

SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become an important tool to communicate with our school communities. It expands the reach of our current communications, and creates new opportunities for extending and enhancing education. As students learn to use social media, it is important, as a part of the overall development of their digital literacy skills, to empower them to build strong online safety skills and to establish an appropriate and positive digital footprint. An effective way to do this is to model the responsible and professional use of social media.

Maintaining professional boundaries in all forms of communication, technology-related or not, is vital to maintaining the public trust and appropriate professional relationships. While social media platforms may seem less formal, professional boundaries must still be maintained. Toronto Catholic District School Board ("TCDSB" or the "Board") staff, trustees and Catholic School Parent Council ("CSPC") members must maintain professional standards when using social media so that they can use these tools safely and appropriately to lead as positive examples for our students. These guidelines will convey TCDSB expectations and help members of the TCDSB community to use their professional judgment to identify and avoid potential risks.

SOCIAL MEDIA DEFINED

For the purposes of these guidelines, social media refers to online technology tools that enable people and organizations to communicate and share information and resources over the Internet and to interact with other users.

1 OFFICIAL TCDSB - ASSOCIATED SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS: AUTHORIZATION & MONITORING

- a. Official TCDSB-associated social media accounts include all Board-wide social media accounts, school-associated accounts, CSPC, and Trustee social media accounts.
- b. Account operators must ensure that log in credentials are passed along when there is a change over (i.e. new principal, new CSPC chair). Any TCDSB-associated account belongs to the Board and password details must be transferred to the new operator and provided to the principal upon request.
- c. The procedures and expectations for TCDSB-associated social media accounts, as outlined below, must be followed.
- d. **ALL TCDSB-ASSOCIATED SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS**
 - i. Must use a naming convention / handle and for schools and CSPCs must be approved by the relevant principal using the following format "**Board department name/ school name / school department / school activity / CSPC name**" followed by "**_TCDSB**" OR **".TCDSB"**.
 - Twitter and Instagram have a limit on the character count for handles as follows:
 - Twitter: 15 characters max.
 - Instagram: 30 characters max.
 - For Twitter this means the options are limited to:
 - @1234_TCDSB_CSPC
 - @0123456789_CSPC
 - If there are still challenges with creation of a name, the CSPC can create a handle in consultation with the Principal that reflects the school as closely as possible
 - The display name must be listed as [SchoolName] TCDSB CSPC as users are allowed up to 50 characters for display names.
 - Please use school acronyms for display names given some school names are lengthy.
 - The account biography section must include the full school name.
 - Existing accounts that do not follow the above guidelines are asked to update their handles immediately. This can be done through accessing account profile settings on all major social media accounts including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
 - For Twitter click: More > Setting and privacy > Your Account > Account Information
 - For Instagram click: Settings > Edit Profile > Username
 - For Facebook click: Settings and Privacy > Settings > Username
 - For further assistance with updating usernames please contact TCDSB Communications.
 - ii. Must represent the mission, vision and values of the TCDSB. Content posted to TCDSB-associated social media accounts/sites should be positive in tone, informative and relevant to the school/board community. Examples include:
 - Good news items celebrating student success (ensuring compliance with student privacy rights)
 - Important dates, public meetings and event notifications
 - News on student programming
 - School, bus and event cancellations
 - Advisories as necessary during crisis situations
 - Education-related updates and links to resources or articles
 - iii. Principals and other Board management must use their professional judgement to identify and address any social media activity that may negatively impact the school, staff, students and/or the TCDSB as a whole.
 - iv. Social media accounts must not include any advertisements, logos (other than the TCDSB logo), testimonials or endorsements of any product or company, except for official partnerships, e.g. the Angel Foundation. If unaware, contact your immediate supervisor for clarification.
 - v. Social media accounts must not endorse any third-party educational services or products, such as education technology apps or tutoring services.
 - vi. Official TCDSB social media accounts should exercise caution when re-posting, 'liking' or 'favouriting' external content; this may be perceived as an endorsement.
 - vii. Official TCDSB social media accounts must not suggest the endorsement of any political candidate or ballot initiative. For instance, pictures with candidates should not be posted as it can be seen as endorsement of a political party.
- e. **CSPC SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS**
 - i. Written authorization from the applicable principal must be obtained to operate a CSPC social media account.
 - ii. It is recommended that the CSPC Chair operate any CSPC social media account as they have been issued a Board email address which should be used for a CSPC social media account.
- f. **TRUSTEE SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS**
 - i. Trustees are governed by the Trustee Code of Conduct.
 - ii. Trustees should include their role in the biography section of a social media profile. i.e. "TCDSB Trustee, Ward #".
 - iii. Trustees should notify the Communications Department of all TCDSB-associated social media accounts which they operate.
- g. **SCHOOL-ASSOCIATED SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS**
 - i. All schools must have generic official social media accounts managed by the school principal.
 - ii. Other school-associated social media accounts (e.g. chaplaincy, athletics, department-based accounts) may be operated by relevant staff at the discretion of the school principal. Written approval must be provided by the principal.
 - iii. Principals must maintain an inventory of all operational school-associated accounts and monitor them regularly, ensuring that questions are responded to in a timely manner, and that any inappropriate content is removed.
 - iv. Principals must ensure that there is adequate protection from unauthorized access and from manipulation and alteration of information that is posted to school-associated accounts.
 - v. Principals must notify the Communications Department of all school-associated social media accounts in operation, and provide the name and contact information for the individual who is responsible for managing each account.
- h. **BOARD-ASSOCIATED SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS**
 - i. Written authorization from the relevant central department lead must be obtained to operate a Board department-associated social media account.
 - ii. Board-based department leads are responsible for the use and maintenance of social media accounts representing their department in the same way as school principals above.

