

SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY SCHOOL COMMITTEE

As elected public officials, School Committee members shall exercise caution when communicating between and among themselves via electronic messaging services including but not limited to electronic mail communications, Internet web platforms and social media.

Under the Open Meeting Law, deliberation by a quorum (three out of five) members constitutes a meeting. Deliberation is defined as movement towards a decision including but not limited to the sharing of an opinion regarding business over which the committee has supervision, control or jurisdiction. A quorum may be arrived at sequentially using electronic messaging without knowledge and intent by the author.

School Committee members should use electronic messaging, between and among members only for housekeeping purposes such as requesting or communicating agenda items, meeting times, meeting dates or to share information for which no action or response is required. Electronic messaging should not be used amongst a quorum of the school committee (which quorum may be arrived at directly or by serial communication) to discuss committee matters that require public discussion under the Open Meeting Law. School Committee members are to be aware that under the public records law, electronic messages between public officials may be considered public records and are to act accordingly.

Members should take the same precautions when posting on any private social media sites and always keep in mind the School Committee policy and Code of Ethics. Recognizing that it may be difficult to determine whether communication constitutes deliberation under the Open Meeting Law, the Attorney General's office cautions public bodies on the use of Facebook and other social media.

When a School Committee member uses social media, email, or other online communication platforms, to communicate about the school district, they should:

1. Clarify that they are communicating as an individual member of the committee, and not an official district spokesperson;
2. Avoid deliberating school district business with a quorum of the committee;
3. If appropriate, and using reasonable efforts, direct complaints or concerns presented online to the appropriate administrator;
4. Avoid posting content that indicates they have already formed an opinion on any pending matters;
5. Post only content that the district has already released through the proper channels to the public;
6. When attempting to restate what happened at a previous meeting, clarify that the posting is not an official record of the committee meeting and be sure to share only information from the open portions of the meeting;

7. Use best efforts to always conduct themselves online in a respectful manner that reflects well on the district;
8. Avoid posting information that has not been made public by the district at an open meeting or otherwise electronically distributed by the district to the public, and never post anonymously about school business;
9. If appropriate, immediately report harassing or defamatory communications to the superintendent if they involve school officials, staff, students or district business;
10. Retain electronic records-including their own posts and content others post to their account-when required to do so by the public records law;
11. Immediately report to the superintendent any potential breach if they lose control of a district-issued or personal electronic device on which confidential district records could be accessed; and
12. Comply with the district's acceptable use policy when using district-issued devices or technology resources, including district Internet access on a personal device.

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