

POLICY  
RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES

SOCIAL MEDIA & ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION GUIDELINES

**A. Introduction/Purpose**

1. Electronic and social media technology can serve as a powerful tool to enhance education, communication, and learning. This technology can provide both educational and professional benefits, including preparing RI School for the Deaf (RISD) students to succeed in their educational and career endeavors.

2. The Board of Trustees is committed to ensuring that all RISD employees who utilize social media technology for professional purposes described below, including staff and students, do so in a safe and responsible manner. RISD strives to create professional social media environments that mirror the academically supportive environments of our schools.

3. These Social Media Guidelines (“Guidelines”) provide guidance regarding recommended practices for professional social media communication between our School employees, as well as social media communication between RI School for the Deaf employees and students.

4. In recognition of 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, these Guidelines also address recommended practices for use of personal social media by RI School for the Deaf staff.

**B. Definition of Social Media**

"Social media" means an electronic service or account, or electronic content, including, but not limited to, videos, still photographs, blogs, video blogs, podcasts, instant and text messages, email, online service or accounts, or Internet website profiles or locations.

Social media includes social networks, blogs, Internet websites, Internet forums, and wikis. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google+, social dating sites, and Snapchat.

1. **Professional social media** is a work-related social media activity that is either school-based (e.g., a RI School for the Deaf principal establishing a Facebook page for his/her school or a teacher establishing a blog for his/her class), or non-school-based (e.g., a RI School for the Deaf office establishing a Facebook page to facilitate implementation of an administrative task).

2. **Personal social media** use is a non-work-related social media activity (e.g., a RI School for the Deaf educator or administrative employee establishing a Facebook page or a Twitter account for his/her own personal use).

### **C. Applicability**

These Guidelines apply to all Rhode Island School for the Deaf employees.

### **D. Professional Social Media Use**

#### 1. Maintaining Separate Professional and Personal e-mail Accounts

RI School for the Deaf Employees who decide to engage in professional social media activities should maintain separate professional and personal e-mail addresses. As such, RI School for the Deaf employees should not use their personal e-mail address for professional social media activities; rather, employees should use a professional e-mail address that is completely separate from any personal social media they maintain. Regular and continuous use of a personal e-mail address for professional purposes, including social media use, may result in the RI School for the Deaf considering the e-mail address, and the corresponding use of that address, as a professional account.

#### 2. Communication with RI School for the Deaf Students

RI School for the Deaf employees who work with students and communicate with students through professional social media sites should follow these guidelines:

- a. Professional social media sites that are school-based should be designed to address reasonable instructional, educational, or extra-curricular program matters;
- b. Each school year, RI School for the Deaf employees shall notify parents about the professional social media activities in which their children may participate.
- c. Employees should continue to bear in mind the transparent nature of all electronic communication. Conversations on social media are never private.

#### 3. Guidance Regarding Professional Social Media Sites

- a. RI School for the Deaf employees must treat professional social media space and communication as they would a classroom and/or a professional workplace. The same standards expected in RI School for the Deaf professional settings are expected on professional social media sites. If a particular type of behavior is inappropriate in the classroom or a professional workplace, then that behavior is also inappropriate on the professional social media site;

- b. RI School for the Deaf employees must exercise caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using professional social media sites.
- c. When establishing professional social media sites, supervisors and employees must consider the intended audience for the site and consider the level of privacy assigned to the site, specifically, whether the site should be a private network (i.e., access limited to a particular class or particular grade within a school) or a public network (i.e., allowing access to anyone within the school or individuals outside of the RI School for the Deaf). It is recommended practice for professional social media sites to be private networks, unless there is a specific educational need for the site to be a public network.
- d. To the extent possible, based on the social media site in use, RI School for the Deaf supervisors or their designees should be given separate administrator rights providing limited access to the professional social media accounts established by RI School for the Deaf employees.
- e. RI School for the Deaf employees must obtain approval from their supervisor, using a registration form, before setting up a professional social media presence. The RI School for the Deaf will provide supervisors with a sample registration form.
- f. If a professional social media site undergoes a significant change (for example, a Facebook page being used to share questions about reading assignments will now be used to share ideas with a class at a school in another country), the RI School for the Deaf employee should consider whether to obtain a revised registry form and provide renewed parental notification. As needed, schools can continue to inform families about newly created social media sites.
- g. Supervisors and their designees are responsible for maintaining a list of all professional social media accounts within their particular school or office.
- h. Professional social media sites must include language identifying the sites as professional social media to differentiate them from personal sites. For example, the professional sites can identify the particular school, grade, or class that is utilizing the site.
- i. Central offices that wish to create a social media presence should work with the office supervisor(s) and also consult with the Superintendent's Office prior to creating a social media presence.
- j. Professional social media sites that are non-school-based should have a reasonable relationship to the mission and function of the RI School for the Deaf office creating the site.
- k. RI School for the Deaf employees should use privacy settings to control access to their professional social media sites with the objective that professional social media communications only reach the intended audience. However, RI School for the Deaf employees should be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the Internet can easily become public. Furthermore, social media sites can change their current default privacy

settings and other functions. As a result, each employee has a responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site being utilized.

