

Public Schools Branch

OPERATIONAL GUIDELINE

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL MESSAGING	
<i>Section</i> General Administration	<i>Guideline Number</i> 105.1
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<i>Replaces:</i> PSB Operational Guideline 105.1 – Social Media and Digital Messaging Guideline, April 4, 2023	

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Public Schools Branch (PSB) is committed to ensuring that our schools provide a safe and caring learning environment for students and staff. This applies to in-person situations, as well as the many digital platforms through which we communicate, including social media and digital messaging.
- 1.2 The guidelines promote a shared responsibility among staff, students and parents/guardians to use social media and digital messaging thoughtfully, respectfully and responsibly. They further aim to provide clarity regarding the expectations for PSB staff, students and parents/guardians when using social media and digital messaging.
- 1.3 It is expected that staff, students and parents/guardians are familiar with these guidelines. Should an identified expectation not be met, the guidelines will be reviewed with the staff person, student or parent/guardian, as appropriate.
- 1.4 Where there is serious misuse of social media or digital messaging impacting the school environment and that contravenes a PSB policy/procedure, code of conduct, collective agreement or legislation, the appropriate discipline under the applicable document will be taken.

2.0 DEFINITIONS

- 2.1 **Defamation:** A false statement or communication that tends to harm the reputation of a person. See definitions of libel and slander for further details.
- 2.2 **Digital messaging:** Communication transmitted electronically which is intended to be transmitted between physical devices (e.g. texting, instant messaging, electronic mail).
- 2.3 **Duty of Loyalty:** An employee’s duty to refrain from public criticism that undermines public trust and confidence in the PSB. Examples of posts that violate this duty include those that are:
 - a) Factually inaccurate
 - b) Defamatory (including libelous or slanderous)

- c) Damaging to the PSB, its policies or reputation
- 2.4 **Libel:** A published defamatory statement, such as in writing, a picture, a sign, online or via electronic broadcast.
- 2.5 **Posting or Postings:** The act of uploading, adding, contributing or linking content on an online platform, social media site, or on the Internet in general.
- 2.6 **Slander:** Defamation that is oral or transitory in form (e.g. speech or gesture).
- 2.7 **Social media:** An internet or mobile device application, location, or site that provides users with the opportunity and means to participate in, develop, or share information, content, views and/or opinions with others (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Snapchat, YouTube, TikTok, WhatsApp, blogs, websites, etc.).
- 2.8 **Work time:** A time period when you are required to work (i.e., when not on a break), includes volunteer shifts.

3.0 PSB SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

- 3.1 The PSB uses social media accounts as one of many tools to inform the school community about important information and events, as well as the many good things happening across our school system. The PSB designates and authorizes staff with the responsibility to use social media for work purposes. Designation is the responsibility of the Director or their designate. Any staff person seeking to create a PSB social media account should seek approval from the Director's Office. Please note that official social media channels will be limited.
- 3.2 School accounts are managed by the schools, with designation and authorization being the responsibility of the principal.
- 3.3 All social media accounts operated by the PSB shall comply with the requirements applicable to staff, parents and students, as set out in this policy.

4.0 COMMENTING ON PSB SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS

- 4.1 Appropriate and positive communication on PSB social media platforms is important.
- 4.2 The PSB uses social media to communicate pertinent information, share stories and highlight successes across the school system.
- 4.3 Items for information only may have the comment function turned off.
- 4.4 Social media channels are monitored and maintained by moderators. Moderators will remove any or all comments or links posted to PSB social media channels that:
 - a) are considered spam;
 - b) promote or advertise personal websites or commercial purposes deemed inappropriate;
 - c) contain threatening, offensive, racist, hateful or defamatory content;
 - d) contain inaccurate or unsubstantiated information, accusations or rumours;
 - e) contain copyrighted material;
 - f) provide non-published or private information about the Government of PEI or its employees such as personal emails, home phone numbers or addresses;

- g) are off topic comments not related to the particular discussion or issue being addressed; and/or
 - h) are identical comments by the same user (the first submission may remain shall it not be in contradiction to the above guidelines).
- 4.5 All comments on PSB social media channels are moderated by employees. Moderating will generally occur during regular business hours (8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Atlantic Time), Monday through Friday. Comments submitted after hours, on weekends or on statutory holidays will be acted upon as early as possible.

