



Social Media Guidelines for Employees



Vision

Achieving Excellence in Catholic Education
LEARN • LEAD • SERVE

Mission

To educate students in faith-filled, safe, inclusive Catholic learning communities by nurturing the mind, body and spirit of all.

Purpose:

These guidelines are intended to help Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington (PVNC) Catholic District School Board staff understand and navigate their professional boundaries and responsibilities in the appropriate use of electronic communication and social media.

This document is based on the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT)'s professional advisory: [Maintaining Professionalism - Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media](#) and we make use of the important insights highlighted in the advisory to assist our own staff.

The PVNC Catholic Social Media Guidelines apply to all PVNC Catholic staff with the goal of helping our staff use digital tools in a safe, responsible manner while leveraging social media as a powerful communications tool that can support student achievement, education, school success, parent engagement and Deep Learning in our classrooms.

Definition:

For the purpose of these guidelines, electronic communication includes, but is not limited to, messaging or video chat software, websites, apps, email, texting, and blogging. It also includes social media networking platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, Snapchat and Youtube.

Introduction:

Social media creates exciting new educational and communication opportunities for educators and school Board staff; however, the scope of the technology also creates potential risks.

It is our hope that these guidelines will assist our staff in understanding the distinction between the private and professional use of social media as an employee's off-duty conduct, even when not directly related to students, is relevant in maintaining public confidence.

Electronic communication and social media tools provide exciting opportunities to learn, teach and communicate with students, parents/guardians and to engage with other educators and school communities both within our Board and beyond.

This technology serves a range of purposes from helping students and parents access assignments and resources to connecting with communities all over the world. PVNC Catholic staff also use the Internet and social media sites as instructional tools, seeking resources to develop lesson plans and information to enhance their professional practice.

For the public, social media can be a window into our vibrant Catholic school communities and an opportunity for community members to understand and appreciate the innovative learning taking place every day in our classrooms.

These tools provide powerful new ways for employees to collaborate and dialogue with others, expand their professional network and continue their professional learning. Used thoughtfully and appropriately, new technologies offer opportunities to model digital citizenship for students and deliver the curriculum in innovative and engaging ways.

However, some of the most popular social media platforms were not created specifically for educational purposes and their use can expose PVNC Catholic staff to risk when it comes to maintaining professionalism.

While employees should be cautious when communicating electronically and online, this does not mean it must be avoided altogether. Keep interactions professional, as you would in the classroom, and build a positive online presence. Know and respect proper professional boundaries with students, even when students initiate electronic interaction.

Professional vs Private Social Media Conduct

All PVNC Catholic staff should treat professional social media space, whether it be electronic communication or social media platforms set up in a classroom, school or through the Board, like a classroom or professional workplace. The standards we expect from our employees in their professional settings also apply to professional social media accounts.

There is a distinction between the professional and private lives of our staff members; however, the nature of education means PVNC Catholic staff hold public positions and are important role models in the communities where they work.

That means off-duty conduct matters and sound judgment and due care must be exercised when posting, commenting or sharing social media content both privately and professionally.

Ontario teachers, for example, must “maintain a sense of professionalism at all times – in their personal and professional lives,” according to the Ontario College of Teachers.

GUIDELINES FOR ALL PVNC Catholic EMPLOYEES

Professional Use of Social Media

- Exercise responsibility, caution, sound judgment and common sense when using professional social media accounts in the classroom, school or on behalf of the Board.
- Professional social media accounts should be used to enhance classroom learning, promote school initiatives and success and engage positively with parents/guardians and the broader community for which our schools serve. Posts should remain positive and make a link to student achievement and well-being as much as possible.
- Do not post comments, or share material that would be inappropriate in the professional setting or would bring disrepute to colleagues, the school, the Board, Catholic Education or the broader education sector.
- When setting up professional social media sites, staff should responsibly consider the intended audience and the appropriate level of privacy.
- Accounts should include language that clearly identify them as professional sites.
- Professional social media communications must comply with PVNC Catholic policies and applicable laws on the disclosure of confidential information, cyberbullying, student privacy, the use of threatening language and other Safe Schools concerns.
- Notify parents and your school administrator before using social networks for classroom activities.
- Principals must securely maintain the administrative logins for school social media accounts.
- Communications Services and IT will keep back-ups of school social media administrative

logins to access in case of an emergency and to assist with social media resets when a principal or designated employee is transferred.

- Principals must be aware of and maintain a list of social media accounts connected to their schools.
- Media inquiries received on school accounts should be referred to Communication Services.

Personal Use of Social Media

- PVNC Catholic employees should exercise caution, common sense and professionalism when using personal social media accounts.
- Employees should consider that their personal social media conduct reflects on their professional reputation.
- Staff should never share information with students in any environment that they would not willingly and appropriately share in a school or school-related setting or in the community.

Interact with students appropriately

- Model the behaviour you expect to see from your students online.
- Teach students appropriate online behaviour and the proper use of comments and images.
- Maintain professional boundaries by communicating with students and others electronically at appropriate times of the day and through established education platforms and Board email.
- Avoid exchanging private texts, phone numbers, personal email addresses, videos or photos of a personal nature with students.
- Do not issue or accept “friend” or “follow” requests from students. Consider the privacy implications of accepting those requests from parents/guardians.

Understand privacy concerns

- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of student information and others in your school community.
- Ensure consent has been given before posting on social media, or posting any student work, digital pictures or other identifying information on social media or websites.
- Check frequently the privacy and security settings of photos and other content on social media accounts as they may change without your notice. Remember, your privacy on these digital platforms is never guaranteed.
- Use privacy settings for their intended audiences. Limitations to privacy settings exist; however, PVNC Catholic employees should be aware that social media sites can change their default privacy settings and other functions at any time.

Act Professionally

- Exercise responsibility, caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using social media sites.
- Seek the principal’s approval before creating social media accounts for classes and community groups.
- Cross-collaborate with PVNC Catholic social media accounts using relevant hashtags.

- Maintain a reasonable and positive alignment with the mission and strategic priorities of PVNC Catholic and content shared on social media.
- Maintain your professionalism by using a formal, courteous and professional tone in all communications with students and parents/guardians.
- Avoid online criticism about students, colleagues, your employer, the Ministry of Education or others within the school community.
- Avoid impulsive, inappropriate or heated comments.

Pause and ask yourself important questions

1. When interacting with students, am I using electronic communication and social media to enhance their learning or for personal reasons?
2. What are my reasons for sharing this information with a student? Are they professional or are they personal?
3. Is this picture or comment something I would be comfortable with my students, their parents, my supervisor, my family or the media seeing?
4. Would my peers or supervisors consider what I have posted as reasonable and professional?
5. Would I write this/post this knowing it can never be truly erased and may remain in the public domain indefinitely?
6. Would I communicate this way in my community?
7. Am I keeping current in my awareness and knowledge of social media technology developments to protect myself from misuse?
8. How does my online presence – that which I control and that which is posted by others – reflect my professionalism? How does it reflect on my profession?

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