

Social Media Guidelines

How to Ensure Your Personal Use Doesn't Hurt You Professionally



Let's define social media

For our purposes, social media is any online forum, platform or program that allows users to connect with each other while online. This includes, but is not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, MySpace, blogs and online role-playing games.

vbschools.com

your virtual link to Hampton Roads' largest school system

Virginia Beach City Public Schools
2512 George Mason Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23456-0038

Produced by the Department of Media and Communications.
For further information, please call (757) 263-1949.

Notice of Non-Discrimination Policy

Virginia Beach City Public Schools does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs and activities and provides equal access to the Boy Scouts and other designated youth groups. School Board policies and regulations (including, but not limited to, Polices 2-33, 4-4, 4-43, 5-7, 5-33, 5-44, 6-7, 7-11, 7-48, 7-49 and Regulations 5-44.1, 7-11.1, 7-57.1) provide equal access to courses, programs, counseling services, physical education and athletic, vocational education, instructional materials, and extracurricular activities.

To seek resolution of grievances resulting from alleged discrimination or to report violations of these policies, please contact the Title IX Coordinator/Director of Student Leadership at (757) 263-2020, 1413 Laskin Road, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23451 (for student complaints) or the Section 504/ADA Coordinator/Chief Human Resources Officer at (757) 263-1133, 2512 George Mason Drive, Municipal Center, Building 6, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456 (for employees or other citizens). Concerns about the application of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act should be addressed to the Section 504 Coordinator/Director of Guidance Services and Student Records at (757) 263-1980, 2512 George Mason Drive, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23456 or the Section 504 Coordinator at the student's school.

Alternative formats of this publication which may include taped, Braille, or large print materials are available upon request for individuals with disabilities. Call or write Sandi Maxwell, Virginia Beach City Public Schools, 2512 George Mason Drive, P.O. Box 6038, Virginia Beach, VA 23456-0038. Telephone 263-1949 (voice); fax 263-1010; 263-1240 (TDD) or email her at sandi.maxwell@vbschools.com.



No part of this publication may be produced or shared in any form without giving specific credit to Virginia Beach City Public Schools.

Why does VBCPS need social media guidelines?

Social media and online platforms can be a terrific way to connect communities, schools, businesses, family members and friends. However, the wrong content at the wrong time can cause substantial conflict, turmoil and even loss of professional standing. While earlier generations might have defined “going viral” as spreading the flu, today going viral involves massive – and sometimes unintended – audiences viewing your personal/professional news, photos or videos in the online setting.

Virginia Beach City Public Schools (VBCPS) recognizes that employees have the right to keep their personal interests separate from their business interests. However, we all must acknowledge, the public holds public employees, particularly educators, to the highest standards of ethical and moral conduct. Consequently, what VBCPS employees say or do on social media can impact how parents, other staff and the community view you professionally. To help employees strike that right balance between preserving personal freedom of expression and maintaining the professionalism demanded of those working in public education, VBCPS has developed the following guidelines for the use of social media by employees.



Guiding Social Media Principles for VBCPS Employees

- 1 Make sure that others know your personal opinion is just that – your personal opinion.** When interacting on any social media platform you may be regarded, by virtue of your job, as a representative of Virginia Beach City Public Schools. Consequently, it’s important that you do not misrepresent yourself on any of these channels by claiming to speak as a division representative on any issue.
- 2 Be careful when and where you are posting –** Yes, smartphones are incredible pieces of technology. With the push of just one button, you are instantly able to post to your Facebook page, Twitter account or send a personal email. And, you can do it all without using the VBCPS server, and, thereby, not violate the Acceptable Use Agreement. However, posting while you are on the job could raise issues with supervisors or parents who can see the timing of your posts.
- 3 Do not establish personal relationships with students –** Some employees may be maintaining social media platforms for communicating professionally with students on instructional and extracurricular school activities. However, school employees should **not** establish personal relationships with students on any personal social media platform (*e.g., friending, following, private messaging*).
- 4 Do not post student photos, work or any other identifying information about students –** When VBCPS plans to allow media coverage of student and school activities or use student photos or work online or in any of its publications, we obtain signed media release forms from parents. You should not shortcut that process by posting student photos or work on your personal social media channels. However, if local media has published an online story or interview with your students, you can feel free to share that link on your social media channels as the appropriate media releases will be in place. One last note: This does not mean you can’t publish photos of your son and his basketball team, just because several of them are VBCPS students, for example. In cases like this -- when the relationships are personal and the activities have taken place outside of the school system’s purview -- the choice of what to post is yours. *The rule of thumb is this: If the children involved in the potential posting are engaging as VBCPS students, don’t post.*

- 5 Remember school values –** Because you are a VBCPS employee, it is likely others will associate you with the school division. Consequently, take care to uphold the division’s values and mission when you are on your social media sites. Express your ideas and opinions on new school division initiatives and programs in a respectful, thoughtful manner. This is not to say you cannot disagree with division decisions. No one wants to work in a world full of “yes men and women.” We actually seek your feedback. Constructive criticism helps build stronger plans. Yet, you have to communicate those opinions considerately.
- 6 Do not insult others online or use questionable language –** Whether it is your boss, coworker, a student’s parent or your next door neighbor, do not use your social media sites to vent about specific people. The use of ethnic slurs, obscenities, innuendos, inappropriate content or other questionable language could find its way to the very audience you would least want to see it. While every employee is entitled to his/her First Amendment rights, you should still carefully consider the ramifications of every post, comment, status update or email. When in doubt, leave it out.
- 7 Take caution in posting about your personal activities –** Employees certainly have the right to enjoy activities after school and on weekends. That said, posting about all of your activities – including those related to alcohol, tobacco or other provocative behavior – can lead to repercussions in your professional world.
- 8 Do not use the VBCPS logo –** Using the logo for any of your personal social media posts implies you are speaking either on behalf of or representing Virginia Beach City Public Schools. Again, as previously mentioned, this is not to be the stance taken on social media channels.
- 9 Observe VBCPS rules of conduct –** Your behavior online – just as your behavior out of the classroom – still falls under all of the governing rules and regulations of VBCPS (*Standards of Conduct in the Employee Handbook, School Board Policy 4-2*). Remember, your actions have the same consequences on the virtual space as they do in reality.