

## **SUBJECT: SOCIAL MEDIA USE**

As an educational organization, the Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES recognizes the value of teacher and professional staff inquiry, investigation and communication using new technology tools to enhance student learning, experiences and promote BOCES mission. Further, the BOCES understands the importance of an open exchange between the BOCES and its many constituents and that access to technology in school gives students, teachers and others greater opportunities to learn, engage, communicate, and develop 21st-century technology and global communication skills. To this end, the BOCES recognizes social media tools, including social networking sites (SNS) and exploration of new and emerging technologies as an important arena for encouraging this interaction and collaboration.

The BOCES further realizes its obligation to ensure responsible and safe use of these technologies. As an employee of the Washington-Saratoga-Warren-Hamilton-Essex BOCES, staff are expected to conduct themselves in an appropriate, professional manner inside and outside of school, including professional and personal social networking activities and electronic communications. All staff are expected to serve as positive ambassadors for the BOCES and as appropriate adult role models for students.

The following policy establishes professional expectations and staff responsibility for professional-use social media accounts created to represent BOCES groups, departments, programs, and/or activities, and the BOCES as a whole. The policy will also address procedures and best practices for personal use of social media and responsibility.

### **Definitions**

**Social Media:** Includes any and all forms of public social media network online platforms where individuals engage in multiple methods of online interaction, not limited to conversation and posting user generated and distributed content including, but not limited to, websites, blogs, wikis, podcasts, on-line forums, video sites, virtual worlds, messaging sites and social networking sites (such as Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Vine, Snapchat, Instagram, Pinterest, Wikipedia, YikYak, LinkedIn, YouTube, and others). This list is by no means comprehensive or exhaustive; new social media platforms are continually introduced to the marketplace. The same set of professional expectations applies regardless of the choice of social media.

**Professional/Instructional Use:** Refers to the use of social media for official purposes to advance a program or function of the BOCES or represent the BOCES on social media as part of an employee's job responsibilities. Content is representative of the BOCES or group within/governed by the BOCES. The definition of BOCES approved social media tools are those that fall within the BOCES electronic technology network, otherwise known as the District's Computer System (DCS) or which the BOCES has approved for educational use. Within these internal forums, the BOCES has greater authority and ability to protect minors from inappropriate content and can limit public access.

**Personal Use:** Refers to the use of social media that is not directly related to the employee's job duties or work for the BOCES, rather, use on a personal level to advance one's self or communicate with family and friends. Content reflects the personal opinion of the account holder.

### **Professional/Instructional Use of Social Media Accounts**

Social media may be used for official educational or promotional purposes, under the following conditions:

1. Employees (or students) are required to obtain prior approval by the District Superintendent or his/her designee to set up a public social networking site for any official BOCES use related to their division, building, program, service or activity. A student's or employee's professional/instructional use of social media must:
  - a. Be linked to the WSWHE BOCES website and
  - b. Contain the WSWHE BOCES logo, and
2. Professional/instructional social media accounts may be subject to periodic review and monitoring by the BOCES.

Some professional social networking sites may be used for legitimate professional purposes to advance the mission of the BOCES. An Administrative Regulation will be developed to specify the procedures for such professional/instructional use of social media accounts and associated content integrity. Any and all social media accounts linked to the BOCES website must meet the same standards for accessibility compliance and contain compliance statements.

### **Social Media Personal Use and Responsibility**

Staff personal use of social media or social networking sites (SNS) during work hours or on BOCES-owned or district-owned hardware and through BOCES or district technology networks is prohibited. However, limited personal use of social media during the work day within designated employee break times may be permitted on personal devices only, through personal data plans and not through the BOCES or district technology networks to include all computer networks, wireless networks/access and other BOCES or district electronic communications systems.

BOCES employees are personally responsible for all comments/information they publish on-line. Be mindful that what is published will be public for a long time. Be sure to protect privacy. BOCES employees are encouraged to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites, however, there are limitations to privacy settings.

Social media sites can change their current default privacy settings and other functions. Staff have an individual responsibility to understand the rules of the social media site being utilized.

Personal social media sites must be identified as the employee's own and not as a representative of the BOCES. Staff must not use their BOCES email address to identify themselves. Further, staff must not use the BOCES logo or any other BOCES images or iconography on any personal social media site, or make statements or representations in their official capacity as an employee of the BOCES, pursuant to their official duties, about matters of private concern. To be protected,

statements must be made as “private citizen” in order to address a matter of “public concern”. In addition, the BOCES name shall not be used to promote a product, cause or political party or candidate.