l. Professional social media communication must be in compliance with existing RI School for the Deaf policies and applicable laws, including, but not limited to, prohibitions on the disclosure of confidential information and prohibitions on the use of harassing, obscene, discriminatory, defamatory or threatening language.

m. No personally identifiable (by name) student information, as defined in 34 CFR § 99.3 may be posted by RI School for the Deaf employees on professional social media sites that are open beyond the classroom. If images of students are to be posted online there must be a media consent form on file at the school for each child featured.

n. RI School for the Deaf students who participate in professional social media sites may not be permitted to post photographs or videos featuring other students without the approval of the teacher or other RI School for the Deaf employee responsible for the site.

o. RI School for the Deaf employees should not post photos of other RI School for the Deaf employees on professional social media sites without prior permission of the photographed employee.

#### 4. Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites

a. RI School for the Deaf supervisors, or their designees, are responsible for monitoring and providing feedback regarding their employees' professional social media sites. The monitoring responsibilities include reviewing the professional social media sites on a regular basis. If RI School for the Deaf employees decide to create a professional social media site and they learn of or discover questionable communications or behavior on their site, they should remove the material or contact their supervisor or law enforcement, as warranted.

b. RI School for the Deaf supervisors (i.e., Director, Assistant Director, Curriculum Leader, etc. ) reserve the right to remove postings and/or disable professional social media sites that do not adhere to the law or RI School for the Deaf policies, or do not reasonably align with these Guidelines. RI School for the Deaf employees should examine the default settings for comments on professional social media sites and in general use more restrictive custom settings. The RI School for the Deaf employee creating the site should intentionally move to more public settings as dictated by need. If the default setting for comments is turned on, allowing any user to post a comment without review, the comments on the site should be monitored regularly.

c. Employees using professional social media have no expectation of privacy with regard to their use of such media. RI School for the Deaf supervisors, or their designees, will regularly monitor professional social media sites to protect the school community.

d. RI School for the Deaf supervisors should maintain a detailed log of all reported non-compliant communications as well as any violations that are otherwise brought to the supervisor's attention. Such reports of non-compliant communications should be immediately

shared with the RI School for the Deaf employee so that the RI School for the Deaf employee may take corrective action, if necessary and if possible

## **E. Personal Social Media Use**

### 1. Communication with RI School for the Deaf Students

In order to maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students, RI School for the Deaf employees should not communicate with students who are currently enrolled in school on personal social media sites. RI School for the Deaf employees' communication with RI School for the Deaf students via personal social media is subject to the following exceptions:

- (a) communication with relatives
- (b) if an emergency situation requires such communication, in which case then the RI School for the Deaf employee should notify his/her supervisor of the contact as soon as possible.

### 2. Communication with prior students

It is strongly recommended that RI School for the Deaf employees allow some separation time with former students and recent graduates before engaging with them on social media. This models good boundaries and allows young adults to formally separate from school and begin their transition to post-secondary life away from RISD. The School recommends a moratorium of at least 1 year before engaging with former students on social media.

### 3. Guidance Regarding Personal Social Media Sites

RI School for the Deaf employees should exercise caution and common sense when using personal social media sites:

- a. As a recommended practice, RI School for the Deaf employees are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites. However, be aware that there are limitations to privacy settings. Private communication published on the Internet can easily become public. Furthermore, social media sites can change their current default privacy settings and other functions. As a result, employees are responsible for understanding the rules of the social media site being utilized.
- b. It is not recommended that RI School for the Deaf employees "tag" photos of other RI School for the Deaf employees, volunteers, contractors or vendors without the prior permission of the individuals being tagged.
- c. Personal social media use, including off-hours use, has the potential to result in disruption at school and/or the workplace, and can be in violation of RI School for the Deaf policies and state or federal law.

d. The posting or disclosure of personally identifiable student information or confidential information via personal social media sites, in violation of RI School for the Deaf policy and federal law, is prohibited.

e. RI School for the Deaf employees should not use the RI School for the Deaf's logo or make representations that their personal social media sites speak in any official RI School for the Deaf capacity.

### **Additional Inquiries**

This document is meant to provide general guidance and does not cover every potential social media situation. Should any questions arise, please contact your direct supervisor or the Director.

### **Electronic communication with students should always be TAP:**

- **Transparent** - Maintain openness, visibility and accountability
- **Accessible** - Consider all electronic communication to be a matter of record
- **Professional** - Use correct grammar, facts, and tone; be aware of teacher/ student boundaries; choose appropriate subject matter; choose language that is courteous.

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