

Social Networking/Social Media Ontario College of Teachers Professional Advisory: Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media

The use of social media by staff and students has become a great part of everyday life. Is there anything I can do to help my staff manage this phenomenon?

The professional advisory issued by the Ontario College of Teachers, provides direction to teachers. Encourage teachers (and really all staff) to monitor their digital, online presence. Does this presence reflect the ethics and standards of the teaching profession? Have staff become very aware of their personal account settings within such applications as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, etc.

Encourage cautious use of social networking tools for curriculum-related uses. Define the parameters for the use of specific social media, such as class discussions, accessing assignments, etc. Teachers need to monitor online traffic and postings for student compliance. As principal, stipulate that you must review and approve any use of social media for school-related matters. Keep a file of these activities and do your best to monitor them. Sit down with your teachers and have them take you through the application. Ask the hard questions!

With respect to the general use of social media by students, a principal may have to deal with this on a different level i.e. code of conduct issues and discipline, particularly in the realm of bullying. Secondary school principals should consider providing their students with information about the pitfalls of social media and the resulting consequences if misuse interferes with school life. This also applies to the elementary panel but the principal should carefully consider the audience. Do so in consultation with staff and parents (school council).

Principal's Best Practice: "Maintaining professional boundaries in all forms of communication, technology-related or not, is vital to maintaining the public trust and appropriate professional relationships with students." (OCT)

From a privacy perspective, there are many important legal considerations. Advise your staff of these and others:

- disclosing confidential information about the school, students and colleagues, breaches workplace privacy policies and contravenes provisions of the *Education Act*.
- posting the work of others without proper and necessary attribution, raises copyright-violation issues.
- disclosing information about a minor, is contrary to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*