

SOCIAL MEDIA AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

Background

Northern Lights Public Schools strongly believes engaging in digital environments can promote learning, teaching and collaboration for students, staff and parents, both inside and outside of the classroom.

Due to the scale of communication via the Internet and the potential lack of control and dissemination of content, care and attention is required to safeguard privacy.

The following procedures apply to digital communication and activity that takes place during regular school hours as part of the professional duties of the division's staff, as well as activity that occurs outside of work hours for professional or personal reasons by representatives of Northern Lights Public Schools including elected trustees, staff, contractors, volunteers, or students whose comments may be interpreted as those of the division. Digital communication includes, but is not limited to: email, texting, digital messaging, social media, websites, blogs, wikis, and user-generated video and audio sharing sites.

Use of the Division and school social media accounts, as well as Division email accounts and websites, is to be consistent with Board Policy and division Administrative Procedures, including, but not limited to AP-140 Acceptable Computer Use, AP-170 Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy, AP-180 Use of Copyrighted Materials, AP-153 Advertising in Schools, and AP-547 Use of Division and School Logos.

The Superintendent expects staff to model ethical and appropriate conduct, recognizing that what is posted online speaks to our character and reputation. Material that is posted should be considered permanent and can be viewed by anyone around the world. The Superintendent expects staff who use social media to use discretion when posting and to recognize individuals may be held accountable for their comments.

Staff are also advised to be aware of professional codes of conduct and regulations that may apply to them relating to these areas.

Procedures

- 1) The Division's website, division-wide social media accounts, and division-wide messaging system shall be administered and monitored by the Division's Communications Officer or an individual designated by the Communications Officer or Superintendent.
- 2) Staff are encouraged to use the following digital communication tools that have been provided to them by the Division and/or schools for communicating with students, parents and the public, before creating alternate accounts or sites:

- a. Google email accounts and other communication tools included in Google Apps for Education;
 - b. Email, voice, text and direct messages through the Division's call-out system and app;
 - c. Division and school websites;
 - d. Division-approved social media accounts.
- 3) Staff are to avoid the following uses of digital communications tools, except in extraordinary circumstances and with the approval of their direct supervisor and/or designate:
 - a. Texts to students or parents using personal communication devices;
 - b. Direct messaging with students or parents through social media accounts (personal or professional)
 - i. Staff should respond to inquiries of a general nature, but are to discourage parents and students from using direct messaging to report absences or discuss educational matters
 - ii. Staff should redirect inquiries to a more appropriate method of communication such as a phone call, email or face-to-face communication depending on the nature of the inquiry.
- 4) All division-wide and school-based social media accounts and/or websites and site/account administrators shall be approved by the Communications Officer before going live.
 - a. All schools shall provide the Communications Officer with a list of social media pages and sites in use as well as the names of those designated as administrators of those sites.
 - b. All site or account administrators must complete the Division's online Focus on Privacy course before being added as an administrator;
 - c. All site or account administrators must be provided with a copy or link to the Division's Social Media Guidelines and Best Practices and/or Website Guidelines and Best Practices as applicable;
 - d. Division-approved school-based social media accounts and websites shall be administered and monitored by the principal and at least one designated staff member;
 - e. All schools will provide the Communications Officer with administrator status on school-based social media accounts and/or the usernames and passwords to access the accounts;
 - f. Trustees, permanent or temporary staff, contractors, volunteers or students with Division-approved accounts are personally responsible for the content published online.
- 5) School staff shall obtain the approval of their school administration prior to creating classroom or program-based social media accounts, websites/microsites, blogs, wikis or other forms of digital communication or sharing for use in their classrooms, with students or parents.
 - a. Staff may be required to complete the Division's online Focus on Privacy course before being granted permission to create an account;
 - b. Staff must grant the Principal or designate administrator access to any accounts and/or the usernames and passwords to access the accounts.

- c. All staff with approved accounts must identify themselves by name and their position within the Division.
 - d. If you create a classroom account where you share important curricular information with students, student may follow your account. You do not need to follow them back. Instead, you can encourage students to use tools, like hashtags, so that you can follow their online conversations. These can be linked to a specific area of study.
- 6) All approved social media accounts, whether division, school or classroom based, shall have their privacy settings set to the highest level. The Communications Officer can provide a recommended list of settings for administrators to implement.
- 7) All division approved social media accounts shall include the following disclaimers on their sites for transparency and accountability purposes:

Northern Lights Public Schools values open, two-way conversation to foster a collaborative and effective engagement process with our stakeholders. Our official social media accounts provide forums for respectful discussion related to education and to share and celebrate stories, events and other information.

