

<b>PERSONNEL</b>	<b>G</b>
<b>CODE OF CONDUCT – SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY</b>	<b>GBAC</b>
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**Purpose**

The Lincoln Public Schools recognize the increasingly important role that technology plays in the educational process as well as in the personal lives of the students, faculty and staff. Online discourse through social media, including, but not limited to, the use of networking sites, text messaging, blogs, discussion fora, wikis, podcasts or other forms of social media, empowers educators and students in the scope of their respective interactions. Lincoln recognizes the open exchange of ideas through the use of such media and supports this process as a means of enhancing the educational environment.

Within this context, it is important that all participants feel free to express their thoughts and ideas in a manner that does not disrupt the educational process, or create unnecessary distractions to, or adversely impact, the interpersonal relationships between the students, faculty and staff. Moreover, proper respect for the privacy of students, confidentiality of sensitive information and respect for copyrights and trademarks are all important issues to consider before participating in an online social environment.

This policy is intended to foster a thoughtful, responsible use of social media and related technological communication tools that will minimize the associated risks and encourage professionalism and accountability at all times. Further, the purpose of this Policy is to protect and maintain professionalism in the workplace for all school personnel and to avoid, wherever possible, the appearance of impropriety in school personnel-student relationships.

**Applicability**

This policy applies to all LPS faculty and staff, users of district owned or leased technology and users of the LPS network. LPS administration will take steps to ensure that other stakeholders, including vendors, volunteers, and independent contractors are informed of and comply with this policy and the LPS Computer and Internet Acceptable Use Policy.

**Definition of Social Media**

Social media is any accessible, expandable, or upgradable online publication, or presence that allows interactive communication, including, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, websites, applications and internet forums. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, SnapChat, YouTube, TikTok, Reddit, and LinkedIn.

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**Social Media Policy.**

The following social media user expectations, both personal and professional, shall be conducted in compliance with the LPS Computer and Internet Acceptable Use Policy.

1. No employee, faculty or staff of the Lincoln Public Schools shall post, forward or otherwise disseminate any data, documents, photos, images, videos or other information using any technology medium, including social networking websites or applications, which might result in a disruption of classroom activity or the educational process.
2. Personnel conduct online shall be carried out consistently with the standards applied while on school premises and in furtherance of the Lincoln Public Schools Mission Statement.
3. Fraternalization, including but not limited to, stalking, sexual harassment, and other objectively inappropriate behavior enabled by a position of authority, via the internet, direct messaging, text messaging, posting or otherwise between school personnel and students (whether by mobile telephone, computer or other communication medium) is prohibited.
4. Posting confidential or proprietary information about Lincoln, its students, its faculty or staff is prohibited.
5. Use of student time for social media should have an articulated and defined instructional purpose consistent with the Lincoln Public Schools mission statement.
6. Lincoln computers and school personnel time are to be used strictly for educational purposes. Access to social networking websites or applications for personal use during school hours, including professional meetings outside of typical school hours, shall be reserved for school personnel authorized breaks or unassigned periods only and shall not be accessed during regular work hours, including classroom instruction time.
7. LPS employees who engage in social media activities for professional purposes should maintain separate professional and personal e-mail addresses, and refrain from using their personal e-mail address for such social media accounts. Regular and continuous use of a personal e-mail address for professional purposes, including social media use are not permissible.
8. Any violation of this policy by school personnel will be subject to disciplinary sanctions included in the applicable collective bargaining agreement in effect at the time of the violation.

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### **Professional Social Media Use**

For the purpose of this policy, professional social media is defined as a work-related social media activity that is either:

- school-based (e.g., a principal establishing an Instagram account for their school; or a teacher establishing a classroom blog) or
  - non-school-based (e.g., a district administrator establishing a Twitter account to promote district achievements; provide notice of events; or promoting educational notices of general interest to the community).
- LPS employees should exercise caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using professional social media sites. LPS employees are expected to demonstrate the same standards of professional decorum in their social media presence as they are in physical professional settings. If a particular type of behavior is inappropriate in the classroom or another professional setting, that behavior is also inappropriate on the professional social media site.
  - When establishing professional social media accounts, LPS employees should consider the intended audience for the site and the level of privacy assigned to the site; specifically, whether the site should be restricted to a private network (e.g., limited to a particular class or grade within a school; a school community; or a districtwide group), or a public network (i.e., open to the general public).
  - Advance approval of the building level administrator and/or the Assistant Superintendent or Superintendent approval must be secured before a faculty or staff member will be permitted to establish a social media account for a school, class, or program.

### **Communication with District Students**

LPS employees who work with students and communicate with students through professional social media sites and/or accounts (including, but not limited to “friending,” following, commenting, and posting messages) should observe the following guidelines:

- Lincoln Public Schools’ employees shall not require, coerce, or request any student and/or prospective student to, nor discharge, discipline, penalize, fail, or refuse to admit, or threaten the same for refusing to, disclose his or her password or provide access to his or her Social Media account(s), add a teacher, administrator, or other school employee or school volunteer to his or her Social Media contact.

