

Policy #: 451
Title: <b>APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA</b>
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Reviewers: MSA Superintendent; MSAB Director; MSAD Director; MSA Human Resources

## I. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Minnesota State Academies face the challenge of balancing the secure use of social media to enhance communication, collaboration and information exchange for the greater MSA community with the need to protect the privacy of our students as well as protecting the ability of employees' to freely express themselves. This policy establishes MSA's position on the utility and management of social media and provides guidance on the management, administration, and oversight. This policy is not intended to address one particular form of social media, but rather social media in general, as advances in technology will occur and new tools/platforms will emerge. This policy governs the appropriate use of social media at all times, including both work and non-work time, by MSA employees, consultants, and contractors.

## II. GENERAL STATEMENT OF POLICY

Social media provides a new and potentially valuable means of assisting the Academies and its employees in meeting community outreach, communication, collaboration, and information exchange with parents, students, and community members. This policy identifies potential uses that may be explored or expanded upon as deemed reasonable by the Superintendent and Directors of MSA. MSA also recognizes the role that these tools play in the personal lives of some employees and that the personal use of social media can have bearing on employees in their official capacity. As such, this policy provides information of a precautionary nature as well as prohibitions on the use of social media by MSA employees.

## III. DEFINITIONS

- *Blog/Vlog:* A self-published diary or commentary on a particular topic that may allow visitors to post responses, reactions, or comments. The term is short for "Web log". Vlog refers to Blogs that are published via video (commonly used by deaf people instead of sharing information via printed media)
- *Page:* The specific portion of a social media website where content is displayed, and managed by an individual or individuals with administrator rights
- *Post:* Content an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site.
- *Profile:* Information that a user provides about themselves on a social networking site.
- *Social Media:* A category of Internet-based resources that integrate user-generated content and user participation. This includes, but is not limited to, social networking sites (Facebook, MySpace), micro-blogging sites (Twitter, Nixle), photo- and video-sharing sites (Flickr, YouTube, Instagram), wikis (Wikipedia), blogs/vlogs, and news sites (Digg, Reddit).
- *Social Networks:* Online platforms where users can create profiles, share information, and socialize with others using a range of technologies.
- *Speech:* Expression or communication of thoughts or opinions in spoken words/sign language, in writing, by expressive conduct, symbolism, photographs, videos, or related forms of communication.
- *Web 2.0:* The second generation of the World Wide Web focused on shareable, user-generated content, rather than static web pages. Some use this term interchangeably with social media.
- *Wiki:* Web page(s) that can be edited collaboratively.

#### IV. ON-THE-JOB USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

##### A. MSA-Approved Social Media: Guiding Principles

- a. When possible, each social media page shall include an introductory statement that clearly specifies the purpose and scope of the Minnesota State Academies' presence on that site.
- b. When possible, the page/post should link to the Minnesota State Academies' official websites.
- c. The Social Media pages/posts should be developed/written for the target audience (such as families, students, or other community members)
- d. MSA employees who are assigned the responsibility of representing MSA on social media outlets should ensure accessibility of those pages/posts (audio description, captions, voice-over, ASL, etc. as appropriate).
- e. The traditional communication rules of reasonableness, respect, courtesy and common sense, and legal requirements also apply to social media outlets.

##### B. Procedures

- a. All MSA social media sites or pages shall be approved by the MSA superintendent and shall be administrated by designees selected by the MSA superintendent and/or Directors of the Academies.
- b. Social media sites (where possible) shall clearly indicate that they are maintained by MSA and shall have MSA contact information prominently displayed.
- c. Social media content shall adhere to applicable laws, regulations and policies, including all privacy requirements for students and all information technology and records management policies. Social media content must also adhere to MSA's website/social media accessibility policy. (Policy # 103) Individuals managing MSA social media outlets must maintain a list of student permission forms regarding media releases and privacy expectations.
- d. When possible, social media posts should state that the opinions expressed by visitors to the page(s) do not reflect the opinions of the Academies.
  - i. Pages shall clearly indicate that posted comments will be monitored and that the Academies reserve the right to remove obscenities, off-topic comments, and personal attacks.
  - ii. Pages shall clearly indicate that any content posted or submitted for posting is subject to public disclosure.

