The Warwick Public Schools
Social Media Policy and Guidelines for Employee Use
DRAFT – 1/9/2017

Introduction

The Warwick Public Schools supports the use of social media as a means to facilitate communication to connect with the school community, including families, school partners, alumni, foundations, and corporate donors. Social media can also be used to grow general awareness throughout the city for events, accomplishments, and program offerings. The responsible use of social media by Warwick Public Schools employees is an effective way to communicate with these audiences.

The Warwick Public Schools Social Media Team Policy

The Warwick Public Schools expects employees authorized to represent the organization via social media to serve as spokespeople for their school, program, and the district on the whole. As such, those designated and/or authorized to use Warwick Public Schools social media pages are expected to adhere to the following requirements:

- All postings, displays, or communications on any social media network must comply with all state and federal laws and any applicable Warwick Public Schools policies.

- All postings, displays, or communications must be respectful and professional in all communications (by word, image or video). The use of obscene, profane or vulgar language on any social media network or engage in communications or conduct that is harassing, threatening, bullying, libelous, or defamatory or that discusses or encourages any illegal activity or the inappropriate use of alcohol, use of illegal drugs, sexual behavior, sexual harassment, or bullying is prohibited and may be grounds for termination.

- Members of the district social media team are prohibited from disclosing information on any social media network that is confidential regarding students or employees or that is protected by student and employee privacy laws.

- The WPS social media team may not post images on any social media network of co-workers without the co-workers' consent.

- The WPS social media team may not post images of students on any social media network without written parental consent, except for images of students taken in the public arena, such as at sporting events, field trips, or other public performances.

Social Media Networking Policy (for all employees)

The Warwick Public Schools recognize that student groups or members of the public may create social media pages representing students or groups affiliated with schools, affinity chapters, athletic teams, and other school-related groups. When any employee of the Warwick Public Schools joins or engages with these social networking groups, they do so as an employee of the Warwick Public Schools. Employees have responsibility for maintaining appropriate employee-student relationships at all times and have responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks. This includes acting to protect the safety of minors online.

WPS employees who participate in social media networks may decide to include information about their work with the WPS as part of their personal profile, as it would relate to a typical social conversation. This may include:

- Work information included in a personal profile, to include job title and job duties.
- Status updates regarding an employee's own job promotion.
- Personal participation in school events, including volunteer activities.
- Personal hobbies and interests.

The line between professional and personal relationships is blurred within a social media context. When employees chose to join or engage with students, families or fellow employees in a social media context that exists outside those approved by the WPS, they are advised to maintain their professionalism as WPS employees and have responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on these networks, including requirements for mandated reporting.

Further:

- Employees should refrain from creating "personal" web pages or social networking pages that permit social interaction with current students. This does not include "professional" pages that may be used for work related reasons (homework blogs, school sports teams, etc.) It is recommended that employees not connect with former students until at least five years after high school graduation.

- Employees should notify parents of their intention to use social media to communicate with the students and the intended purpose of such communications. All ethical expectations for appropriate employee/student relationships should be followed. Employees should only provide their official work e-mail addresses as a way to communicate with students or parents regarding WPS and/or related business.

- During the work day, employees should refrain from participating on any social networking web site for personal reasons, even from personal equipment (i.e. their own smartphone, iPhone, laptop, tablet, etc.)

- Employees should avoid posting personal comments – on their page or someone else's page – no matter whose equipment it is during lunch time and/or breaks since such activities will leave time-stamps that could be misinterpreted by others.

An employee who is responsible for a social media network posting that fails to comply with the rules and guidelines set forth in this policy may be subject to discipline, up to and including termination.

Social Media Guidelines and Tips

Public social media networks, outside of those sponsored by the WPS, may not be used for classroom instruction or school-sponsored activities without the prior authorization of the executive director or designee, and parental consent for student participation on social networks. However, employees must avoid posting any information or engaging in communications that violate state or federal laws or organizational policies.

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The following is a list of helpful guidelines and tips based on best practices.

