

Garland ISD Social Media Guidelines

A. Introduction/Purpose

Social media serves as a powerful communication tool to engage audiences, gain insight, and share news or information. But the use of social media also presents risks and carries with it certain responsibilities—especially within education. To help employees operate professional and personal accounts appropriately, Garland ISD established these guidelines.

All employees are responsible for knowing and understanding these guidelines in addition to GISD's [Acceptable Use Policy](#) and [Electronic Media Policy](#).

B. Definition of Social Media

While the forms of social media continue to change, it is commonly defined as electronic communication where users share information, ideas, personal messages and other content.

Social media may include, but is not limited to:

- Social networking sites (Twitter, Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn, Yammer, Google+)
- Video and photo sharing sites (Instagram, Flickr, YouTube, Vimeo)
- Blogs (Blogger, WordPress, Tumblr, Weebly)
- Wikis (Google apps, Wikispaces, Wikipedia)
- Forums and editorial comments
- Podcasting and vodcasting
- Social bookmarking (Pinterest, Delicious)
- Geo-spatial tagging (Foursquare)
- Personal websites

Professional social media includes work-related accounts established for campuses, departments, classrooms, individuals, etc. Personal social media includes activity by GISD employees that is not related to the district. Be aware that personal and professional lines are often blurred in today's digital world. And because GISD staff members are state employees, legal regulations also factor into the personal-professional blend. Once someone is identified as a district employee, their actions are a reflection of GISD and can potentially affect their employment.

With open access to all social media, employees must accept the associated liability and commit to its appropriate use.

C. Professional Social Media Use

Professional social media accounts should be kept separate from personal ones. They should also identify their affiliation with GISD either in title or description. Campus, department and school-based accounts are encouraged to only retweet work-related individual accounts, not personal ones.

1. Campus and Department Accounts

Social media accounts for GISD campuses and departments must be created by the Communications Department. This ensures a uniform naming structure and allows passwords to be kept on file in case access is needed. Campus and department leadership should email Communications Director [Tiffany Veno](#) with their account request, or if passwords are changed in the future.

Failure to contact Communications will result in corrective action before the account is recognized as official. Because all campus and department accounts are added to GISD's social media directory, it may also lead to missed promotion opportunities.

2. School-based (activity) Accounts

Social media accounts for classrooms, clubs, sports, etc., can be created by campus staff, but must have principal approval. Schools are responsible for keeping a current list along with accompanying passwords.

3. Individual Accounts

Social media accounts created by individuals to speak in an official capacity as an employee of GISD do not require prior approval.

4. Rules

- a. Do not violate the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act. Any student named or pictured must have on file their consent for publication.
- b. Do not compromise district or student safety. The public does not need to know that an Internet firewall or building access control system is not working.
- c. Do not communicate with students unless permitted by the superintendent, principal or supervisor. Exceptions can be made for relatives and family friends.
- d. Limit permitted communication with students to matters within the scope of professional responsibilities.
- e. Ensure parents and administrators have access to all communication with students.
- f. Respect copyright, fair use and other laws. Give credit to sources of content, images and ideas referenced.
- g. Personal information about students or staff should not be shared.

5. Best Practices

- a. Professional social media accounts are an extension of Garland ISD. Use sound judgement and maintain a positive image.
- b. Create public accounts—not friend-based—that do not require approval to see posts. Think fan pages versus profiles in Facebook.
- c. Use district email addresses for all professional social media accounts.
- d. When possible, adhere to the district's [Style Guide](#). Do not abbreviate words that are not supposed to be abbreviated, use numbers in place of words or deliberately leave out letters.
- e. Triple check for spelling and grammar errors before posting.

- f. Exercise extreme caution if electing to follow other accounts. Only follow professional ones. Do not follow students. Do not follow friends.
- g. Understand that sharing someone's post can be seen as approval of both the person and information.
- h. Refrain from sharing political views or opinions on public issues not pertaining to GISD.
- i. If a mistake is made, admit it and be quick with a correction.
- j. Accounts with no activity for 90 days or more should be deactivated.
- k. If using a social media management application such as Hootsuite or TweetDeck for both professional and personal accounts, ensure posts are made to the proper account.
- l. Be courteous of your followers, especially those who receive tweets as texts. Refrain from posting late at night and early in the morning.

6. Monitoring Professional Social Media

Professional social media accounts that allow public comments, such as Facebook, must display the district's Participation Agreement. Account-holders are responsible for daily monitoring to ensure cooperation. Be timely with responses, if necessary, and remain positive when answering criticism. Direct any concerns or press inquiries to Communications at 972-487-3256.

D. Personal Social Media Use

While the First Amendment protects an employee's right to engage in social media, courts have also ruled that school districts can discipline employees if their speech disrupts school operations. Personal social media accounts should not be affiliated with GISD.

1. Rules

- a. Do not use GISD logos or imply that personal social media accounts speak in an official capacity for the district.
- b. Interaction with students via personal social media accounts is prohibited. Exceptions can be made for relatives and family friends.
- c. Never share student information or pictures on personal social media sites.
- d. Information and photos of coworkers should not be shared without consent.
- e. Respect copyright, fair use and other laws. Give credit to sources of content, images and ideas referenced.

2. Best Practices

- a. Use personal email addresses for all personal social media accounts.
- b. Refrain from interacting with parents of students on personal social media accounts. It blurs the personal/professional line.

- c. Customize privacy settings to control what is shared and with whom. But know that private communication can easily become public. Social media accounts can also change default privacy settings unannounced.
- d. Ensure online behavior reflects the same standards of honesty, respect and consideration as face-to-face communication.
- e. Consider impact of photos. Would it be appropriate to post on a classroom or office wall?

E. Legal Considerations

GISD employees are personally responsible for the content they publish online. Defamatory, threatening or harassing posts, as well as copyright infringement, may result in legal action. If an employee's capacity to maintain the respect of students and parents or their ability to serve as a role model for children is impaired, the district may take disciplinary action up to and including termination. Employees should remain mindful that they may be disciplined for any activity, work-related or otherwise, that, because of publicity given it, or knowledge of it among students, staff and community members, impairs or diminishes their effectiveness in the district.

When accessing social media via GISD's Internet, employees should do so in a manner that does not interfere with their work, and is not inappropriate or excessive.

F. Updates

This document provides general guidance. It does not cover every potential social media situation. As these guidelines address rapidly changing technology, they will be regularly revisited and updated as needed. Please contact Communications at 972-487-3256 with any questions.