

Social Media Guidelines for Your School

Social media is as common now as the air we breathe. In the past few years we have had several claims related to the misuse of various social media. Below are few incidents that have occurred:

- Teacher posts a message on social media that had comments about a student in the classroom. These comments were not positive about the student and the parents brought a defamation suit against the school.
- Two girls on a sports team post comments that were very unkind to other team members from multiple teams in their conference.
- The cyberbullying against a student at a school results in a complaint being filed with the Civil Rights Commission. School is then involved in a lengthy response and defense process.
- A student uses the school's anti bullying policies to falsely accuse another student of cyber bullying. The second student is then disciplined and the second student's family files suit against the school due to the false accusation.

The world of social media is changing at such a fast pace, it is difficult to stay on top of all the potential exposures to a school district. Many of the schools we work with have put social media policies in place, but there is no policy that will cover all the potential incidents. Considering that, below are some general guidelines to build your own school policy:

1. **Assess your current school culture.** What are current beliefs amongst staff and students regarding social media? How are staff members using social media to communicate with students? How well versed are staff members on the various mediums used by students?
2. **Develop a team to research this policy for your school.** The team should be a cross section of staff members from all areas, school legal counselor, guidance counselor and some student representation. This team should evaluate the current policies and acceptable user policies as well as recent legal changes regarding social media and internet accounts. Please see [2013 Wisconsin Act 208](#). Keeping this policy general in nature is encouraged due to the rapidly changing nature of social media. Contact the [WASB Policy Staff](#) for sample policies from other districts. Then use those policies to help form your own policy tailored to your school district.
3. **Propose updates to your current policy or draft a new policy.** This can be the most challenging and rewarding part of the process. When I used to be on school board, this can sometimes be tedious as different team members have contrary views as to how the policy should work. Be sure to run this by your legal counselor for their input. In the end, have a policy everyone can agree on.
4. **Implementation of the policy.** Now that the new policy has been drafted and agreed upon, the policy needs to be presented to all staff, students, parents and any other stakeholder that has an interest in this policy. Be transparent about what this policy means and the expectations for the district.
5. **Annual review.** Because of the dynamically changing environment with social media, it is critical to review this policy at least every year. Change team members to obtain a fresh perspective along with administrators who will be implementing the policy.

If you have any questions or need some resources related to development of a social media policy, please contact me, John Gibson, at TRICOR Insurance. My email is john@tricorinsurance.com, or call at 877-468-7426 x1714.