Purpose for Social Media Guidelines:

Guilford County Schools (GCS) realizes that part of 21st-century learning is adapting to the changing methods of communication. The importance of teachers, students and parents engaging, collaborating, learning and sharing in these digital environments is a part of 21st-century learning. To this aim, Guilford County Schools has adapted the following guidelines to provide direction for instructional employees, students and the School District community when participating in online social media activities.

Whether or not an employee chooses to participate in a blog, wiki, online social network or any other form of online publishing or discussion is his or her own decision. Free speech protects individuals who want to participate in social media, but the laws and courts have ruled that school districts can discipline employees if their speech, including personal online postings, disrupts school operations.

These guidelines have been created as a resource for you. It is important to create an atmosphere of trust and individual accountability. Keep in mind that information produced by GCS employees is a reflection on the entire District and is subject to the District's Acceptable Use Policy. Personal postings, even if marked private, may also be subject to relevant GCS policies and procedures, as well as to relevant local, state and federal laws. By accessing, creating or contributing to any blogs, wikis, podcasts or other social media for classroom or district use, you agree to abide by these guidelines. Please read them carefully before participating in any social media application.

What is Social Media?

User-created content online designed in a collaborative environment where users share opinions, knowledge and information with each other.

Tools include, but are not limited to:

- Blogs (Blogger, WordPress, etc.)
- Wikis (Wikispaces, Google Sites, etc.)
- Social Networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.)
- Photo and Video Sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr, etc.)
- Social Bookmarking (Diigo, Delicious)
- Podcasting and Vodcasting

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Personal Responsibility

Guilford County Schools (GCS) encourages district employees with a personal online presence to be mindful of the information they post. Your online behavior should reflect the same professional and personal standards of honesty, respect and consideration that you use face-to-face and in work-related settings.

Please note that even if you delete personal information, it still may be stored on the website's server for a longer period of time. Information that is marked "private" rarely is private on the Internet. It is very easy for "friends" to copy and paste information about you and send it or forward it to others, for example. There is no realistic expectation of privacy on the World Wide Web.

The lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred in the digital world. By virtue of identifying yourself as a GCS employee online, you are now connected to colleagues, students, parents and the school community. Use these connections wisely and well. You should also ensure that content associated with you is consistent with your work at GCS and your role as a public school/State employee.

It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the appropriate security settings for any social media (personal or professional) that you may use. Be sure that the settings are such that any personal content may only be viewed by your intended audience. Be aware that, even if your privacy settings are set properly, it is still possible for anyone who you've allowed to see your profile to copy and paste text and send it to someone else. It is also easy for others to "tag" or identify you in photos that they publish with or without your knowledge and permission. Similarly, if you enable settings such as Facebook's ability to allow "friends of friends" to view your content, it is extremely likely that unintended viewers will have access to pictures and other personal content.

It is inappropriate to use e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging or social networking sites to discuss with a student a matter that does not pertain to school-related activities. Appropriate discussions would include the student's homework, class activity, school sport or club or other school-sponsored activity. Electronic communications with students are to be sent simultaneously to multiple recipients, not to just one student, except where the communication is clearly school-related and inappropriate for persons other than the individual student to receive (for example, e-mailing a message about a student's grades).

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Engaging in personal social-networking friendships on MySpace, Facebook or other social networking sites is prohibited with students, and strongly discouraged with parents or guardians of students. The District recognizes that because of the tight-knit community of GCS, many staff members may have students or parents of students that are family members or close personal friends. However, the District cautions staff members against engaging in such social-networking friendships with these individuals. Use your official, school- or work-related page(s) instead.

A recommendation for staff to respond to "friend" requests on their personal pages is:

If you are a student or parent requesting to be my "friend," please do not be surprised or offended if I ignore your request. As an employee of Guilford County Schools, District procedures and practices discourage me from "friending" students or parents on my personal pages. I would encourage you to friend our school's (and/or classroom's, department's, the Guilford County Schools Facebook pages, etc.) page.

