

# PROCEDURE

## Queen Anne’s County Public Schools

POLICY TITLE: <b>Employee Use of Social Media</b>		
ADOPTION/EFFECTIVE DATE:	MOST RECENTLY AMENDED:	MOST RECENTLY REAFFIRMED:
POLICY/PROCEDURE MANUAL SUMMARY CATEGORY:		

### A. PURPOSE

Queen Anne’s County Public Schools (QACPS) recognize that schools and employees may be interested in developing a social media presence to communicate with students and parent(s)/guardian(s) beyond the normal school day, to improve the school’s ability to reach out to students, parent(s)/guardians and the local community, or to provide reasonable or necessary updates on school programs, course offerings, and extra-curricular activities. Employees are required to comply with the following guidelines in creating or developing a social media presence for professional use purposes.

### B. POLICY STATEMENT

The purpose of authorized social media used by QACPS employees is for conducting school system business and the fostering of the legitimate exchange of information among and between staff, parent(s)/guardian(s) and the community at large regarding instruction, programs, services, and activities. QACPS reserves the right to remove inappropriate content posted on any QACPS regulated social media site at the school system’s discretion at any time. QACPS may further make insertions disclaiming opinions or authorship of any statement posted on any QACPS regulated social media site.

### C. RATIONALE

QACPS endeavors to provide access to social media to employees for professional use in a manner consistent with the First and Fourth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution as well as other applicable federal and state laws. Employees are reminded that they are mandated by law to report suspected child abuse in violation of §5-704 of the Family Law Article, Annotated Code of Maryland. Employees are further reminded that they are to be guided by all relevant policies and procedures including but not limited to Appropriate Use, Discrimination and Harassment, Disability Accommodation and Bullying.

### D. DEFINITIONS

**Social Media Site** – Any online or Internet-based platform that allows interactive communication between persons or entities on social networks, blogs, websites,

application software, Internet forums, and wikis.

**Professional Social Media Presence** - Access and use of social media sites for a bona fide work-related purpose, whether school-based or non-school based.

**Personal Social Media Presence** - Access to and use of social media sites by employees for non-work-related purposes, including establishing the employee's own personal presence on social media sites. In these instances, the employee's presence is not as a representative of QACPS. Further, the employee is not authorized to communicate in his or her employee capacity with QACPS students, vendors or contractors with QACPS, parent(s)/guardian(s), volunteers or other stakeholders on social media sites in the employee's personal capacity.

**Improper or Inappropriate Communication** – Any communication between employee and student, regardless of who initiates the communication, that may be viewed as derogatory, sexual or lewd in content, threatening or harassing, discriminatory, fraternizing or suggestive in nature. Photos or symbols exchanged between employees and students conveying the same message are also improper or inappropriate even if no words are used.

**Misuse of Social Media** – Whether on or off school grounds, the use of social media in a manner that demeans, condemns or berates others, including students and staff, incites violence of any kind, embarrasses, defames, harasses or bullies others, including students and staff (as “harass” and “bully” are defined by QACPS Policies and/or Procedures (see References in paragraph G below), the Student Handbook or local, state or federal laws.

**Students** – Current QACPS students.

**Staff or Staff Member** – includes any full or part-time employee, coach or volunteer coach or club advisor of QACPS.

## **E. PROCEDURES**

Professional Social Media sites must adhere to all federal, state and local laws, policies, Procedures, and procedures for employees of QACPS. Employees must comply with the Policy on Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment all times when using social media.

Employees interested in developing an QACPS-related professional social media presence, whether accessed from an QACPS computer, tablet, mobile device, or not, must receive permission from their administrators or supervisors in developing the site and are required to provide their supervisor with administrative rights to access the professional social media site, which may be regularly monitored by supervisors and administrators to ensure compliance with the Acceptable use of Electronic Networks Policy and others referenced in paragraph G and all other applicable laws, policies and procedures.

