinary action.

- 1. District Logo** - The Communications Department must approve the use of Sarasota County Schools' logo(s) on a social media site. For approved logo use, refer to the **Sarasota County Visual Branding Guide** established by the Communications Department at [www.sarasotacountyschools.net/Branding](http://www.sarasotacountyschools.net/Branding).

**2. Sponsorships, Business Partnerships and Fundraising** - Sponsor logos and school-benefiting fundraisers are permissible on social media pages with the approval of the principal or cost center head. The post must include a link to contact information for an individual who can provide information about sponsorship, partnership or fundraiser. Advertising for third-party events or activities unassociated with official District business is subject to District Policy 9.40 regarding Advertising in Schools.

**3. Disclaimer** – When possible, all Official/Authorized social media sites shall include the following text: "Sarasota County Schools' social media pages are limited public forums intended to be a place of relevant, positive and respectful interactions. The District reserves the right to lawfully remove posted content or comments on district sites due to the material being obscene, sexual in nature, off-topic, a solicitation of commerce, or threatening or compromising to the safety and security of the District or school. District accounts are not monitored 24/7. If this is an emergency, please call 966- SAFE. If you need to speak with a mental health specialist, text HERE4U to 741741 – always confidential – available 24/7/365. If we can answer any questions, please contact the Department of Communications and Community Relations at 941-927-9000 ext. 74009. We are here to make your experience a meaningful and positive one."

Unofficial/Affiliate accounts shall include the following text: "This is not an official account of [School Name or Sarasota County Schools]."

It is strongly suggested that personal accounts that identify as an employee of the Sarasota County School Board include the following text: "All opinions are my own."

#### **E. Social Media Designees**

Social Media Designees are responsible for monitoring and maintaining Official/Authorized social media sites as described below:

**1. Legal compliance** - Content must conform to all applicable state and federal laws, as well as all district and board policies and administrative procedures.

**2. Timeliness** - Content must be kept current and accurate and be refreshed a minimum of once per week.

**3. Responsiveness – When required**, comments and messages received on districted social media should be responded to within 48 hours or the next business day. Negative feedback should be responded to as quickly as possible and direct the commenter offline for follow-up.

**4. Style** - All district or school authored content should use Standard English grammar, spelling and syntax.

**5. Copyrighted material** - Content must conform to copyright or intellectual property laws. The content manager must secure the expressed consent of all involved parties for the right to distribute or publish recordings, photos, images, video, text, slideshow presentations, artwork or any other copyrighted materials.

**6. Student Photographs and Names-** Staff members may not send, share, or post pictures, text messages, emails or other content that identifies district students in electronic or any other form of personal technology without an approved Media Release or written permission from the student's parents or guardians. Before posting any photographs of students, content managers shall review the list of students whose parents have not consented to have their child's photograph taken or published. No student photographs may be published for personal, promotional use or any other non-school-related purpose. The Communications Department recommends that content managers designate a second person to review all photographs before publication. The District does not encourage student names to be shared on social media; however, if pertinent to the story, the student's first name can be shared if that student has an approved Media Release. Anytime a student is depicted on a social media site, it is the responsibility of the social media designee(s) to ensure the student has an approved media release on file.

**7. Confidential Information** - Social media sites are a form of publication. Therefore, employees are prohibited from sharing student information that might identify a student to a third party, including other students, faculty, staff or community members. The prohibition includes grades, classroom performance, behavior and all other confidential information. Staff members may not use images of students, emails or additional personally identifiable student information for personal gain or profit.

**8. Assessment information** - Employees are prohibited from discussing or revealing information about testing or other forms of assessment, including general topics, formats or types of questions asked. This prohibition applies regardless of whether the assessment in question has yet to be administered or has been previously administered.

#### **F. Acceptable Use Policy**

Although District staff members enjoy free speech rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to the US Constitution, those rights are subject to certain limitations. The use of District technology is a privilege, not a right.

The District Acceptable Use Policy governs electronic communication using District technology. Staff should not expect privacy in the content of personal files on the district's internet system or other District technology, including email.

District technology may only be used for educational purposes. Use for entertainment, personal blogging, instant messaging, online shopping or gaming is

prohibited. Except for authorized social media designees, employees are not permitted to access Facebook pages through District technology.

