



# Using Social Media at School

## Frequently Asked Questions on Social Media Use

### How are contents and sites restricted for schools of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District?

Authority for the use of social networking sites in schools and at other worksites is left to the discretion of the school administrator/manager.

Each Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) school may establish its own policy and practices regarding the use of the internet and social media by students as required. Any use of NLESD Information Technology Resources and any school policies developed **must** be in compliance with district policies and guidelines (available here: <https://www.nlesd.ca/about/policies.jsp>).

### Can teachers use social media tools to teach the curriculum and support students to do homework?

The short answer is yes. We want teachers and students to use new and current technologies to make the learning experience more meaningful and enjoyable. There are many ways that social media tools can help teachers provide support beyond the classroom and school day. However, there are also pitfalls associated with social media. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- A) **Teachers** monitor and provide guidance and supervision.
- B) **School administrators** (or designate, such as technology teacher, etc.) approve the activity and, from time to time, monitor the online activity.
- C) **Students** be made aware of the expectations for appropriate behaviour when participating in the forum, and that the school code of conduct, the District's Terms and Conditions for social media use by students, and other associated rules for behaviour apply to the online format.
- D) **Sites** are established specifically for communications, teaching and learning purposes, and are not conducted from the personal sites of employees.
- E) **Student personal information** (e.g. name, grade, email, contact information) is not uploaded to online sites. Teachers/school administrators are also encouraged to check the privacy settings for online forums, as, for example some sites share information with third parties and/or use information for marketing purposes.
- F) **School administrators and teachers** should first look to district-sanctioned programs/systems, such as *PowerSchool*, to share information with parents and students.

## Is it okay for employees to 'friend', 'follow', or engage with students on social media sites like Facebook?

Employees **should not** 'friend', 'follow', or engage with current students through their personal accounts on social media sites. Such sites blur professional boundaries as a great deal of personal information is sometimes shared by individuals on personal sites. You may inadvertently provide access to private information such as photos and contact information through a student and his/her friends, to a broad group of people. Likewise, you may find out more about students than you would like.

Employees are advised to regularly check their privacy settings on personal social media sites and ensure that access is restricted. Users should also keep in mind that some social media sites may change settings without notification.

## What if a student uses social media negatively towards another student?

School administrators may be uncertain about how to respond when they become aware of inappropriate postings by students targeting other students, especially if they occur outside of school hours.

Regardless of the method or tool that is used, when a student targets or engages with another student inappropriately **and it carries over to the school setting**, the school administrator should take steps to address the matter. If social media postings cause disruption at school or interfere with the rights of other students, school administrators would follow the normal process for dealing with student issues. This may include:

- Interviewing the student or students involved;
- Documenting the information provided;
- Obtaining copies of relevant postings where possible;
- Disciplining student(s) as per the school's disciplinary process; and/or,
- Notifying parents where appropriate.

In the case of serious incidents or where there is concern that a student is at risk, **the school administrator may also need to report the matter to the police.** They should consult with district office staff where necessary.

## What happens if a student uses social media negatively towards or about an NLESD employee?

Schools can take a proactive approach to social media use by promoting presentations, classroom activities and other resources that teach students about social media, network etiquette and respectful behaviour. Online behaviour should also be incorporated into a school's *Code of Conduct*.

In all cases where students and/or others post items to social media sites that may reflect on the school/district, administrators will need to take into account an individual's right to free speech and the expression of opinions, with the right of other individuals to be safe and protected from defaming and false statements.

If a student uses social media inappropriately towards a teacher or other school employee, a school administrator should discuss the comments with the student and remind them that

it may be considered a public forum. A meeting between the student, parent or guardian, and the teacher/school employee might also be considered.

- If comments on social media about a teacher or other employee may be false, potentially defamatory or threatening, the school administrator may need to:
  - Initiate disciplinary process;
  - Report potential abuse to the social media site;
  - Notify the student's parents/guardians.
- The employee and/or school administrator may also decide to report the matter to the police.

Employees can understandably be upset by comments made about them on social media sites by students. In such cases, the NLESD employee is encouraged to maintain a professional approach with the student, to work with the school administration to address the matter and to seek additional support and advice where necessary.

### **What happens if a parent/guardian uses social media inappropriately towards a teacher or other NLESD employee?**

Many people simply do not realize that comments that they make on 'personal' sites such as Facebook, may actually be available to a broad group of people. For all intents and purposes, comments made on social media sites are being made in public. When a school administrator becomes aware of inappropriate comments, they should take steps to respond to the matter. Such steps can include:

- Speaking with the individual to let them know that the school is aware of his/her postings, and to remind them of the relevant school process for making complaints or concerns known.
- Discussing the appropriateness of the comments and requesting that they remove the postings.

Should such incidents continue, the school administrator may need to follow-up with an invitation to meet and/or with written correspondence, to again advise the parent/guardian of the appropriate process for making complaints or concerns known.

- Where the comments are more serious, the individual should be advised that their comments may be potentially liable or defamatory. If the complaints are against an employee for example, the individual should be advised that the employee may be able to pursue legal action.
- If a parent/guardian or other individual makes threats against an employee on social media, the employee and/or school administration may need to report the matter to the police.

Again, in such cases, the employee is advised to work with the school administration to address the matter, and to seek additional advice where appropriate. The employee should not respond to the comments through social media.

## **What happens if an employee uses social media to criticize his/her school, the school district or a parent or student?**

Social media sites are not appropriate forums for employees to criticize or discuss work-related matters. District policies and collective agreements outline the appropriate processes for dealing with concerns or complaints. Failure to follow the appropriate process could result in disciplinary action.

Employees are reminded that comments made on social media sites are being made 'in public' and they should not write anything that they would not say in a public venue (e.g., meeting, conference).

*".....you must never put anything on a social media site that you would not want printed and put up on a staffroom wall next to your photo."*

***Up Front from the President  
NLTA Bulletin  
January/February 2013***

*"The Arbitrator noted that prior arbitration awards have found Facebook conversations are circulated widely. A case in which a Facebook post is found to be private in nature will almost certainly be the exception rather than the rule in the current legal climate... The Company had just cause to terminate".*

***Ruth Trask  
Associate  
Steward McKelvey Lawyers  
Re: Corner Brook Pulp and Paper Arbitration Decision  
January, 2014***

Depending on the topic being discussed online, it will also need to be clear that the opinion expressed is that of an individual employee and not the opinion of the school district.

Furthermore, employees must not disclose any personal or confidential information on social media sites which they have obtained through their employment. This includes personal information about students or colleagues (including photos), confidential corporate information that they may have access to and so on.

Harassment, bullying, defamation, disclosure of private/confidential information and other inappropriate uses of social media by employees may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal and could potentially involve police and/or other law enforcement officials.

*For more information check out:*

NLESD Policy: [FIN-502 Social Media Use](#)

NLESD: [Social Media](#) - Terms and Conditions for STAFF Use

NLESD: [Social Media](#) - Terms and Conditions for STUDENT Use

***Newfoundland and Labrador English School District  
Updated: January 2015***