Professional Social Media sites developed by school-based employees for schools shall

offer parent(s)/guardian(s) and students general access to the site and the school shall provide annual notifications to parent(s)/guardian(s) and students about the site's existence along with the kinds of materials that may be accessed via the site.

Employees are prohibited from using Professional Social Media sites in any manner to demean, condemn or berate others, including other employees and students, incite violence of any kind, to embarrass, defame, sexually harass, harass, or bully others, including other employees and students (as "harass" and "bully" are defined by Policies and Procedures) or to in any manner that violates QACPS Board policy or procedure, whether inside or outside the professional work environment.

Employees using Professional Social Media sites are required to maintain the privacy of personal student records consistent with Board Policies and Procedures regarding Student Records, and confidential employee information.

Employees who use social media to communicate with students shall only communicate with students whose parent(s)/guardian(s) have given written authorization of and have access to their child's use of the social media sites. Employees shall not use their professional social media presence to communicate improper or inappropriate messages with or about QACPS students.

Employees, schools, and offices within QACPS who create a Professional Social Media site are required to monitor the site for compliance with Policies and Procedures.

### **Personal Use of Social Media**

QACPS recognizes that employees may also have a personal presence on social media sites and encourages employees who have such presence to continue to adhere to Board policies and procedures in their personal use of sites. Employees are prohibited from conducting personal use of social media sites during work hours or on QACPS devices. The following guidelines shall apply.

Employees shall not use their personal social media presence to communicate improper or inappropriate messages or content with or about QACPS students.

Employees shall not disclose student or employee records or other personal information regarding students or employees over a social media website, whether using their personal social media presence or their professional social media presence.

Employees shall not post photos of any QACPS student to any personal social

media site for any reason. Exceptions will be permitted where the student is a relative by blood, adoption, or marriage of the employee, or the employee has received permission to post from the parents or guardians of the student, and provided the photos are not improper or inappropriate.

Employees shall not use their personal social media presence as a representative of QACPS or the Board of Education of Queen Anne's County.

Employees shall not post photos of other employees of QACPS without the consent of the other employees. In all cases, an employee is not authorized to use his or her personal use of social media to embarrass, harass, annoy, or intimidate another employee of QACPS. Employees are expected to monitor their own sites.

### **REPORTING MISUSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**

When a staff member becomes aware of an incident that involves the misuse of social media, the staff member shall immediately report the incident to a school administrator who will notify the Director of Human Resources, unless the incident involves the safety or security of a student or staff member, in which case the Director of Operations will be called.

If it is determined that the incident is a direct result of cyber-bullying, the school administrator will refer to the procedure in the Bullying Policy/Procedure and complete the investigation as outlined therein.

Students and staff are encouraged to report the misuse of social media, including communications or invitations to communicate with staff members over social media to QACPS administrators/supervisors.

Administrators/supervisors shall report all incidents of misuse of social media to the appropriate supervisor for action unless the incident involves the safety or security of a student, in which case, the Director of Operations will be called.

The school administrator/designee should be aware that some acts pertaining to the misuse of social media could also be delinquent acts. If they are delinquent acts, they shall be reported promptly to the responsible law enforcement agency.

### **VIOLATION**

Employees' professional and personal use of Social Media may be monitored and investigated for violation of this Regulation. Threats discovered on social media sites should be reported to the Director of Operations and other supervisory personnel as appropriate. Employees found to be in violation of this regulation may face disciplinary

action up to and including dismissal, depending on the severity of the offense.

**F. REFERENCES**

- Acceptable Use of Electronic Networks Policy
- Americans with Disabilities Act Policy
- Bullying Harassment Intimidation Policy
- Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Policy
- Dating, Sexual Relations or Inappropriate Relationships between Staff and Students Policy
- Delinquent Acts of a Serious Nature and Sexual Abuse/Assault Reporting Policy
- Non-Discrimination Policy
- Obeying the Laws Policy
- Selling to Children and Parents Policy
- Student Handbook
- Title IX Policy

**Board Approval Acknowledged By:**

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Mr. Gregory Pilewski, Secretary and Treasurer  
Board of Education of Queen Anne's County