

Social Networking

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As technology rapidly advances, your use of technology at work and at home will have a significant effect on your profession. Whether inside or outside of the school building, your use of e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging, blogging, and social networking can affect you and your job. This advisory focuses on social networking websites and includes important information to consider in order to use these resources safely.

What is social networking?

Each day, on the news, in your classrooms, and in conversations with your friends and colleagues, you hear references to terms like Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn - all of which are part of a growing world referred to as “social networking.” Social networks are web-based services that focus on building online communities of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.

Social networking sites allow you to share your personal information, interests, educational and professional information, photos, and other information. These sites allow you to connect with colleagues, former classmates and friends by becoming “friends” or “contacts” through social networks.

Social networking sites are powerful tools that can help you to stay in contact with your friends and colleagues, PSEA, and other education organizations. When used appropriately, these sites can provide you with professional development opportunities, allow you to share ideas, news, and resources, help you to understand the websites your students are actively using, and allow you stay ahead of the technology curve.

However, be sure to follow the advice outlined in this advisory to ensure that your social networking does not cause any problems for you or your job.

Three terms you need to know

Profile: Your profile represents YOU. Profiles you create on social networking sites display information you post about yourself, and messages people post for you, on your page. If you create a social networking profile, make sure all of the material posted on your page is information you would be comfortable sharing with almost anyone.

Friends: Your “friends” in the social networking world are individuals and organizations who you connect to your profile. You control your list of “friends.” Friend is often used as a verb in this context.

Tagging: When social networking users post photographs, videos, and other content onto their profiles, they can “tag” other individuals on their list of friends, to identify them or reference them in some way. Be aware of who tags you in photos and other content. Social networking users have the option to remove “tags” of themselves if they choose to do so.

Social Networking Advisory

Protect your privacy

Protecting the privacy of your information is an essential part of safe social networking. Most social networking sites have privacy settings to allow you to control who can see your profile. Make sure you are familiar with the privacy settings provided by the site that you're using. Often, privacy settings are used to limit profile access to the individuals on your list of "friends." Even if your information is "private," make sure everything you post is professional and appropriate.

Think before you post

Each time you post a photograph or other information on a social networking site, make sure you would feel comfortable if the following people were to see it: your mother; your students; your superintendent; or the editor of the New York Times.

Even though the First Amendment protects your speech as a private citizen on matters of public concern, such speech may fall outside of First Amendment protection if it "impedes your employer's effectiveness or efficiency, or otherwise disrupts the workplace."

Avoid posting anything on your profile page about your colleagues, administrators, or students, as well as using inappropriate or profane messages or graphics, or anything that would reflect negatively on your workplace. Be aware that social networking applications, quizzes, games, and other related features also can result in content appearing on your profile page. Make sure that anything posted on your page is appropriate.

Keep in mind that information posted to your profile page is often searchable. When interviewing for a job, would you want your potential employers to know: Your relationship status? Your political views? Your religion? Your sexual orientation? Whether you have children? Is there something on your profile that is inconsistent with what is on your resume?

Picture perfect

Be sure not to post any photographs of yourself or others that could be considered unprofessional or inappropriate, or link to any material that could be considered unprofessional or profane. If a friend tags you in a photo or other content that could be considered unprofessional or profane, remove that tag and ask your friend to remove the content.

Know your friends

When accepting "friend requests" or adding individuals to your friend list, keep in mind that these individuals will have access to most information you post. Be sure not to accept a friend request from anyone you do not know. **Do not accept friend requests from your students or their parents.** If a student or parent of a student messages you through a social networking site, do not respond.

Stay informed

PSEA will provide up-to-date information for PSEA members to encourage safe use of social networking sites and other electronic communication tools. Visit www.psea.org/technology often for the latest information on Technology & Your Profession.