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SUBJECT: SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction/Purpose

The Greater Southern Tier BOCES believes social media technology can serve as a powerful tool to enhance education, communication, and learning. This technology can provide both educational and professional benefits, including preparing BOCES students to succeed in their educational and career endeavors.

BOCES is committed to ensuring that all stakeholders who use social media technology for professional purposes described below, including staff and students, do so in a safe and responsible manner. The BOCES strives to create professional social media environments that mirror the academically supportive environments of our schools.

This policy provides direction regarding practices for professional and personal social media communication by BOCES employees¹, as well as social media communication between BOCES employees and BOCES students.² Please refer to the BOCES' Acceptable Use Policy for additional direction.

Definition of Social Media

Social media is defined as any form of online publication or presence that allows interactive communication, including, but not limited to, social networks, blogs, Internet websites, Internet forums, and wikis. Examples of social media include, but are not limited to, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Google+, and Flickr.

Professional social media is a work-related social media activity (e.g., a BOCES principal establishing a Facebook page for his/her program or a BOCES teacher establishing a blog for his/her class).

Personal social media use is a non-work-related social media activity (e.g., a BOCES employee establishing a Facebook page or a Twitter account for his/her own personal use).

¹ "BOCES employee" includes any individual with regular or long-term substitute employment with BOCES.

² "Student" is defined as pupils enrolled in a BOCES program who has not earned a diploma (i.e., this definition does not adult education students). This policy does not address student-to-student communication via social media. The Code of Conduct, together with the BOCES' Bill of Student Rights and Responsibilities and the Dignity for All Students Act policy, set forth expected standards of behavior with respect to student communication.

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Professional Social Media Use

1. Maintaining Separate Professional and Personal E-mail Accounts

BOCES employees who decide to engage in professional social media activities must maintain separate professional and personal e-mail addresses. As such, BOCES employees may not use their personal e-mail address for professional social media activities. Instead, employees must use a professional e-mail address that is completely separate from any personal social media they maintain. Regular and continuous use of a personal e-mail address for professional purposes, including social media use, may result in BOCES considering the e-mail address, and the corresponding use of that address, as a professional account.

2. Communication with BOCES Students

BOCES employees who work with students and communicate³ with students through professional social media sites⁴ must adhere to the following rules:

- a. Professional social media sites must be designed to address reasonable instructional, educational, or extra-curricular program matters.⁵ Communications between BOCES employees and students through professional social media sites must be related to classroom, instructional, extra-curricular, or other official BOCES matters.
- b. Each school year, BOCES' parents⁶ will be notified about the professional social media activities in which their children may participate. BOCES will instruct parents to contact the school with any questions or concerns they may have about such social media.

3. Professional Social Media Sites

- a. BOCES employees will treat professional social media space and communication like a classroom and/or a professional workplace. The same standards expected in BOCES professional settings are expected on professional social media sites. If a particular type of behavior is inappropriate in the classroom or a professional

³ The term "communicates", as used in this policy, refers to activity, including, but not limited to, "friending," "following," "commenting," and "posting messages" using social media sites.

⁴ The term "site" and "sites" refer to an online social media account or usage.

⁵ BOCES employees must use school-based professional social media sites that involve BOCES students for professional purposes only.

⁶ The term parent means the student's parent or guardian, or any person in a parental or custodial relationship to the student. This includes: birth or adoptive parent, step-parent, legally appointed guardian, and foster parent.

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workplace, then that behavior is also inappropriate on the professional social media site;

- b. BOCES employees will exercise caution, sound judgment, and common sense when using professional social media sites.
- c. When establishing professional social media sites, supervisors and employees must consider the intended audience for the site and consider the level of privacy assigned to the site, specifically, whether the site should be a private network (for example, it is limited to a particular class or particular grade with in a school) or a public network (for example, anyone within the school, a larger group within the BOCES community can participate or individuals outside of the BOCES). It is recommended practice for professional social media sites to be private networks, unless there is a specific educational need for the site to be a public network.
- d. To the extent possible, based on the social media site being used, BOCES supervisors or their designees must be given access to the professional social media accounts established by BOCES employees that includes the ability to alter content.
- e. BOCES employees must obtain their supervisor’s approval before setting up a professional social media presence.
- f. Supervisors and their designees are responsible for maintaining a list of all professional social media accounts within their particular program or office and transmitting that list to their successors.
- g. Professional BOCES social media sites must identify the BOCES program or service using the site and include the following language to identify the sites as a professional social media BOCES site:

“Greater Southern Tier BOCES is not liable for the content or comments posted to this site. Any inappropriate content may be removed. This site is subject to monitoring at all times.”
- h. Programs or services that wish to create a professional social media presence must review their plans for a site with BOCES’ Community Information Service prior to creating a social media presence.
- i. Once a professional social media site is approved, BOCES employees must use privacy settings to control access to their professional social media sites with the objective that professional social media communications only reach the intended

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audience. Furthermore, if possible, the employee maintaining a professional social media site will establish settings that will require him/her to approve all messages or photos before they are posted on the site.