5.0 STAFF USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 5.1 Social media are communication tools that have the potential to support many positive and innovative teaching and learning outcomes. They can connect and engage communities, support collaboration and learning, and provide inspiration and insights. However, most social media tools are not designed for the education sector and don't take into account the potential risk factors for our communities. As such, staff should ensure they understand the expectations for their use of social media.
- 5.2 The guidelines apply to social media use both during work and non-work time, as well as for both personal and professional use. They supplement existing policies and procedures, including but not limited to Respectful Workplace, Safe and Caring Learning Environments, Concerns and Resolutions, and the Acceptable Use of Technology Agreement signed by all staff.

6.0 SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM ACCOUNTS

- 6.1 School and classroom social media accounts will be viewed as an extension of the school itself and should reflect PSB and school policies and values.

7.0 PERSONAL VS PROFESSIONAL

- 7.1 Any use of social media related to work or school must be of a professional nature and adhere to PSB and/or school policies and professional codes of conduct, including but not limited to:
- a) Digital Citizenship And Technology in Schools;
 - b) Respectful Workplaces;
 - c) Safe and Caring Learning Environments; and
 - d) Professional codes of conduct and/or standards of practice, if applicable.
- 7.2 Use of social media should not interfere with the performance of an employee's duties.
- 7.3 Personal opinions expressed by PSB employees on social media should not violate the duty of loyalty owed to the PSB as the employer. This includes both during work and non-work time.
- 7.4 Staff should recognize that retweets, shares, likes and favourites are often perceived as endorsements and should be done with care/awareness.
- 7.5 PSB email addresses are not permitted for the use of employee personal social media accounts.
- 7.6 Staff are encouraged to always consider how their social media activity could be perceived.

- 7.7 Staff should consider any safety implications for students when posting school-related photos or information. For example, sharing real-time posts of students on field trips could potentially alert the public to the location of students; sharing wide-shot photos of classrooms can share specific details about entrance/exits and/or building layouts.
- 7.8 Staff shall not post content relating to or describing work-related concerns or issues. These issues are to be addressed through appropriate school and/or PSB channels, and not publicly via personal use of social media.

8.0 PRIVACY

- 8.1 Staff should be aware that posts on social media can be shared in a more public space, including private messages between two users and even when strong privacy settings are used.
- 8.2 Parents/guardians are required to provide consent for external sharing of their child's works (student's name, grade, image, work, and performance) using the Student Media Consent form.
- 8.3 Staff should not share personal information about other PSB staff on social media.

9.0 COPYRIGHT AND FAIR USE

- 9.1 Staff should respect and model respect for copyright laws and fair use, including but not limited to:
 - a) Ensuring any content posted to social media does not violate copyright;
 - b) Not plagiarizing and giving credit where it is due;
 - c) Use a hyperlink citation to outside sources, when appropriate, and ensuring the linked site adheres to PSB values and policies; and
 - d) Seeking clarification on copyright and/or fair use when there is doubt.
- 9.2 Similar to print and music, online photos and graphics are protected by copyright laws. Staff should verify that they have the appropriate permissions to use an image.

10.0 STAFF ONLINE/DIGITAL INTERACTIONS WITH STUDENTS AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS

- 10.1 Staff are encouraged to model appropriate online behaviour.
- 10.2 Staff should not communicate one-on-one with students via social media platforms, including texting. Communications with students should include another adult (i.e. staff person, parent/guardian), or be accessible to multiple staff (i.e. employer provided email systems, Google Classroom).
- 10.3 Staff should not interact with students on social media outside educational platforms. They should not accept or issue "friend" requests or similar on personal social media platforms, and should consider the implications of doing so with parents/guardians.
- 10.4 Staff should ensure that the creation of any educational platforms follows PSB, Department of Education and Lifelong Learning and school policies and procedures.
- 10.5 *Please note:* The PSB recognizes that there may be pre-existing relationships between students and school staff, i.e. family, family friends, employment.