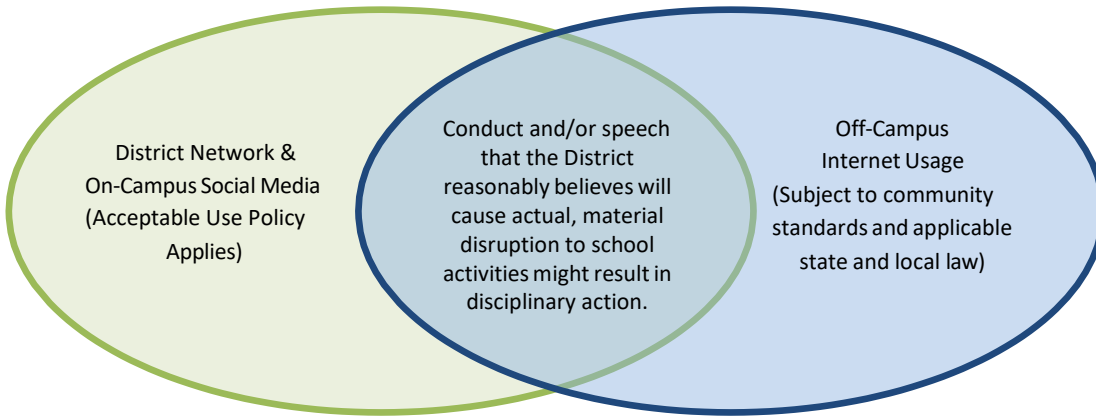
The use of TikTok, and any successor platforms, is prohibited on all district- or school-owned devices, or on any device (including privately owned) connected to district- or school-provided internet.

Use of personal technology or devices may violate the District Acceptable Use Policy if District officials reasonably believe the conduct or speech will cause actual, material disruption of school activities or interfere with a staff member's ability to perform their job duties.

Although off-campus communication is generally unrelated to school business, courts have held that certain inappropriate off-campus communications were connected enough to school activities, students or staff to warrant disciplinary action. The guidelines below and the diagram in Figure 1 are intended to provide staff members with direction for the appropriate and ethical use of social media, whether accessed through District or personal technology.

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## G. Individual responsibilities

1. **Limit On-Duty Use** - Staff members are encouraged to limit their personal technology use during duty hours. Use of personal technology for non-District business should be limited to off-duty time and designated breaks.
2. **Work/Personal Distinction** - Staff members are encouraged to maintain a clear distinction between their personal social media use and any District-related social media sites.
3. **Professional Effectiveness** - District employees must be mindful that any internet information is ultimately accessible to the world. To avoid jeopardizing their professional effectiveness, employees are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the privacy policies, settings and protections on any social media sites they subscribe to. The information posted online, despite privacy protections, is easily and often reported to administrators or exposed to District students. Employees may be disciplined for online conduct and/or speech that the District reasonably believes will cause actual, material disruption to school activities.
4. **Friending Students** – Employees should not have online interactions with students on social networking sites outside of those forums dedicated to academic use. District employees’ social networking profiles and personal blogs should not be linked to students’ online profiles. Additionally, District employees should use appropriate discretion when using social networks for personal communications and should limit this activity to off-duty hours and the use of their own electronic communication devices.
5. **Contacting Students Off-Hours** – If an employee needs to contact a district student during off-duty hours using either district-owned communication devices, network services, an internet access route or those of the employee, the employee should begin by contacting the student’s parent(s) or legal guardian through their district registered phone number. District employees should only contact District students for educational purposes and must never disclose confidential information possessed by the employee by virtue of their district employment.
6. **Responsible Online Identity Monitoring** – Employees should monitor their online identity by regularly performing search engine research to track information posted about them online. A simple check may prevent their online profiles from being fraudulently compromised. If unwanted information is posted about an employee, they should contact the site administrator to request its removal.
7. **Personal Social Networking and Media Accounts** – Educators must seriously consider the implications of joining an online social network.

Because online content can be spread in mere seconds to a mass audience, the District encourages employees to ask themselves before posting any information online whether they would be comfortable having the information printed in the newspaper alongside their photo.

**If you would not bring it into the classroom, do not post it online!**

## References



This document was developed by the Sarasota County Schools Communications Department in collaboration with the Sarasota County Schools Information Technology Department and the Office of the Superintendent.

**Policies:** Policy 9.40; Advertising in Schools  
Policy 6.322; District-Related Social Media Accounts

**Procedures:** Acceptable Use Policy  
Sarasota County Schools Logo Guidelines  
Sarasota County Schools Visual Branding Guide

**Form:** Social Media Account Authorization Request Form 021-13-COM-BUS

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