- j. Professional social media communication must be in compliance with existing BOCES policies and applicable laws, including, but not limited to, prohibitions on the disclosure of confidential information and prohibitions on the use of harassing, obscene, bullying, discriminatory, defamatory or threatening language. Any violation of this policy may be subject to BOCES counseling and/or discipline in accordance with the applicable law, policy or contract, which may result in a counseling memorandum, reprimand, fine, suspension without pay, and or dismissal from employment.
- k. No personally identifiable student information may be posted by BOCES employees on professional social media sites that are open beyond the classroom. If images of students are to be posted online there must be a media consent form on file at the program office for each child featured.
- l. BOCES students who participate in professional social media sites may not be permitted to post photographs or videos featuring other students without the approval of the teacher or other BOCES employee responsible for the site.
- m. BOCES employees may not post photographs of other BOCES employees on professional social media sites without a media consent form from the photographed employee.

4. Monitoring of Professional Social Media Sites

- a. BOCES employees who maintain professional social media sites will be primarily responsible for monitoring such sites. To assist in monitoring, such BOCES employees must regularly examine the default settings for comments on professional social media sites and, in general, use more restrictive custom settings.
- b. BOCES supervisors, or ~~their~~ designees, are also responsible for monitoring and providing feedback regarding their employees' professional social media sites. The monitoring responsibilities include reviewing the professional social media sites on a regular basis.
- c. If employees or supervisors discover questionable communications or behavior on professional social media sites, they are required to contact the appropriate

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authorities for assistance.⁷ Employees who maintain a professional social media site and who become aware of questionable communications or behavior on their site must preserve evidence of the communication or behavior (e.g., print the message) and contact their supervisor. The employee must contact the appropriate authorities, where required, as well as their supervisor for assistance.

- d. BOCES supervisors reserve the right to remove postings and/or disable a page of professional social media sites that do not adhere to the law or do not reasonably align with this policy.
- e. BOCES supervisors should maintain a detailed log of all reported non-compliant communications as well as any violations that are otherwise brought to the supervisor's attention. Such reports of non-compliant communications should be immediately shared with the BOCES employee who maintains the professional social media site so that the BOCES employee may take corrective action, if necessary and if possible. Supervisors who find non-compliant communications must also take steps to preserve evidence of such communications (e.g., printing the page on which the communication appears).
- f. Employees using professional social media have no expectation of privacy or confidentiality with regard to their use of such media.

5. Press Inquiries

Any press inquiries received via professional social media sites should be referred to BOCES' Community Information Service.

Personal Social Media Use

1. Communication with BOCES Students

To maintain a professional and appropriate relationship with students, BOCES employees should not communicate (including telephone calls or texts) with students who are currently enrolled in BOCES programs on personal social media sites with the following exceptions: (a) communication with relatives; (b) an emergency situation that requires such communication, in which case the BOCES employee should notify his/her supervisor of the contact as soon as possible; (c) communications to facilitate a BOCES educational program/activity (e.g., a field trip) that has an educational purpose, in which case any contact information must be deleted after the program/activity is concluded; or (d) as approved by the District Superintendent or his/her designee.

⁷ Existing BOCES reporting requirements must be followed.

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2. Personal Social Media Sites

BOCES employees must exercise caution and common sense when using personal social media sites:

- a. BOCES teachers should not communicate with BOCES students through personal social media sites. BOCES teachers are expected to use appropriate privacy settings to control access to their personal social media sites, especially by BOCES students.
- b. BOCES employees may not post or identify photos of other BOCES employees, BOCES volunteers, BOCES contractors or BOCES vendors taken during work or school time without the prior written permission of the individuals in the photo.
- c. Although BOCES employees enjoy free speech rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, these rights may be limited where an employee's speech is likely to disrupt classroom or other BOCES activities or operations. Personal social media use, including off-hours use, has the potential to result in disruption at school and/or the workplace, may be deemed to be grooming or predatory behavior in pursuit of an inappropriate employee-student relationship, and/or can be in violation of BOCES policies, law, or conduct expected of a BOCES employee. Such illegal, inappropriate, unprofessional or grooming/predatory behavior may be subject to BOCES counseling and/or discipline in accordance with the applicable law, policy or contract, which may result in a counseling memorandum, reprimand, fine, suspension without pay, and/or dismissal from employment.
- d. The posting or disclosure of personally identifiable student information or confidential information via personal social media sites, in violation of applicable law or regulation, is prohibited.
- e. BOCES employees may not use the BOCES's logo or make representations that their personal social media sites speak in an official BOCES capacity. Use of the BOCES logo that is automatically populated on personal social media sites, such as LinkedIn, is permitted.

Applicability of BOCES Policies and Other Laws

This policy is intended to supplement, not supersede, existing BOCES policies or laws. Users of professional social media sites must comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws,

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including, but not limited to the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and intellectual property laws.

BOCES employees who are mandated reporters are required to abide by the same reporting responsibilities in a social media context.

Access and Training

The BOCES will provide necessary and reasonable access to and training on technology and media sites to enable BOCES supervisors to perform their responsibilities under this policy.