



**Humboldt County  
Office of Education**

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# ***SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES***



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## **PURPOSE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN EDUCATION**

Emerging platforms for online collaboration are fundamentally changing the way we communicate with educators, support students, and serve communities. The Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE) recognizes the importance of using social media as a tool to connect and share information with our stakeholders. With proper security precautions, HCOE supports the use of social media as a valuable tool to further its vision and mission.

News, websites, and television continue to be the primary sources of information, with social media seeing rapid growth. Staying current and engaging families and the community with a strong web presence is increasingly important. Pairing websites with communication channels like phone calls, emails, and social media will ensure a message maintains consistency and allows us to engage with people where they are gathering their information.

An official HCOE social media platform is a site authorized by the Humboldt County Superintendent of Schools and/or Communications Center. Sites that have not been authorized by the Superintendent or designee, but contain content related to the organization or comments on educational operations, such as a site created by a school or related organization, a student or employee's personal site, are not considered official HCOE social media platforms.

These basic guidelines will assist managers, staff, and students of HCOE who will create, administer or post to social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram on behalf of the organization.

The purpose of using social media is to share news and information about programs, events, and resources within the educational context. This document contains HCOE's guidelines regarding the use of online social media. These guidelines will continue to evolve as new social media tools and platforms are introduced.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR EMPLOYEES AND ASSOCIATED PERSONS**

All Employees and Associated Persons of the Humboldt County Office of Education are responsible for adhering to the following list of responsibilities. Associated Persons include contractors, service providers, volunteers, or others working on behalf of HCOE programs.

1. Employees and Associated Persons shall obtain approval by the Superintendent of Schools or designee before setting up any social media platforms on behalf of any HCOE departments, programs, or services.
2. Employees and Associated Persons are responsible for the information they post, share, or respond to online.
3. Employees and Associated Persons are encouraged to utilize privacy settings to control access to personal networks, web pages, profiles, posts, digital media, forums, fan pages, etc.
4. Employees and Associated Persons should avoid online interactions with current students, and alumni under the age of 18, on social networking sites outside of those websites/webpages dedicated for educational use.
5. Employees and Associated Persons should only contact students under the age of 18 for educational purposes.
6. Employees and Associated Persons should not post photos or videos of fellow employees without their permission.
7. Employees and Associated Persons who use social media shall not post photos, videos, or written information about students without written parent/legal guardian consent.
8. Employees and Associated Persons who use social media or identify themselves online as a HCOE employee or associate should ensure that their profile maintains professionalism and is consistent with how they wish to present themselves to colleagues, parents/legal guardians, and students.
9. Employees who post inappropriate, threatening, harassing, racist, biased, derogatory, disparaging or bullying comments toward or against any individual on any social media site may be subject to disciplinary or other legal action.

10. When discussing HCOE related matters in online social media, employees should write in the first person and identify themselves by name and, if relevant, by HCOE title. Employees and Associated Persons should consider adding a disclaimer to their personnel social media sites: *“The opinions and positions expressed on this site are my own and do not necessarily reflect the positions, strategies, or opinions of HCOE.”* This standard disclaimer does not exempt employees from their responsibilities as explained in these guidelines.
11. Employees and Associated Persons shall not share confidential information at any time.
12. Use of any HCOE or program-related logos or images as a profile on one’s personal social networking sites is prohibited unless approved in advance. If an employee wishes to promote a specific HCOE activity or event, the employee should contact the Superintendent or Communications Center for guidance/permission.
13. Employees should be aware that all their online activity is public.
14. Employees and Associated persons shall ensure any student or individual has a signed media release on file prior to any type of public media post.

### **TIPS FOR RESPONSIBLE SOCIAL MEDIA USE**

1. Comments should be civil and include information that accurately reflects the Humboldt County Office of Education, its programs, and/or services.
2. Employees should be mindful that what is published online will potentially be archived for years to come.
3. Employees should be aware that all policies of HCOE may apply to interactions between colleagues across social media platforms.
4. It is illegal for employees to endorse a commercial product or service or a political party or election issue while using HCOE sponsored social media platforms.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA PAGES**

Department managers and staff are encouraged to work with the Communications Center so updates and important information can be shared on their behalf to appropriate social media channels.

No division, department or employee is permitted to create a stand-alone social media page or on-line presence without the prior approval from the Superintendent or Communications Center.

The Communications Center manages the social media platforms for HCOE. Only Communications Center staff members and pre-approved users are authorized to post and/or update HCOE-related social media platforms.

Pre-approved page administrators must clearly define long-term goals for their social media page, indicate who will be responsible for regularly creating and adding content, and decide who will be responsible for monitoring and answering questions from the public, removing inappropriate comments, etc.

## USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media posts reflect on the Humboldt County Office of Education and should therefore be written and structured in an appropriate, ethical, professional, and lawful manner. Use of HCOE official social media sites and approved programs indicates that you have read and will abide by the responsibility guidelines. HCOE reserves the right to **moderate and remove any comments and posts** that do not fall within its official guidelines on official HCOE platforms.

1. Employees and Associated Persons are welcome and encouraged to engage with HCOE social media sites (e.g., comments, photo tagging, retweets, etc.). You do not need prior approval to engage with social media if the use is in accordance with the policies, guidelines and best practices referenced in this manual. Districts are encouraged to engage with and cross promote HCOE related sites and use the same social media guidelines and procedures that govern social media usage.
2. This office reserves the right to remove content or comments that violate the “**Content Deletion Guidelines**” listed below:
  - Are defamatory, discriminatory, harassing, bullying, intimidating, hateful, libelous, obscene or may be considered hostile
  - Contains unauthorized commercial solicitations, such as spam or includes links to other sites
  - Is clearly off topic and/or presents misinformation
  - Advocates illegal activity
  - Infringes on copyrights or trademarks
  - Obscenities/obscene materials
  - Comments/materials pertaining to violence
  - Comments that are not respectful
  - Commenters who misrepresent themselves
  - A single person who is dominating the conversation
  - An advertisement for a commercial business
  - Information that violates student privacy
  - Information that violates staff privacy

3. Logos or images produced and representing this office and/or related programs may not be posted to a social media site without specific approval from the Superintendent or Communications Center.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA POSTING BEST PRACTICES AND CONSIDERATIONS**

Although online conversations and media posts on social media sites are often casual, they must remain professional and respectful. Comments on social media pages may be monitored to ensure compliance with its social networking guidelines. Those posts not in compliance with HCOE guidelines will be removed.

1. Consider a few basic objectives before creating a social media post:
  - What do you plan to achieve with this social media post?
  - What kind of information do you want to share or receive on the page?
  - Who (what audience) will engage, read and comment on your social media post?
  - Is this social media site the appropriate venue for your communication?
2. Personal information should not be posted on social media sites, including but not limited to: Student Identification Numbers, Employee Identification Numbers, Social Security Numbers, Personal Addresses, Phone Numbers, or Driver's License Numbers.
3. Social media sites are not private, and the expectation of privacy is not conveyed to you as a user or administrator of the site. Expect questions, feedback and comments directed to you individually.
4. Photos/Videos posted on social media pages should accurately portray the Humboldt County Office of Education and the persons depicted in the photos/videos. The following guidelines should be followed when posting photos/videos:
  - Photos/Videos must not violate the "Content Deletion Guidelines" (see above).
  - Photos/Videos of children should not be posted without expressed consent release from their parents/legal guardians. Always use great caution when posting photos/videos of young children.
  - Photos/Videos of public events can be posted on social media sites, but they should be appropriate and reflect the organization in a positive light. The posts should contain content that may be posted on HCOE's approved social media and web sites in accordance with HCOE guidelines. Basic rules of good taste and appropriate policy standards will be observed.
  - Photos/Videos that are not public or are not produced by HCOE must have a media release signed by each person in the photo/video.

5. Consider the image you want to portray about HCOE and yourself to the public. Be mindful that what you post may be viewed by parents/legal guardians, students, administrators, and community members. As we all know, in this digital age, *posts stay public for a long, long time.*

- Ensure that you are providing accurate information at all times.
- Use your best judgment, and if in doubt, don't post.
- Don't be afraid to seek advice by contacting the Communications Center for guidance.

6. Social media site design/colors should maintain uniformity with HCOE or program color and official design standards from site to site. These design schemes, along with the official HCOE logo(s), represent our unique branding presentation to the public. HCOE social media sites should refer to the latest logo/color scheme usage guidelines to maintain uniformity in our branding practices and outreach to the community. Please contact the Communications Center for guidance, if needed.

## **LEGAL LIABILITY**

Employees need to be aware that they are legally liable for anything they may write or present online. They can be sued by any individual or organization, including other HCOE employees, who view such commentary, content, or images as defamatory, pornographic, proprietary, harassing, libelous or creating a hostile work environment.

## **PRESS INQUIRES**

Postings may generate media coverage. If a member of the media contacts you about a social media posting or requests additional information, please contact the Communications Manager to provide further information or arrange for contact with the content provider. Always confirm that any information posted has been publicly disclosed.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY**

Respect the privacy of management and staff and the opinions of others. Before sharing a comment, post, picture, or video, obtain their permission first.

## **ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE**

For more information, or to request a post using HCOE social media platforms, please contact Ken Conlin, Communications Manager at (707) 445-7767 or [kconlin@hcoe.org](mailto:kconlin@hcoe.org)