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- Professional social media sites that are school-based should be designed to address reasonable instructional, educational, or extra-curricular program matters.
- LPS employees should use school-based professional social media sites that involve students for professional purposes only.
- LPS employees shall not use photos along with student’s name in any publication or form of social media without parent or guardian permission as indicated by the annually distributed “Photo Release” section of “Release and Emergency Information” form.
- LPS employees shall only communicate with students via social media using district or department assigned hardware.

**Personal Social Media Use**

Personal social media use is a non-work-related activity. Given the public and pervasive nature of social media communications, as well as the fact that in this digital era, the lines between professional and personal endeavors are sometimes blurred, this policy also addresses recommended practices for use of personal social media by LPS faculty and staff.

LPS employees are responsible for understanding the rules of the social media sites they use. LPS employees are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites, while maintaining awareness of the limitations to privacy settings.

- It is not recommended LPS employees “tag” photos of other LPS employees, volunteers, contractors, vendors without the prior permission of the individuals being tagged.
- LPS employees shall note on their social media sites that this is a personal media site and not connected with or representative of LPS.
- Comments related to the school should always meet the highest standards of professional discretion and act on the assumption that all postings are in the public domain.
- LPS employees are expected to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students at all times and in all situations especially social media interactions.
- LPS employees should not communicate with students who are currently enrolled in LPS schools on personal social media sites, except:
  - (a) via communication with students’ parents or guardians; or
  - (b) if an emergency situation requires such communication, in which case the District employee should notify his/her supervisor of the contact as soon as practicable.

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- Notwithstanding the guidelines above, postings by a LPS employee may be protected activity under applicable labor laws and collective bargaining agreements.

### **School/District Administrators**

- School and district administrators are responsible for maintaining a list of all professional social media accounts used within their particular school or office.
- Professional District social media sites and accounts should include language identifying the sites as professional social media LPS approved and maintained accounts.

### **Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites**

LPS employees using professional social media have no expectation of privacy with regard to their use of such media. LPS administrators will monitor professional social media sites from time to time.

### **Best Practices Guidelines**

The following “best practices” guidelines are intended to assist school personnel with the use of social media in an effective manner and to protect personal and professional reputations. All existing Lincoln Public Schools Policies and Codes of Conduct applicable to school personnel extend to school related activities in social media as well as on school department premises. Lincoln Public Schools personnel are encouraged to abide by these guidelines while accessing, creating or contributing to any form of social media.

#### **1. Be transparent.**

- School personnel should always be honest about their identity and must ensure their profile and related content is accurate, though no addresses, phone numbers or other confidential information should be provided.
- All personnel representing the Lincoln Public Schools in social media should identify themselves as such.
- School personnel posting about Lincoln on personal time should properly identify themselves as Lincoln faculty or staff.

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## 2. **Copyright and Fair Use.**

- Respect copyright and fair use guidelines. Be aware of possible liability for posting commentary deemed to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene.
- Hyperlinking to outside sources is recommended. Ensure the content to which you hyperlink is appropriate and consistent with these guidelines.
- Avoid plagiarism. It is recommended that the creator of any items of reposted photos, videos, poems, music, text, artwork or other copyrightable material be identified to the extent reasonably possible. Be aware that photographs taken by professional photographers, including those of you and for which you have been paid, cannot be scanned and used on the internet without the photographer’s permission.

## 3. **Use Good Judgment.**

- School personnel should be mindful that what they post will be viewed and archived permanently online. Archival systems save information even if a post is deleted.
- School personnel should always be constructive, courteous and respectful when composing or answering a post. Be cognizant that comments can be forwarded or copied. It is advisable to delay posting on a passionate or heated subject until emotion subsides.
- Ensure that your contribution to social networking sites has valuable insights. Avoid posting information about topics or events which do not have professional relevance.
- Online conduct should reflect the same standards of honesty, respect and consideration that are used during face-to-face interaction.
- Posts, blogs, wikis, discussion groups, and podcasts are an extension of the classroom. What is inappropriate in the classroom is inappropriate online.
- Do not post or pass along mass emails and urban legends (funny stories, videos, non-school photos and other “SPAM”).

## 4. **Maintain confidentiality.**

- Do not post confidential or proprietary information about the Lincoln Public Schools, its faculty, staff or students. Use good ethical judgment and follow Lincoln Public Schools policies.

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- If discussing a situation involving individuals on a social media site, ensure the individuals cannot be identified.
- If any questions arise as to the appropriateness or confidentiality of a topic, consult the building principal or Superintendent.

**5. Monitor comments.**

- School personnel should set sites of their network or blog so comments must be reviewed and approved prior to appearing on the site or blog.
- Reasonable protections against general public access should be employed and access should be limited only to identified or invited persons.
- Offensive comments may be blocked.

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***TOWN OF LINCOLN SCHOOL COMMITTEE, Lincoln, Rhode Island***