



12 HABITS OF SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SCHOOLS

School districts using social media see improved engagement from parents, increased sponsorship from their community, and enhanced involvement from their students. Yet your social media presence includes risk if schools are not careful to implement strategies that promote safety and inclusion.

How are some of the largest school districts using social media while managing risk? Developed by experts in the field, here are the top 12 habits to cultivate if you want to promote your school district safely online.



1 HAVE A SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

A solid social media policy is a roadmap that helps your faculty and staff enjoy the benefits of social media without creating risk for your school district. Schools that use social media need to have an up-to-date policy that helps faculty, staff, and community members understand the purpose of your district's social media presence.

Your social media policy should include rules for usage, comment moderation, points of contact, laws guiding retention and procedures, where to find additional resources, and an explanation of goals for the district. Having this information in one policy will help direct your faculty and staff to avoid risky behavior and showcase your district in the best light possible.

2 HAVE A DIRECTORY OF ACCOUNTS

When a club falls out of favor, or a teacher leaves their classroom, what happens to the social media content they created? Most likely, these accounts will sit dormant. Unfortunately, inactivity does not guarantee that no one will post comments on the page, or that the page will not be hacked. In reality, inactive social media accounts create substantial security risks.

Make a master directory of social media accounts associated with your district available to your entire faculty and staff. Having a source of truth will make it easier to prevent dead accounts from slipping under the radar.

BONUS

Having a directory of accounts available to all of your faculty makes it easier for social media managers to recognize efforts across the district and give attribution to other accounts.

3

MAKE CONTENT ACCESSIBLE

If you think your content is significant enough to share, make sure everyone can access it! Your online presence should always be following ADA guidelines on accessibility.

Those guidelines include:

- Creating accurate closed captions on videos
- Using alt tags to describe images
- High contrast between colors
- Adjustable text size on posts
- Always providing details in descriptions

Take the time to learn about screen readers, visual aids, and different assistive technology. Understanding these tools help your school district connect with each and every one of your community members.



4

HAVE WRITTEN PERMISSION FOR POSTING PICTURES

As much as we wish we could protect our children all the time, online activities come with a certain amount of danger. To help your students remain safe online, create a system for checking for permission before you post photos of your students. Whether it is a permission slip sent at the beginning of the year, or individual slips for each photograph, safe schools always have documentation on what students may or may not be featured online.

A great permission system should include both the guardian and the student. Most students enjoy being featured, but the risk of an unflattering or misleading photo can make students cautious around the camera while a guardian may provide permission, allow students to opt-out if they choose. Students will feel safer and more willing to share if they know that they have a say in posted material.



5

MAKE IT EASIER TO RECOGNIZE ROGUE ACCOUNTS WITH A STYLE GUIDE

Your website and social media is a fantastic tool for controlling your story to the public. Controlling your narrative will be impossible if your followers can not recognize fake accounts.

Even worse, if people can not distinguish between fake and real accounts, these rouge admins can create security concerns by spreading false or negative information about your school.

Creating a style guide for your administrators to follow when posting content is an excellent way to remain proactive in preventing these rogue accounts from impacting your presence. Often, rogue accounts only have access to second-hand logos and fail to follow specific guidelines. The stronger your visual brand is, the easier it is for followers to recognize fake accounts and alert you.

6

HAVE A PLAN TO DEAL WITH NEGATIVE COMMENTS

Dealing with problematic comments on a case by case basis doesn't scale well. If an emergency occurs, your social media team needs a system for dealing with negative and derogatory comments.

Moderation is key here: avoid extreme comment policies. Not deleting any comments may lead to harassment on your pages, while removing all negative comments can lead to litigation for first amendment and public records violations.

Similarly to the rule against falsely yelling fire in a theater, there are exceptions and precedents when it comes to deleting comments on education-based social media. Research any existing policies and your state's legislation on public records to understand how to manage comments if they are removed.

7

ARCHIVE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA

Does your district document student transcripts, emails, behavior reports, and almost everything else that goes on in your schools? Do you need the transcripts of students that graduated five years ago?

Probably not, but you keep them in case your students need them in the future. Maintaining these valuable records assures you can accommodate any need that arises, and acts as an insurance policy for your district.

A social media archive is a critical insurance policy that protects your school district against accusations of improper use of social media. For

example, Poway Unified School District, CA is facing more than \$400,000 in legal fees after a federal court ruled against the district over blocking users and comments on social media.

Preserving what users have, or haven't been blocked, and when, is critical to protecting your school district from a lawsuit or erosion of public trust. A great archive should include both content you created and shared, along with all community comments posted. If a follower deletes a critical comment, then that information is gone without a proper archive. And the networks aren't responsible for retaining this information for you.



8

CLARIFY PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL USE FOR YOUR FACULTY AND STAFF

If faculty members post updates about your school district on their personal social media accounts, they are creating public records. These are now public records that your district is responsible for, creating a new security risk.

Make sure that you have specified usage guidelines for your faculty and staff, including what they should and shouldn't post on their personal social media accounts. Improve staff and faculty buy-in by explaining why specific comments should not be posted on social media.

9

QUICKLY RESPOND TO QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

You want your followers to look to you for accurate information. If a question never receives an answer or a concern is never addressed, then your followers will look for answers elsewhere. Build trust with your audience by having a system in place to respond quickly to comments and provide live updates during key events or milestones. Even if you do not have any new information, continually remind followers of where they can find the latest news.

No news is news. In a crisis, keep communication open with your community. Posting regular updates will keep your community members calm and prevent them from looking elsewhere for information.



10

HAVE A HOW-TO GUIDE WHEN YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER IS OUT

In a recent survey of social media professionals in the public sector, 36% of those surveyed were the only ones responsible for their agency's social media. What happens if that one person gets sick or goes on vacation? Hoping there will be no news is not safe. Prioritize creating a plan and how-to guide for when your social media manager needs time off.

A how-to guide for an interim social media manager should include your district's social media policy, style guide, social media account directory, list of possible manager fill-ins, expected posting and comment response schedule, where to find passwords, permission-to-post slips and content available to post.

BONUS

Happy people work better! Creating a how-to guide allows your social media manager to step away from the keyboard. Time away from social media is essential for remaining patient and creative enough to deal with any issues that may arise.

11

MAKE POLICIES AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC

If your policy impacts the public, it should be available to the public. Ease concerns online by posting your social media policy and any regulation guiding page administrators. Posting your policy online provides answers to community member questions surrounding comment moderation and district goals.

Post your social media policy in your biography or in the "About Us" section to ensure that your policies are accessible to all members of your community.

12

STAY ALERT

Social media platforms and their role in our world is constantly evolving. A pivotal habit of creating safe social media is to continue to learn and adapt your policies. Learning about new safety precautions, legal regulations, and posting techniques will help your district create open and honest engagement with your community. Just make sure staying safe becomes a district habit!



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



CREATING CONTENT

[The Complete Social Media Toolkit for Schools: Content, Metrics, & More!](#)



STRATEGY

[Social Media Strategy Guide for K-12 Communicators](#)



LAWS AND POLICY

[Social Media Policy Template for Education](#)
[Social Media Policy Project Guide](#)



SOCIAL MEDIA RECORD PROTECTION

[Social Media Record Protection for Education](#)
[The School Districts Guide to Social Media](#)



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