2 TCDSB PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA USE

- a. Staff may choose to have a professional social media account. Such accounts may or may not specifically identify the staff member as an employee of the TCDSB. Although permission is not required for staff to open a professional social media account, staff creating the account are responsible for its use and must be aware that its content reflects on the TCDSB and the professionalism of its employees. It is recommended that staff advise their supervisor that they have created a professional social media account.
- b. Staff may also choose to maintain personal social media accounts. While there is a distinction between the public and private life of a TCDSB employee, off-duty conduct matters and sound judgment and due care must be exercised. Teachers should take time to review the Ontario College of Teachers' Professional Advisory "Maintaining Professionalism – Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media."
- c. The Supreme Court of Canada has ruled that teachers' off-duty conduct, even when not directly related to students, is relevant to their suitability to teach. A high standard of judgment is expected of TCDSB staff when using both professional and personal social media accounts. Inappropriate content posted on professional or personal social media accounts may result in discipline up to and including termination.
- d. Social media accounts that blend personal and professional content are strongly discouraged. Staff are encouraged to maintain a clear distinction between their personal and professional social media use, and to have separate accounts for each purpose. Personal accounts should not identify the individual's position or place of employment nor should it include content that pertains to daily activities at schools.
- e. Staff must not communicate with students over social media, unless communicating through approved, official TCDSB-associated social media accounts for educational purposes. In so doing, communications must not be sent to students' personal social media accounts and staff must maintain professional boundaries by communicating with students in a professional manner at appropriate times of the school day.
- f. Staff must not initiate 'friend' or 'follow' requests from students or accept student friend or follow requests on personal accounts. Staff must consider the professional and privacy implications of accepting friend requests from parents/guardians.
- g. All TCDSB-related social media interaction must be formal, courteous and professional in tone, reflecting the same rigorous professional atmosphere as in a classroom setting. As digital citizens, staff must model the online behaviour they expect to see from students, colleagues, and the TCDSB community at large.
- h. If staff become aware of a student safety concern via social media, either directly or indirectly, they must follow established reporting protocols and have a duty to report to Safe Schools.
- i. When staff have concerns or questions, they should endeavour to address these with their immediate supervisor, or with central administrative staff as needed rather than through social media.
- j. Staff must avoid making impulsive, inappropriate or heated comments, and should not engage in hostile interactions with other users on social media.