##### C. MSA-Sanctioned Use

- a. MSA employees representing the Academies via social media outlets shall follow the guidelines below:
  - i. Conduct themselves at all times as representatives of the Minnesota State Academies and, accordingly, adhere to all MSA standards for conduct, and observe conventionally accepted protocols and proper decorum.
  - ii. Identify themselves as an employee of the Minnesota State Academies
  - iii. Maintain confidentiality, following expectations outlined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

- iv. Utilize department computers and/or mobile devices to manage MSA social media activities.
- b. Potential Uses of Social Media
  - i. Community Outreach and engagement by:
    - 1. Providing tips related to education and language development
    - 2. Offering opportunities for communication with school administration
    - 3. Sharing information and announcements about upcoming events open to the community/parents
    - 4. Soliciting input and feedback about school-related projects and/or policies
  - ii. Time –sensitive notifications related to:
    - 1. Transportation changes and updates
    - 2. Weather emergencies
    - 3. Security and Safety of students
    - 4. Special events, including last-minute scheduling changes
  - iii. Recruitment of potential employees or volunteers
    - 1. Information about current programs
    - 2. Information about current vacancies
    - 3. Opportunities for volunteers
  - iv. Information sharing with potential students and their families
    - 1. Information about school programs and extracurricular activities
    - 2. Information about successful students and alumni
    - 3. Family events at the Academies
    - 4. Contact persons for questions about the Academies

**V. PERSONAL USE: Precautions and Prohibitions**

Barring state law or binding employment contracts to the contrary, MSA employees should be aware of the following considerations and take precautions when using social media.

- a. MSA employees are free to express themselves as private citizens on social media sites but are encouraged to take care that their speech does not impair their positive working relationships with other employees, parents, families, and students at the Minnesota State Academies. Examples of sensitive situations may include the following: Situations in which confidentiality is important; Opinions that may exclude or offend minority groups at work; Comments about co-workers that may impair discipline and harmony among co-workers; or comments that may negatively affect the public perception of the Academies.
- b. As public employees, MSA employees are cautioned that speech on- or off-duty, made pursuant to their official duties – that is, that owes its existence to the employee’s professional duties and responsibilities – is not protected speech under the First Amendment and may form the basis for discipline if their speech is determined to be a violation of policies of the Minnesota State Academies. MSA employees should assume that their speech and related activities on social media sites will reflect upon their position and MSA. Employees must also maintain

confidentiality, following expectations outlined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

- c. MSA employees shall not post, transmit, or otherwise disseminate any information to which they have access as a result of their employment without authorization from the Superintendent or the Directors of the Academies.
- d. When using social media, MSA employees should be mindful that their speech becomes part of the worldwide electronic domain. Therefore adherence to MSA's code of conduct is expected in the personal use of social media. In particular, MSA employees should be mindful of the impact of their comments on students and families, particularly with speech containing obscene or sexually explicit language, images or acts; or statements or other forms of speech that ridicule, malign, disparage, or otherwise express bias against any race, any religion, or any protected class of individuals. Employees also should take caution about speech involving themselves or other employees that reflect behavior that may be reasonably considered as reckless or irresponsible.
- e. MSA employees may not divulge information gained by reason of their authority; make any statements, speeches, appearances and endorsements; or publish materials that could be reasonably considered to represent the views or positions of the Minnesota State Academies without express authorization. This includes pictures, videos, and other materials taken during work time.
- f. MSA employees should be aware that privacy settings and social media sites are constantly in flux and they should never assume that personal information posted on such sites is protected.
- g. MSA employees should expect that any information created, transmitted, downloaded, exchanged, or discussed in a public online forum may be accessed by MSA at any time without prior notice.
- h. MSA employees are prohibited from utilizing work time to access/manage their personal social media sites without express authorization. When using MSA's computer systems, use of social media for business purposes is allowed, but personal use of social media networks or personal blogging of online content may result in disciplinary action.

VI. **REPORTING VIOLATIONS**

Any employee becoming aware of or having knowledge of a posting or any website/webpage in violation of the provisions of this policy shall notify their supervisor immediately for follow-up action.