Material that employees post on social networks that is publicly available to those in the school community must reflect the professional image applicable to the employee's position and not impair the employee's capacity to maintain the respect of students and parents/guardians or impair the employee's ability to serve as a role model for children.

Professional Responsibility

While social media can be a powerful communication tool and an educational tool for students and parents, GCS employees are personally responsible for the content they publish online. Be mindful that what you publish will be public for a long time—protect your privacy.

Remember that social media in the classroom is an extension of your physical classroom. What is inappropriate in your classroom should be deemed inappropriate online. Teachers who use social networking to interact with students and/or parents in an educational manner or as a communication tool must find ways to interact without giving students and parents access to their personal information and posts. Many social network sites allow you to create "groups" or "pages" where you can interact with students without giving them access to your personal account. Please see detailed Facebook guidelines for more information.

When contributing online do not post confidential student information. Do not post pictures of any students on your personal sites.

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Use a GCS provided e-mail as your e-mail contact for official or school-related pages.

Do not use your GCS provided e-mail as a username or e-mail contact for personal pages.

Please remember that all GCS policies and procedures, as well as relevant local, state and federal laws (copyright, fair use, Family Education Right to Privacy Act, personnel statutes, criminal statutes, etc.) apply to social media communications.

Overall Guidelines for Using Social Media

The following are general guidelines for using social media whether personally or professionally.

Be Transparent

How you represent yourself online is an extension of yourself. Do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else's identity or misrepresenting your identity. Be honest about who you are, where you work and what you do.

Always a School Employee

Although the lines between public and private, personal and professional, can become blurred in the digital world, you will always be considered to be a GCS employee. Whether it is clearly communicated or not, you will be identified as an employee of the School District in what you do and say online. If you don't want it on the 10 p.m. news or in the daily newspaper - don't share it online.

School Values

Represent GCS district values. Express ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. All communications should be done in good taste. Build trust and responsibility in your relationships. Do not denigrate or insult others including students, staff, administrators, parents or other districts. Any online contributions must be in accordance with the appropriate policies, guidelines and relevant laws. Consider carefully what you post through comments and photos. A violation of these policies, guidelines and/or relevant laws could be regarded as a form of professional misconduct and may result in disciplinary action.

Build Community/Positively Represent School

Represent GCS, the students and parents you serve in the best light. Respect the privacy and the feelings of others. Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about students or colleagues (including administrators) nor the District in general. Negative comments about people may amount to cyber-bullying and could be

deemed a disciplinary offense. Your posts and comments should help build and support the school community. Do not comment on nor forward unsupported information, e.g. rumors. You are responsible for what you and others post, even if on a personal page, so be certain it is accurate and supports your organization. It is a good idea to monitor your profile page to ensure that all material posted by others doesn't violate these guidelines. Once posted you can't take it back.

Other Online Activities

Part of the Internet's popularity is its many online diversions. Be careful of gimmicks or games that many websites use to increase web traffic. Examples can include risqué surveys or quizzes. Often comments or information thought to be shared in private are capable of being shared publically. Also, employees may be disciplined for using their online access for non work-related purposes.

Share your Expertise

Write what you know and be accurate. Add value to the discussion. Post something useful. Provide worthwhile information and perspective. A district's most valuable asset is its staff represented by its people and what you publish may reflect on the school. Speak in the first person with your own voice and perspective.

Respectful and Responsible

Employees, parents, and students reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Be respectful for others' opinions in your posts or comments. You are responsible for the content you post. Do your tags, descriptions and your image portray you and the District in a professional manner?

Own and Correct Mistakes

If you make a mistake, admit the mistake and correct it quickly. Share your error with your principal, Human Resources, or District Relations so they can help address the issue effectively.

Clearly state if you've corrected a previous post. Even though damage may be done, it is best to admit your mistake and correct it. Apologize if appropriate.

Confidential Information

Online postings and conversations are not private. Do not share confidential information whether it is internal school discussions or specific information about students or other staff. What you post will be seen by others and will be online for a long time. It can be forwarded or shared in just a few clicks. Do not write about colleagues or students without their expressed permission.

