

SIMCOE COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

MEMORANDUM

2010-2011: 90

TO: Elementary Principals
Elementary Vice-Principals
Secondary Principals
Secondary Vice-Principals

FROM: John Dance
Superintendent of Education

SUBJECT: **GUIDELINES FOR STAFF PERSONAL USE OF INTERNET SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

Background

Internet social networking refers to an online community of internet users who share common interests and includes Blogs[®], Wikis[®], Moodles[®], collaboration forums, discussion boards and social networking sites, i.e. Facebook[®], Twitter[®], YouTube[®], etc. The emergence of these networks is fundamentally changing the way school employees engage with each other and the world at large.

The challenge for school boards involves balancing an employee's right to freedom of expression with the need to ensure a respectful and positive learning and teaching environment. The objective is to achieve responsible involvement and participation with respect to internet social networking.

Internet Fundamentals

In using these applications, staff must remember:

- the internet is a public place;
- what you say and do online can be traced; and
- what goes online stays online.

Freedom of Speech

Simcoe County District School Board respects the legal rights of employees to create or participate in a Blog[®], Wiki[®] or online social network. In general, what employees do on their own time is their concern. However, activities in and outside of work that affects job performance, the performance of others and/or the rights and privacy of others are the proper focus of school board policy.

Code of Conduct

The Ontario Provincial Code of Conduct and SCDSB Administrative Procedure Memorandum (APM) A7630, Code of Conduct, set out clear provincial standards of behaviour. These norms apply not only to students, but to all individuals involved in the publicly-funded school system, including teachers and other staff members, whether they are on school property, at school-related events or activities, or in other circumstances that could have an impact on the school climate.

The Code of Conduct requires that all members of the school community:

- respect differences in people, their ideas and opinions;
- treat one another with dignity and respect at all times, and especially when there is a disagreement;
- respect and treat others fairly, regardless of, for example, race, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age or disability; and
- respect the rights of others.

Further, it provides that all members of the school community must not engage in bullying behaviours or engage in hate propaganda and other forms of behaviour motivated by hate or bias. In this regard, we recommend the responsible involvement and participation of school board employees with respect to networking and social web-based applications.

Statutory Duties

The *Education Act* and the *Ontario College of Teachers Act* establish a statutory duty of confidentiality for teachers. The Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act sets out a duty to protect personal information entrusted to the organization.

Guidelines

The following guidelines have been established to help staff meet their statutory duties of confidentiality and protection of privacy as they engage in personal use of internet social networking.

1. School staff shall not use social networking sites to communicate with students. It is inappropriate to have students as “friends” on these sites and any invitations from students to join a social network site should be declined. All communication with current students should be through the usual communication vehicles available through the school (i.e. Board email, regular mail and course software).
2. In using social networking sites, school staff should be encouraged to make sure their privacy settings for both content and photos are set. Staff members should carefully screen who can post on their site.
3. All inappropriate references to the school or school personnel, students, parents or any other member of the school community, in computer-related mediums, such as social networking sites, blogging, web pages or e-mail, represents a contravention of Board policy.
4. Staff must follow the guidelines for acceptable use set out in APM A1160, Computing and Information Technology (under review) and any system directives regarding the safe and appropriate use of technology. The same principles and guidelines that apply for staff regarding the appropriate use of technology will apply to the activities of school staff and members online, including Blogs[®], websites, Wikis[®], user-generated video and audio and social networks.
5. School staff members who have a personal blog or website in which indicate that they work at the school, should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the principal or appropriate school administrator. Similarly, staff members who want to start blogging - and wish to say that they work at the school - should discuss any potential conflicts of interest with the principal or appropriate supervisor.

6. Staff shall ensure that blogs and websites do not reveal personal information about its staff, students, parents or other members of the school community, or confidential information about the school (staffing, staff assignments, etc). This may include student or staff information, photographs or videos of students or staff, curricular information, financial information, school plans, and school development information.
7. Confidential school information should not be placed on a blog without the express consent of the principal or appropriate administrator.
8. Personal blogs and websites shall not be used to attack, threaten, or abuse colleagues. Staff should respect the privacy and the feelings of others.
9. Staff shall ensure that their blogging activity does not interfere with their work commitment.
10. Staff must remember that what they post on their blog or online social networking site, speaks to their character and reputation. Material that staff members post will remain in cyberspace for years and can be viewed by anyone around the world.
11. Staff should show proper respect for the laws governing copyright and fair use of copyrighted material owned by others. It is generally good blogging practice to link to others work.
12. Online social networking, blogs and other forms of social discourse are primarily a form of communication among individuals. When the school board or school wishes to communicate publicly, whether to the school community or to the general public, it has well-established means to do so. School board employees should recognize that only those officially designated by the school board or school have the authority to speak on behalf of these organizations.

Additional guidance shall be provided as these technologies continue to emerge and evolve. Questions related to these guidelines may be referred to the school principal or Gina Coish, Freedom of Information/ Records Management Officer at the Education Centre at gcoish@scdsb.on.ca.

November 12, 2010