3 PRIVACY

- a. All employees and those who administer official TCDSB social media accounts must respect the privacy rights of other individuals, including students, parents/guardians, other employees and members of the TCDSB community at large.
- b. TCDSB staff must remain vigilant in protecting personal information when using social media. Personal information shared by the TCDSB on social media is subject to the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.
- c. No personal information (e.g. names and identifying pictures and video) may be shared on social media if written consent is not given.
- d. For safety and security reasons, pictures of classrooms or the school environment must not be shared on personal staff social media accounts. All schools must obtain written informed consent annually from parents for the use of their child's image or any identifying information, including its use on official TCDSB-associated social media. This consent is obtained via TCDSB's *Student Identification Consent Form* at the start of every school year and managed by the principal. The consent form does not provide staff with permission to post images or identifying information of students on their personal accounts, and staff must refrain from doing so.
- e. School principals are responsible for maintaining a list of all students whose parents do not consent to the use of identifying information. If parents signal withdrawal of consent at any time, schools and teachers must ensure these wishes are respected immediately.
- f. Students for whom consent is not given must be excluded, obscured or blurred in any individual or group pictures appearing on social media accounts.
- g. Staff must consider the privacy rights of colleagues or other adult members of the TCDSB community and obtain consent before posting another adult's identifying information.
- h. If unauthorized personal information is shared inadvertently, schools must take immediate steps to delete it from the account. All breaches of personal information must be reported immediately to the Sr. Manager of Freedom of Information (Corporate Services department)
- i. Staff must operate under the presumption that all information shared on social media is public information. Even if strict privacy settings are applied to accounts, information can often be easily copied and shared by other users. In addition, privacy settings on social media platforms may change frequently and without notice. Staff must not share any information on social media that they would not wish to be made public.
- j. School administrators or central office department heads must regularly monitor accounts for which they are responsible. Inappropriate and/or confidential information must be removed immediately.
- k. Staff should ensure that account settings provide them a notification when they are 'tagged' in a post and review the post for any inappropriate or confidential content. If inappropriate, un-tag yourself and report to your immediate supervisor.
- l. Staff should act as privacy ambassadors, and request that other members of the TCDSB community remove any inappropriate and/or confidential information that may have been shared inadvertently.
- m. Staff must consider the safety of all students when considering making a social media post, and must not post specific information about school excursions or extracurricular activities in advance of or during the event.

4 COMPLIANCE WITH SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES

Acceptable Use of Technology Policy A.29, all users must abide by the administrative procedures outlined in the policy. *Users include but are not limited to employees, students, trustees, association staff, parents, volunteers, contractors, community service workers, and temporary staff. Electronic communication includes but is not limited to Internet use, e-mail, social media, browsing, publishing or posting on web sites, downloading, accessing or storing files and use of personal electronic devices.*

As such, all users are expected to comply with these Social Media Guidelines. Failure to comply may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of staff; review of Trustee social media conduct by the Integrity Commissioner; and/or involvement by the Conflict Resolution Department, as appropriate.

5 POLICIES/RESOURCES

- a. [Acceptable Use of Technology Policy A.29](#)
- b. [TCDSB Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Policy A.38](#)
- c. [TCDSB Code of Conduct S.S. 09](#)
- d. [Social Media Guidelines for Catholic School Parent Councils](#)
- e. [Political Activities and Campaigning Policy A.40](#)
- f. Ontario College of Teachers – [Maintaining Professionalism – Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media – Professional Advisory](#)
- g. Privacy and Information Commissioner of Ontario – [A Guide to Privacy and Access to Information in Ontario Schools](#)