

COMMITTEE MEMBER USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The Committee recognizes that many, if not most, of its members are active users of social media, including, but not limited to, online platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, and other digital media such as blogs and personal websites. The Committee understands that while social media can be a positive tool for supporting schools and encouraging community engagement, Committee members need to be aware of the legal and ethical considerations that arise when they post, “message,” or otherwise interact with others on social media platforms.

It is not the intent of this policy to interfere with or restrict a Committee members’ freedom of speech, but to set standards for social media conduct that are consistent with law and Committee policy, including the Committee’s Code of Ethics.

Committee members shall comply with the following provisions:

- Committee members shall not post on social media or engage in online discussions as a substitute for deliberations at Committee meetings. Committee members should be aware that social media activity can be perceived as a meeting if a sufficient number (a quorum) of Committee members are involved on the site to influence or determine the course of action that will be taken by the Committee, even if other people are posting to the site as well.
- Committee members should be aware that any posting that pertains to School Department matters may create a “record” that is subject to laws and regulations pertaining to the retention and disposition of local government records, and to discovery in legal proceedings involving the Committee or the School Department.
- Committee members shall avoid disclosing confidential or personally identifiable information about students (including images), School Department employees, or Committee matters or discussions that have taken place in executive sessions. Committee members shall comply with the same standards as School Department employees with regard to confidential information.

Committee members should adhere to the following ethical guidelines when using social media in their role as public officials:

A Committee member should:

- Recognize that he/she has no authority to speak on behalf of the Committee or the School Department unless specifically designated to do so;
- Conduct himself/herself on social media in a manner that reflects well on the Committee and on the School Department, and with the decorum expected of an elected official;
- Avoid posting in anger, even when provoked;
- Refrain from harassing, defaming, or disparaging fellow Committee members or others based on racial, religious, or other personal characteristics;
- Keep deliberations within meetings of the Committee;



- Take care to avoid disclosing confidential or personally identifiable information about students (including images), School Department employees, or Committee discussions that have taken place in executive sessions;
- Avoid posting information that is misleading or inaccurate or which has not been released to the public;
- Not make any promise that he/she will vote in a particular way;
- Avoid posting content that indicates he/she has reached an opinion on a pending matter;
- Direct persons presenting concerns or complaints through social media to follow the Committee's protocol pertaining to public concerns and complaints;
- Retain electronic records, including the Committee member's own posts and content others post to the Committee member's account when required to do so by law, regulations, or legal process.
- Comply with the School Department's acceptable use rules, as applicable to School Department employees, when using School Department devices or technology resources, or when accessing the Internet through School Department's network using a personal device.

Legal Reference: 1 MRSA § 401 et seq.
20-A MRSA § 6001-6002
20 USC § 1232g

Cross Reference: BBAA–Board Member Authority and Responsibilities
BBF–Board Member Code of Ethics
BDC–Executive Sessions
GBJ–Personnel Records and Files
JFH–Public Concerns and Complaints
JO–Student Education Records and Information

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