School staff should be conscious of the reason for communication and follow guidelines as appropriate.

11.0 PARENT/GUARDIAN USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 11.1 Parents/guardians are encouraged to model appropriate online behaviour and monitor student social media use at home. In accordance with the *Education Act*, parent/guardian responsibilities, as they relate to social media, include:
 - a) ensuring that their own conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment;
 - b) encouraging, fostering and advancing collaborative, positive and respectful relationships with teachers, principals, other school staff and professionals providing supports and services in the school; and
 - c) engaging in the student's school community.
- 11.2 Parents/guardians should be aware that posts on social media are rarely private and can be shared more widely, even when strong privacy settings are used.
- 11.3 Parents/guardians should not distribute personal information about other students or staff on social media.
- 11.4 Social media is not the appropriate channel for concerns or complaints about your child's education, school matters, student services matters, transportation matters or similar. When parents/guardians have concerns or complaints, they should follow the process outlined in the Concerns and Resolutions procedure.
- 11.5 Parents/guardians should also refer to the Safe and Caring Learning Environments Policy and Procedure for further guidance on how they can support a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.
- 11.6 Where the Employer determines that an employee has been a victim of cyber-bullying or online harassment directed at them by a non-employee, the Employer will take appropriate action, which may include loss of school privileges or legal action.

12.0 STUDENT USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

- 12.1 In accordance with the *Education Act*, student responsibilities, as they relate to social media, include:
 - a) being ready to learn and actively engaging in and diligently pursuing the student's education;
 - b) ensuring their conduct contributes to a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment;
 - c) respecting the rights of others in the school;
 - d) refraining from, reporting and not tolerating bullying or bullying behaviour directed toward others in the school, whether or not it occurs on the school premises, during the instructional day or by electronic means;
 - e) complying with the rules of the school and the policies of the PSB;
 - f) being accountable to their teachers and other school staff for their conduct; and
 - g) contributing positively to the student's school community.

- 12.2 Students should be aware that posts on social media are rarely private and can be shared more widely, even when strong privacy settings are used.
- 12.3 Students should consider the potential consequences of what they post and/or share online.
- 12.4 Students should practice online safety, such as not sharing personal information or passwords.
- 12.5 Students should not intentionally misrepresent themselves or use someone else's identity.
- 12.6 Social media is not the appropriate channel for concerns or complaints about your education, school matters, student services matters, transportation matters or similar. When students have concerns or complaints, they should address them with their parent/guardian, teacher, school counsellor, school administration or other trusted adult.
- 12.7 Students should also refer to the Safe and Caring Learning Environments policy and procedure for further guidance on their roles in supporting a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.
- 12.8 Where the PSB determines that an employee has been a victim of cyber-bullying or online harassment directed at them by a student, the PSB will take appropriate disciplinary action in accordance with its policies, which may include loss of school privileges or suspension.

13.0 CROSS REFERENCES

- 13.1 [Prince Edward Island Education Act](#)
- 13.2 [Public Schools Branch Policy Page](#)
- 13.3 Respectful Workplace ([Policy 505](#))
- 13.4 Safe and Caring Learning Environments ([Policy 605](#) and [Procedure 605.1](#))
- 13.5 Concerns and Resolutions ([Procedure 102.1](#))
- 13.6 [Acceptable Use Agreement for Government-Provided Computer Technology](#)
- 13.7 Digital Citizenship and Technology in Schools ([Policy 104](#))
- 13.8 [Cybersafe Care](#)

14.0 REFERENCES

- 14.1 <https://www.oct.ca/resources/advisories/use-of-electronic-communication-and-social-media>
- 14.2 <http://sd78.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Policy-5070-Social-Media.pdf>
- 14.3 <https://psc.gpei.ca/sites/psc.gpei.ca/files/5.07%20Social%20Media%20Dec%202020.pdf>
- 14.4 <https://www.peelschools.org/documents/Peel-District-School-Board-social-media-guidelines.pdf/Peel-District-School-Board-social-media-guidelines.pdf>
- 14.5 <https://peinu.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/HPEI-Social-Media-Policy.pdf>
- 14.6 <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/executive-council-office/comments-policy>