### **Ethical Standards/Legal Obligations/Appropriate Behavior for BOCES Staff Using Social Media**

1. All online behavior should reflect the same standards of honesty, dignity, respect, and consideration that are used in face-to-face contact, and be in accordance with all other established high standards of professional conduct, whether using BOCES devices, electronic networks or social networking sites or personal devices and personal social networking sites. BOCES employees are expected to behave honorably in online spaces. Online activities or communications which are improper, unethical, illegal, or which cause undue discomfort for students, employees, parents, or other members of the BOCES community should be avoided. The same laws, professional expectations, and guidelines for interacting with students, parents, alumni, BOCES staff, media, and other BOCES stakeholders apply online as in-person communications and in accordance with employee handbooks, Board Policy, Administrative Regulations and state and federal laws. Employees are responsible for anything they post to social media sites. Online activities or communications which cause a disruption within the BOCES may be grounds for discipline.
2. BOCES staff acknowledge and agree that when they create or post material on the BOCES professional social media site, they are in effect, “content publishers” and as such are subject to a host of ethical and legal obligations, including, but not limited to, compliance with the federal Digital Millennium Copyright Act.
3. BOCES staff are prohibited from posting confidential or proprietary information about the BOCES, its students, employees or alumni, and from disclosing any personally identifiable student information. In addition, staff must adhere to all applicable state and federal laws, including but not limited to FERPA and HIPPA. BOCES staff must further adhere to all BOCES privacy and confidentiality policies, including those that prohibit the use of student photos where parental permission has been withheld in writing. Furthermore, staff should not “tag” photos or identify by name or social media account any other employee or student without prior permission of the individual being identified.
4. BOCES staff should not use social media networking sites to create or maintain personal relationships with students or to “friend” students, with the exception of family members. It is too easy for genuinely-intentioned and innocent comments and situations to be misinterpreted, resulting in potentially damaging consequences for everyone involved. “Personal relationships with students” shall mean any behavior or conduct that is unrelated to course work or official school matters. Such behavior may erode the professional authority and traditional roles of the teacher (or other adult) and student within the BOCES and may violate BOCES policies and/or regulations.

## **Dignity for All Students Act**

Section VIII of the Dignity for All Students Act, Guidance on Bullying and Cyberbullying, outlines the BOCES' responsibility to address cyberbullying not only within our schools, but also incidents that occur off school property that could "foreseeably disrupt" the school environment. This guidance includes any conduct taking place on social media and at any time of the day. Any student disciplinary actions as it relates to conduct on social media and cyberbullying will follow the BOCES' Code of Conduct.

### **Reporting Requirements**

BOCES staff have a professional responsibility to report inappropriate behavior or activity on social media networks, including requirements for mandated reporting and any known or suspected violations of the BOCES Social Media Policy, and all other applicable BOCES policies and regulations and potential violations of state or federal law.

### **Disciplinary Sanctions**

BOCES staff shall be held to the same professional standards in his or her public use of electronic media, including use of social media and social networking sites, as for any other public conduct. While mindful of the first amendment, if BOCES staff use of electronic media violates state or federal law, Commissioner's Regulations or any BOCES policy or regulation, including any provision of this Social Media Policy and any accompanying regulations, or interferes with the employee's ability to effectively perform his or her job duties, or is disruptive or potentially disruptive to the effective operation of the BOCES, its programs or classes, or our districts, the employee shall be subject to disciplinary measures, up to and including termination of employment, in accordance with legal requirements, BOCES policies, and the applicable collective bargaining agreement.

### **Prohibition of Retaliatory Behavior (Commonly Known as "Whistle-Blower" Protection)**

The Board prohibits any retaliatory behavior directed against staff who report or who are perceived to have reported inappropriate behavior or activity on social network sites or violations of this policy or any other applicable BOCES policies or regulations.

### **Knowingly Making False Accusations**

Employees who knowingly make false accusations regarding other individuals as to allegations of inappropriate behavior or activity on social network sites may also face appropriate disciplinary action.

### **Compliance with Other Applicable Policies and Regulations**

BOCES staff who participate in social networking sites, shall be subject to all applicable policies and regulations including, but not limited to the following:

1. Policy 5450 Staff-Student Relations (Fraternization)
2. Policy 7100 Internet Safety
  
3. Policy 6600 Student Use of Computerized Information Resources (Student Acceptable Use Policy)
4. Policy 6800 Digital Content on Mobile Communication Devices
5. Policy 5005 School Conduct and Discipline
6. BOCES Code of Conduct
7. Policy 6850 Dignity for All Students Act
8. Policy 5165 Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment in the BOCES
9. Policy 6110 Student Records Access and Challenge
10. Policy 5000 Code of Ethics for all BOCES Personnel
11. Administrative Regulation 2080 Staff Technology Use
12. Administrative Regulation 7090 Classroom Technology Use (Internet Acceptable Use)
13. Administrative Regulation 2090 Guidelines for Producing Materials for Electronic Media
14. Policy 6750 Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment of Students in the BOCES
15. Administrative Regulation 6750 Complaints Concerning Discrimination or Harassment of Students
16. Administrative Regulation 5165 Complaints Concerning Discrimination or Harassment

**Adopted: August 8, 2018**

**Revised: November 6, 2018**

**Revised: July 10, 2019**