

PRESS RELEASE

Lee County Public Schools

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SUBJECT: **DISTRICT IMPLEMENTS GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYEES WHO PARTICIPATE ON SOCIAL MEDIA WEB SITES**

Goal to Provide Direction for Employees for Online Activity

The 2010/11 school year is almost upon us. This week, teachers are making their way back for “pre-school” week where they will learn new things for the coming school year. One subject they will be learning about are the District’s new Guidelines for Use of Social Media Web sites.

Social media Web sites have become part of our everyday lives – Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, LinkedIn, just to name a few. Social media Web sites are how more and more people interact with each other.

While these sites allow people to interact in ways never before seen, they bring with them a new level of responsibility for the user. In cities across the country, employees – both in the public and private sector – have done things in the “online world” that have affected their careers. There are cases where employees have been disciplined – or even terminated – because of something that appeared online on a social media Web site.

In order to provide guidance and suggested direction, Lee County Public Schools has created **Guidelines for Use of Social Media** for its employees. The idea didn’t grow out of a “gotcha” perspective; rather, it was done to provide employees a heads-up on what they should and shouldn’t do in the cyber world.

“Too many people may not realize what they do in their private life online can come back to cause issues in their professional life, especially in public education” said Robert Dodig, the District’s Staff Attorney. “Rather than letting our employees flounder without any help, the Superintendent directed us to put these guidelines together to provide employees some direction.”

The implementation of these guidelines is believed to be the first such action of any school district in Florida – and possibly the United States.

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“I think it’s safe to say Lee County Public Schools isn’t afraid to be a leader nationally,” said Dr. James Browder, Superintendent of Schools. “We continue to be on the cutting edge in many aspects of our operations – from academics to employee relations – and I fully anticipate others to follow our lead.”

The Use of Social Media Guidelines separates the issue of participation into “personal” and “work-related” activities. Some of the main points employees should remember are:

- If they are participating for work-related reasons, it **must** be done with the knowledge and approval of their supervisor;
- It is never acceptable to access inappropriate Web sites during work hours – it would be considered a violation of Board policy 2.20;
- Everything that is posted or done online for work reasons falls under the state’s Public Records Law (Florida Statutes 119) and must be archived and treated appropriately;
- If they are participating for personal reasons, employees should do not do so during work hours (even during lunch or break time;)
- It is inappropriate for employees to communicate, regardless of the reason, with current students enrolled in the District on any public social networking Web site
 - This includes becoming “friends” or allowing students access to personal Web pages for communication reasons;
- Be thoughtful when posting items online (i.e. photographs, etc.) as some may be considered offensive to other parties and a violation of state and/or District rules and policies;
- Never post information that is considered proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene (as defined by the courts) as it may be a violation of state and/or District rules and policies;
- Never post information about students – even something as innocent as a student’s name – as student information is considered private and confidential.

The very nature of the Internet and social networking sites are that they are ever-changing. The District’s new guidelines are intended to provide direction if employees choose to use social networking sites and/or blogs for either personal or professional reasons.

While the use of these sites is becoming commonplace, it is important that District employees remember to conduct themselves in an appropriate manner. The goal is to help staff avoid any unintended situations that could adversely affect their professional standing with the District. These guidelines are not intended to restrict participation by employees but rather to provide some level of protection if they choose to engage in online activities.

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