Guidelines:

- **You are responsible for what you write**. If it seems inappropriate, use caution. If you're about to publish something that makes you even the slightest bit uncomfortable, don't shrug it off and hit 'send.' Take time to review these guidelines and try to figure out what's bothering you and fix it. If you're still unsure, you might want to discuss it with your supervisor. What you publish is widely accessible and will be around for a long time, so consider the content carefully.

- **Be transparent**. Your honesty and your dishonesty will be quickly noticed in the social media environment. If you are posting about your work, use your real name and identify your employment relationship with the WPS.

- **Be clear about your role;** if you have a vested interest in something you are discussing, be the first to point it out. If you publish to a site outside the WPS network, please use a disclaimer to state in clear terms that the views expressed are the employee's alone and that they do not necessarily reflect the views of the Warwick Public Schools.

- **Protect confidential information**. Be thoughtful about what you publish. You must make sure you do not disclose or use confidential information. Students, parents, and colleagues should not be cited or obviously referenced without their approval. For example, ask permission before posting someone's picture in a social network (student photos require parental consent) or publishing a conversation that was meant to be private.

- **Share your work**. It is acceptable to discuss general details about projects, lessons, or events and to use non-identifying pseudonyms for an individual so long as the information provided does not make it easy for someone to identify the individual or violate any privacy laws.

- **Respect your audience.** (And your coworkers.) Always express ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. Make sure your communications are in good taste.

- **Do not insult others**, including other schools or competitors. Remember that our communities reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view.

- **Be respectful.** This includes not only the obvious (no ethnic slurs, personal insults, obscenity, etc.) but also proper consideration of privacy and of topics that may be considered objectionable or inflammatory. Be sensitive about linking to content. Redirecting to another site may imply an endorsement of its content.

- **Perception is reality**. In online networks, the lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred. Just by identifying yourself as an WPS employee, you are creating perceptions about your expertise and about the WPS by community members, parents, students, and the general public; and you are creating perceptions about yourself with your colleagues and managers.

- **Be Professional**. If you chose to join or engage with students and families in a social media context, do so in a professional manner, ever mindful that in the minds of students, families, colleagues and the public, you are an WPS employee.

Helpful Tips:

- **Keep your cool**. One of the aims of social media is to create dialogue, and people will not always agree on an issue. When confronted with a difference of opinion, stay cool. If you make an error, be up front about your mistake and correct it quickly. Express your points in a clear, logical way. Don't pick fights, and correct mistakes when needed. Sometimes, it's best to ignore a comment and not give it credibility by acknowledging it with a response.

- **Be careful with personal information**. Make full use of privacy settings. Know how to disable anonymous postings and use moderating tools on your social media site(s). Astute criminals can piece together information you provide on different sites and then use it to impersonate you or someone you know, or even re-set your passwords.

- **Be a positive role model.** The line between professional and personal relationships is blurred within a social media context. Educational employees have a responsibility to maintain appropriate employee-student relationships, whether on or off duty. Both case law and public expectations hold educational employees to a higher standard of conduct than the general public.

- **Don't forget your day job**. You should make sure that your online activities do not interfere with your job. Remember that WPS technologies are provided for educational use. Use of social media for personal use during work time unless in official capacity for the WPS social media team is prohibited.

- **It's all public.** Any information shared via social networking sites and/or blogs regarding the business of the WPS, whether using personal or WPS equipment, is considered public record. Do not post confidential or proprietary information about the WPS, its students, alumni or employees. By their very nature, social media Web sites and blogs are not private. Internet search engines can find information years after it was originally posted. Comments can be forwarded or copied and archival systems save information even if you delete a post.

- **Don't post angry.** If you feel angry or passionate about a subject, it may not be the time to share your thoughts in a post – you should delay posting until you are calm and clear-headed. Please thoroughly spell and grammar check your content before you post. Citizens expect that education employees set a good example when they write and speak in public. Content never disappears entirely once it is posted, so it's important you correct any errors as soon as you can. Since transparency is important, admit your mistake, apologize if necessary, correct it and move on.

- **You are writing for publication**. Even if it's just for a social networking web site, refrain from making unsubstantiated statements and avoid careless comments, such as "research shows" unless you also provide full citations of the research.