



PROCEDURE

SO-003

Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media Guidelines

Board Received: June 13, 2022

Review Date: September 2026

Responsibility: Superintendent of Education responsible for Information Technology

Purpose:

This procedure outlines appropriate use of electronic communication and social media, including third-party applications (apps) and services, to support effective engagement with Grand Erie communities and stakeholders.

Definitions

Electronic communication: Includes social media and other messaging forms that allow users to interact, create, share and communicate information online.

Social media: Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content, and/or participate in social networking. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, TikTok and online gaming sites.

Third-Party application (apps) and services: In the context of this procedure, any tools/apps/services not owned or operated by Grand Erie but are used to support processes or communication. (for example, SafeArrival)

Guiding Principles:

1. General

- a) Any activity that relates to the operation of the board and/or the education of students is considered the business of the board. All staff, students, Trustees and stakeholders of the board, including but not limited to, School Councils, the Grand Erie Parent Involvement Committee (GEPIC), and the Student Senate, must take this into consideration when using technology to communicate about the business of the Board.
- b) Social media platforms take time and effort to maintain for effective use. Consider objectives and audiences before committing to launching a new electronic communication platform. Reach out to the communications department for advice or counsel if required.
- c) Any use of the Grand Erie logo on social media must be approved by the communications department.
- d) Upon request, staff will provide any necessary log-in information and credentials to Grand Erie social media accounts. It is the responsibility of all parties to ensure user IDs and passwords are shared and stored in a secure manner.
- e) Social media accounts must be set up using an official Grand Erie email address. Personal email accounts are not to be used to set up Grand Erie social media accounts.
- f) Retweets, likes and favourites are perceived as endorsements. Information that promotes student, parent/caregiver, staff or community engagement can be retweeted or shared, but be aware of the source, and do not share from an account that could negatively impact the reputation of the Board.
- g) All content posted to social media networks must be accurate and current.
- h) Training opportunities can be provided in the use of platforms, tools, and techniques for the creation and publishing of online content. Training may be provided through workshops, online resources or one-to-one consultations with information technology

(IT) or communications department staff

- i) Support or guidance regarding specific techniques, questions or difficulties will be provided as needed. In many cases, the goal and purpose of such interactions will be to empower the person seeking help to learn something new, achieve a goal, resolve an issue or prevent future difficulties.
- j) Where possible, social media administrators must enforce a code of conduct for the use of the page, by posting language regarding unacceptable behaviour in the page's 'About' section and removing posts that violate the standards of behaviour. An example: *Please keep your posts clean, constructive and on topic. Unlawful, disrespectful, slanderous, defamatory, malicious, threatening, profane, obscene, tasteless, or pornographic remarks will not be tolerated, and will be deleted or reported without notice. Spam, campaigning, and advertising are also strictly prohibited. While we encourage free speech and debate, harassment, hate speech and attacks on others are unacceptable. Repeated abusers of this policy will be reported and may be blocked or banned.*

2. Privacy and safety

- a) No personal information or photographs shall be posted on messaging tools or social media without written informed consent of the parent/caregiver, or adult student if eighteen (18) years of age or older, or a student 16 years of age and older and removed from parental control.
- b) Photos where students cannot be identified may be posted without informed consent.
- c) With informed consent, when photos of students are posted, they will not include students' last names.
- d) With informed consent, when samples of students' work (for example: art, writing, science projects) are posted, they will not include students' last names.
- e) Under certain circumstances (for example, when celebrating awards or student achievement), a student's full name may be posted on Grand Erie websites and social media networks if and only if explicit informed consent is obtained which specifies the use of the student's full name.

3. School and department social media

- a) All information posted to Grand Erie school or departmental social media accounts is the responsibility of the principal or supervisor.
- b) All schools with official social media accounts must link to their school website in their social media account profile(s).
- c) Only Grand Erie staff may have administrative access to school or departmental social media accounts. parents/caregiver and students are not to be granted access.

4. Club/Group/Council social media

- a) Students, School Council representatives and staff are required to inform their school principal when creating an account connected to their school (e.g., a club, group, event, School Council or activity).
- b) All information posted to Grand Erie school club or group social media accounts is the responsibility of the principal of that school.
- c) All information posted to School Council social media accounts is the responsibility of the School Council account administrator.
- d) Clubs/Groups/Councils may have their own social media accounts; however these accounts must be clearly branded as such in both the social media account name and 'About' section. For example, if starting a group on Facebook, the name must be John PS School Council Facebook group, not John PS Facebook group.
- e) School Council account administrators will provide a copy of the necessary login information and credentials for the School Council social media sites to the school principal. Principals will keep this information confidential.

5. Staff use of electronic communication and social media

- a) A personal account for staff, whether the individual identifies their place of work or not, is considered public. Each time staff communicate, they shape public opinion about themselves, their profession, their school, the Grand Erie District School Board and public education. Statements such as, "Tweets are my own and do not reflect my employer's views" do not hold true. Staff must use sound judgement and due care when using social media both on and off duty.
- b) Do not follow students on their personal social media accounts.
- c) Review privacy settings to block student access to personal social media.
- d) Board or school personnel may discuss or address an individual's choice of content when that content is inconsistent with this procedure and/or is counter to the Board's vision and mission.

6. Third-party applications (apps) and services

- a) All schools and departments must only use board-approved third-party apps or services that have gone through the board's vetting process and must follow the guidelines established for safe and accessible use. The board needs to be able to monitor the use of all apps and services to protect the safety and privacy of staff and students.

When the board finds that a violation of this Procedure has occurred, it may result in the imposition of one or more of the following:

1. Administration of the Progressive Discipline process found in Procedure (HR-119)
2. Governance Policy #4 Trustee Code of Conduct Usage of board computer equipment and applications restricted or removed
3. Disciplinary action up to and including student expulsion
4. Disciplinary action up to and including employee termination
5. Civil or criminal proceedings

References:

- Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media Guidelines (SO-03)
- Code of Conduct Policy (SO-12)
- Acceptable Use of Information Technology Policy (SO-27)
- Accessibility Policy (SO-31)
- *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (2005)*
- Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario – *Electronic Communication and Social Media: Advice to Members*
- *Integrated Accessibility Standards (Ontario Regulation 191/11)*
- *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*
- Ontario College of Teachers – *Professional Advisory: Use of electronic communication and social media*
- *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*