

COVENTRY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
COVENTRY, RI
SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY

Purpose:

Coventry Public Schools recognizes the increasingly-important role that technology plays in the educational process as well as in the personal lives of the students, their families, faculty and staff. Online discourse through social media, including the use of networking sites, text messaging, and the like empowers the learning community in the scope of their respective interactions. Coventry respects the importance of open exchange and learning related to enhancing the educational environment and supports this process.

Within this context, it is important that all participants feel free to express their thoughts and ideas in a manner that does not disrupt the educational process, or create unnecessary distractions to, or adversely impact, the interpersonal relationships among the students, faculty and staff.

This Policy is intended to foster a thoughtful, responsible use of social media and related technological communication tools that will minimize the risk and be appropriately professional and respectful at all times. Further, the purpose of this Policy is to protect and maintain professionalism in the workplace for all School personnel and to avoid, wherever possible, the appearance of impropriety in School personnel-Student relationships.

Best Practice Guidelines:

Since social media channels are fairly new to many employees, Coventry has assembled “best practice” guidelines to help School personnel use these forums effectively, protect personal and professional reputations, and follow Coventry policies.

The keys to success in social media are for School personnel to be honest about their identities when using or visiting a site, be thoughtful before beginning a post, and respect the people and issues involved in a post.

- **Be transparent.** School personnel should always be honest about their identity. If they are representing Coventry Public Schools in social media, say so. If they choose to post about Coventry on their personal time, they should identify themselves as a Coventry faculty or staff member. School personnel should never hide their identity. Tracking tools enable supposedly anonymous posts to be traced back to their authors.
- **Be accurate.** Make sure of all the facts before preparing a post. It’s better to verify information with a source first than to have to post a correction or retraction later. Cite and link sources whenever possible.

Everyone is legally liable for what they post on their own site and on the sites of others. Individual bloggers have been held liable for commentary deemed to be proprietary, copyrighted, defamatory, libelous or obscene.

- **Be respectful.** School personnel should always be respectful when composing or answering a post. It is easier to achieve goals if the posts are constructive and respectful.
- **Be a valued member.** When joining a social network such as a Facebook group or commenting on someone’s blog, make sure the contribution has valuable insights. Don’t post information about topics or events unless it is professional and relevant.

Think before posting. There's no such thing as a "private" social media site. Search engines can turn up posts years after the publication date. Comments can be forwarded or copied. Archival systems save information even if a post is deleted. If angry or passionate about a subject, it's wise to delay posting until calmer heads prevail.

- **Maintain confidentiality.** Do not post confidential or proprietary information about Coventry, its students, its faculty or staff. Use good ethical judgment and follow Coventry policies. If discussing a situation involving individuals on a social media site, be sure that they cannot be identified. A good guideline is don't post anything that cannot appear on the front page of the newspaper. If questions arise about whether it is appropriate for School personnel to write about certain kinds of material, ask a principal or administrator to help.
- **Protect identity.** While being honest is important, don't provide personal information that scam artists or identity thieves could use. Don't list home addresses or telephone numbers or work telephone or e-mail addresses. It is a good idea to create a separate e-mail address that is used only with a social media site.
- **Respect Coventry time and property.** Coventry computers and School personnel work time are to be used for Coventry-related business. Maintaining personal sites should be done on employees' own time using non-Coventry computers.
- **Monitor comments.** Most people who maintain social media sites welcome comments—it builds credibility and community. However, School personnel should set the sites of their network or blog so comments must be reviewed and approved before they appear. This allows responding in a timely way to comments, and blocks any individuals who post offensive or frivolous comments.

Policy Guidelines

No employee, faculty or staff of Coventry Public Schools shall post, forward or otherwise disseminate any data, documents, photos, images, videos or other information using any technology medium, including social networking websites (e.g. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Flickr, etc.), which might be discriminatory, harassing or defamatory resulting in a disruption of classroom activity or the educational process. Fraternization, including, but not limited to, stalking, sexual harassment, and other objectively inappropriate behavior enabled by a position of authority, via the internet, instant messaging, text messaging or otherwise between School personnel and students (whether by mobile telephone, computer or other communication medium) is prohibited. Any violation of this policy by School personnel will be subject to those disciplinary sanctions included in the Collective Bargaining Agreement applicable to said personnel.

Nothing in this policy prohibits School personnel or students from using educational websites, such as www.schoolnotes.com or Coventry Public Schools' websites and services since these are used solely for educational purposes. Access of social networking websites for personal use during school hours, including professional meetings outside of typical school hours, shall be reserved for School personnel's authorized breaks or unassigned periods only and shall not be accessed during regular work hours, including classroom instruction time. Please be aware that when using Coventry School computers and networks, an audit log is always maintained.