School Logos

Obtain written permission before using any school or district logo or image. School logos may only be used in a professional capacity. When using social media for GCS or school-related purposes, please follow the GCS Style Guide. If you need assistance, please contact District Relations.

Posting Photos or Movies without Permission

Do not post or tag photos or movies of others without their permission. Do not use photos or movies taken at school without permission. Do not post photos or movies that contain students without parent consent.

Responding to Negative Comments and Criticism

How you respond to negative comments or criticism will say more about you and your character than what you post. When in doubt, it's best not to give it credibility by acknowledging it with a response publicly; perhaps a private response would be more appropriate. See the response guidelines for more information on responding to these types of comments.

Response and Post Regularly

To encourage readership, post regularly. Don't post to your blog and then not post for three weeks. Readers won't have a reason to follow you if they cannot expect new content regularly. Respond to other's posts. Answer questions; thank people even if it's just a few words. Make it a two-way conversation.

Spell Check and Abbreviations

Any online contribution should be well written. What you post will be online for the world to read.

Follow writing conventions including proper grammar, capitalization and punctuation. Be cautious about using common abbreviations. While your circle of friends may understand what you are saying, you may have readers from across the world who won't understand. When in doubt, define the abbreviation at least once in a post or include a definitions page on your site.

Copyright and Fair Use

Respect copyright and fair use guidelines. Share what others have said by linking to the source and using embedded content. Be sure to cite your source when quoting. When using a hyperlink, confirm that link goes where it should and that the content is appropriate. Keep in mind that copyright and fair use also apply to music. Do not post

presentations or videos using popular music, or any music or art that you have not obtained the appropriate permissions for use.

For example, just because you've purchased something for personal use doesn't mean you've purchased the right to broadcast it to others online.

Personal Information

Be careful about sharing too much personal information. People often share personal information such as their pet names, their parents and children's names, where they grew up, and more. This information may help a hacker guess your passwords. If you share that you will be out of town, a criminal may use this to target your home for a burglary. Do not share with a student your personal problems that would normally be discussed with adults. Be smart and don't share too much information.

Video

The Internet is becoming an increasingly popular educational tool and place to share personally created movies. You are responsible for all you do, say, and post online, including video. Anything you post online should represent you in a professional manner as others will see you as connected to the School District. Anything you show in your classroom should be previewed by you in its entirety, prior to any student seeing it. Consult a supervisor if you feel the content may be questionable.

Staff-Student Relations

Employees are prohibited from establishing personal relationships with students that are unprofessional and thereby inappropriate. Examples of unprofessional relationships include, but are not limited to: employees fraternizing or communicating with students as if employees and students were peers, such as writing personal letters or e-mails; personally texting or calling students, or allowing students to make personal calls to them unrelated to homework, class work, or other school-related business; sending inappropriate pictures to students; discussing or revealing to students personal matters about their private lives or inviting students to do the same (other than professional counseling by a school counselor); and engaging in sexualized dialogue, whether in person, by phone, via the Internet or in writing.

Employees who post information on Facebook, MySpace or similar websites that include inappropriate personal information such as, but not limited to: provocative photographs, sexually explicit messages, abuse of alcohol, drugs or anything students are prohibited from doing must understand that if students, parents or other employees obtain access to such information and report this to the district, their report will be investigated by school and district officials.

Adapted From:

Social Media Guidelines Wiki

Referenced Sites and Resources

Barrow County Schools: http://www.barrow.k12.ga.us/

Social Media Guidelines for Educators

(Facebook group): http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=80354045978

Social Media Guidelines for Schools - Andy Mann, Calhoun ISD

http://www.scribd.com/doc/28430149/Social-Media-Guidelines-for-Schools

Social Media Guidelines for Schools Wiki http://socialmediaguidelines.pbworks.com/

Think Social Media Guidelines:

http://thinkingmachine.pbworks.com/Think-Social-Media-Guidelines

A list of resources is provided at the end of this document. This is created to be shared, edited, updated and has been licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike license.