

Social Media Guidelines for School Board Members

Adapted from TASB School Law eSource

Many School Board members are active users of social media, including online platforms like Facebook and Twitter, blogs and personal websites. When communicating online about school district business, Board members ought to follow best practices. Consider the following guidelines when using social media as public officials.

Clarify that you are communicating about school district business as an individual member of the Board, not as an official district spokesperson.

When community members hear from Board members they often assume that these trustees are speaking for the Board and the district. They do not distinguish between a single Board member's musings, and Board policy and district direction. It must be clear that the official spokesperson for the Board is the President, and the official spokesperson for the district is the Superintendent.

Deliberating with a quorum of the Board about school district business violates the OMA.

A message sent to an internet-based group whose membership is unknown could constitute a deliberation and a meeting under OMA. Board members should not use online communications as a vehicle for communicating with each other outside of meetings. In addition to the risk of an OMA violation, such communication undermines good working relationships, and the purpose of open meetings.

Direct complaints or concerns presented online to the appropriate administrator.

When a community member approaches a Board member with a concern, in person or online, the Board member ought to direct the person to an appropriate administrator and/or encourage them to access the "let's talk" link on Dexter's website. This maintains chain-of-command and separates "management" which is the work of administration, from "governance" which is the work of the Board.

Avoid posting content that indicates you have already formed an opinion on pending matters.

When an issue is presented to the Board of Education it is with the understanding that the Board will sit as a deliberative body and operate with due process. Social media posts by a Board member expressing an opinion on a pending matter may be considered evidence of bias or prejudice and call into question the validity of Board action.

Ask for community input to be provided through appropriate channels and do not allow your social network to direct your decisions as a trustee.

Soliciting input from the community is part of the district's communication strategy. Yielding governance decisions to social network influences violates local policy, Board norms, ethics, and, in some instances, the law.

Only post content that the district has already released to the public.

In light of the sensitivity of many school district matters and the risk of inadvertent disclosure of confidential material, a trustee should limit the use of social media to sharing content already released to the public by the district.

When attempting to restate what happened at a previous Board meeting, clarify that the posting is not an official record of the meeting and share information only from the open portions of the meeting.

The minutes are the official record of the meeting. When describing what took place at a Board meeting, remember to honor the vote of the Board. Whether in the minority or the majority, once the motion is approved, the Board has spoken and policy has been enacted. It is particularly destructive to use social media to vent about a contentious decision.

Retain electronic records—including your own posts and content others post to your account—when required to do so by district's records retention policy.

Generally speaking, posts about school district business ought to be retained if the content goes beyond simply sharing existing district information—like a link to the website—or routine correspondence—date/time/location of an upcoming Board meeting.

Immediately report any potential security breach if you lose control or possession of a district-issued personal electronic device on which confidential district records can be accessed.

Board members need to safeguard school district records, including the records they access online or with personal electronic devices.