12 *HABITS* OF
SAFE SOCIAL MEDIA FOR SCHOOLS

School districts using social media see improved engagement from parents, increased sponsor support from their community, and enhanced involvement from their students. Yet, social media involvement can include risks if schools are not careful to implement strategies that promote safety and inclusion.

How are some of the largest school districts safely using social media? Here are some of the top habits, developed by educational social media experts that you should implement if you want to promote safety while showcasing your school district online.

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1. YOU 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 increasing risk for the 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.

A solid 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 your faculty and staff avoid risky behavior and showcase the district.

2. YOU HAVE A DIRECTORY OF ACCOUNTS

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

Have a master directory of social media accounts associated with your district available to your entire faculty and staff. Having a directory makes it easier to prevent dead accounts.

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

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3. YOUR CONTENT IS ACCESSIBLE

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

- creating accurate closed captions on videos,
- using alt tags to describe images,
- high contrast between colors,
- text size is adjustable, and
- 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 all your community members.

4. YOU HAVE WRITTEN PERMISSION FOR POSTING PICTURES

As much as we wish we could protect our children all the time, dangers still abound. 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, and while their guardians may provide permission, allow students to opt-out if they so choose. Students will feel safer and more willing to accommodate if they know they have a say in posted material.

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5. YOU MAKE IT EASIER TO RECOGNIZE ROGUE ACCOUNTS WITH A STYLE GUIDE

Your website and social media is a fantastic tool for controlling your narrative to the public. Controlling your narrative becomes 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 the school.

Creating a style guide for your administrators to follow when posting content is an excellent way to remain proactive in preventing these types of accounts. 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 and alert you to fake accounts.

6. YOU HAVE A PLAN TO DEAL WITH NEGATIVE COMMENTS

Dealing with 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. Avoid extreme comment moderation 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.

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7. YOU ARCHIVE YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA

Your district documents transcripts, emails, behavior reports, and almost everything that goes on in your schools? Do you need the transcripts of students that graduated five years ago? Probably not. But you keep them on the chance that your student may need it in the future. Maintaining these records is an insurance policy that assures the district that all the information will be available if the need arises.

A social media archive is an insurance policy that protects your school district against accusations of improper use of social media. A great archive should include both content you have posted and all comments. If a follower deletes a comment, then that information is gone without a proper archive.

8. YOU CLARIFY PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL USE FOR YOUR FACULTY AND STAFF

If your faculty is posting updates about your school district on their personal social media accounts, they are creating public records. Public records that your district is now responsible for that you never knew existed. Creating a gapping security risk.

Ensure 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.

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9.   YOU QUICKLY RESPOND TO QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

You want 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. Have a system to respond quickly to comments and provide live updates during events. Even if you do not have any new information, point followers to where they can find news.

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

10.   YOU 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. So what happens if that one person gets sick or goes on vacation? Hoping there will be no news is not safe. Prioritize the time to create a plan and how-to guide for when your social media manager needs time off.

A how-to guide for interim social media managers should include your district's social media policy, style guide, social media account directory, list of possible manager fill-ins, expected posting schedule, where to find access to 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 calm and patient enough to deal with any issues that may arise.

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11. YOUR POLICIES ARE 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 community members may have on comment moderation and goals of the district.

Post your social media policy in your biography or about section and ensure that your policies are accessible to all members of your community.

12. YOU STAY ALERT

Social media is continually changing. A pivotal habit of creating safe social media is to continue to learn and evolve your policies. Learning about new safety precautions, legal regulations, and posting techniques will help your district create open and honest engagement with your community. And staying safe will become a district habit.
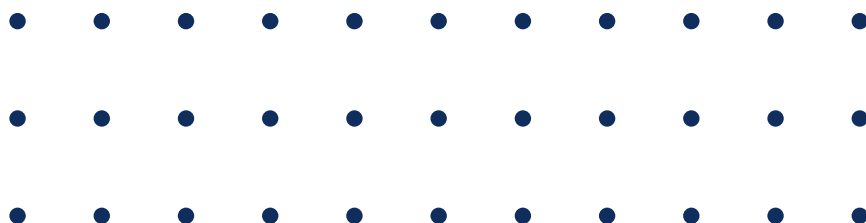
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

CREATING CONTENT

24 Social Media Content Ideas for Schools

STRATEGY

Social Media Strategy Guide for K-12 Communicators

The Metrics Behind Social Media Success for Schools

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

For these resources and more, visit us at **ArchiveSocial.com** to learn how we can help you safely grow your social media today!

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