All posts and comments are to be consistent with Division policies and administrative procedures including the following:

1. *Obscene, racial or disrespectful comments or posts will not be allowed.*
2. *Comments that are abusive, hateful or intended to defame anyone or any organization will not be permitted.*
3. *Users participate at their own risk, taking personal responsibility for comments, username and any information provided.*

Northern Lights Public Schools reserves the right to delete comments that are spam or advertising are clearly off-topic or disruptive; advocate illegal activity; promote particular services, products or political organizations; infringe on copyrights or trademarks; and violate any Northern Lights Public Schools board policies and/or administrative procedures.

The comments and posts expressed by followers on our social media accounts do not necessarily reflect the opinions and/or positions of the Northern Lights Public Schools board or its employees.

- 8) All site or account administrators are responsible for monitoring and moderating comments, posts and other content on a daily basis. Failure to do so may result in account privileges being suspended or revoked and/or having the account suspended or deleted.
- 9) All site or account administrators are responsible for complying with all applicable board policies, admin procedures and other laws and regulations, including the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPP) Act and Copyright Act. Failure to comply with these regulations may result in account privileges being suspended or revoked and/or having the account suspended or deleted in addition to any sanctions sought by outside bodies responsible for enforcing the applicable laws and regulations.

- 10) Where applicable, account passwords should be changed on a regular basis with the change communicated to all account administrators and the Division Office designate.
- 11) For social media accounts that do not permit administrators/users to have separate log ins, the use of a social media management program may be used.
- 12) All site or account administrators will endeavor to respond to public requests for information within a timeline consistent with the type of social media platform the request was received on.
 - a. Responses to questions posted online may be provided directly to the individual who made the query, through a direct message or other communication method, rather than in the comments section, if deemed more appropriate.
 - b. For transparency and engagement purposes, all discussions on school or division social media accounts will not be retracted or moved from the public site unless the posts are in violation of division policies or administrative procedures, or are degrading, discriminatory, defamatory or offensive in any manner in nature.
 - c. Misleading or inaccurate information about the division will be acknowledged and corrected where required.
- 13) Site and account administrators are advised to be conservative in posting pictures on social media as many sites own the information once it is posted. Those who wish to share photos in large quantities or with great frequency are encouraged to create photo galleries on their school websites and post a link to those galleries on social media.
- 14) Authorization is not required for staff to open a personal social media account. Northern Lights Public Schools encourages the responsible use of social media. When used properly, it is an excellent tool for professional development. Staff should keep the following in mind when posting on social media or using other forms of digital communication:
 - a. Disclaimers such as “Posts are my own and don’t reflect my employer’s views” don’t hold true for educators. Staff should use sound judgment when using social media while off duty. Such disclaimers do not remove or lessen the requirement of NLPS employees to follow the guidelines in this administrative procedure or any other professional codes of conduct they are expected to comply with.
 - b. Maintain professionalism at all times – in your personal and professional lives.
 - c. The Division strongly advises against the use of a blended personal and professional account.
 - d. Staff should communicate with students and parents for educational purposes only. Avoid or limit sharing personal information with students or parents.
 - e. Texting or private messaging students is inappropriate whether for personal or educational purposes.
 - f. Work-related communication should occur only through the use of division-approved communication channels – phone calls, division email,

- call-out system, websites and division-approved social media accounts.
- g. Posting images or content related to alcohol and/or tobacco use cannot happen on classroom, department and professional accounts and is strongly discouraged on personal accounts.
 - h. If you have a personal account that a student becomes aware of, refer them back to an educational account for discussion rather than permitting personal or private messages. Attempts by a student to communicate with an employee via a personal account should be shared with the employee's supervisor.
 - i. Do not accept students or parents as "friends" or "followers" on your personal social media accounts and do not "friend" or "follow" students or parents on their social media accounts.
 - j. Do not disclose student, parent or staff personal information on personal social media sites. The FOIP consents collected by schools apply to division and school social media accounts, not staff personal social media accounts.
 - k. Do not use NLPS or school logos or email addresses on personal social media sites.
 - l. Do not endorse any commercial products, services or entities related to your work with NLPS. Retweets, likes and favourites are perceived as endorsements. These interactions should be limited and done with care.