

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BOARD OF EDUCATION’S POLICIES AND AACPS ADMINISTRATIVE REGULATIONS REGARDING USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

When did the Board of Education adopt policies regarding use of social media by Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) students and employees?

The Board adopted the Student Use of Social Media policy (JCCC) and the Employee Use of Social Media policy (GAOO) on April 17, 2013. Accompanying administrative regulations went into effect the same day.

Why were these policies and regulations put in place?

The policies and regulations are intended to “support students’ use of social media in ways that have a positive impact on the learning environment, and to foster the legitimate exchange of information between school system employees, students, parents, and the community at large.”

How is “social media site” defined?

AACPS defines “social media site” as “any online or Internet based platform that allows interactive communication between persons and entities on social networks, blogs, websites, application software, Internet forums, and wikis.

Do these policies and regulations measures mean that students and employees can access all social media sites at any time while in school?

No. With regard to instructional use of social media, a committee consisting of teachers, principals, students, and school system administrators will be formed by the Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS) Deputy Superintendent. The committee will meet periodically (but not less frequently than annually) to determine which social media sites will be cleared for use as part of classroom instruction. This list will be made available to schools, communicated to parents, and posted on the school system’s website, www.aacps.org. Current filtering and blocking procedures will remain in place for unapproved sites.

Are schools required to use approved social media sites for instruction and/or communication?

No. Those decisions will be made on a school-by-school basis.

How will schools and the public be notified what sites are approved for use?

A list of approved sites will be disseminated to schools, listed on the AACPS Update! page that is placed in all school newsletters, and posted on the AACPS website, www.aacps.org.

For the 2013-2014 school year, the following sites (with appropriate levels indicated) have been approved as suitable for students to access using school system devices in Anne Arundel County Public Schools classrooms for the 2013-2014 school year:

Weebly (HS)

Khan Academy (ES, MS, HS)

You Tube For Education (ES, MS, HS)

Teacher Tube (ES, MS, HS)

Diigo (ES, MS, HS)

Delicious (MS, HS)

Google Drive (ES, MS, HS)

Please note that You Tube videos not stored on the You Tube for Education site will not be accessible on school system computers.

In addition, the following sites have been approved for use by teachers (but not access by students) for instructional purposes:

Twitter (ES, MS, HS)
Pinterest (ES, MS, HS)

Culture Quest (ES, MS, HS)

The following sites (with applicable levels indicated) have been approved as suitable for use in appropriate communication (but not instruction) between schools, employees, parents, and students (where age appropriate) in Anne Arundel County Public Schools in the 2013-2014 school year:

Facebook (ES, MS, HS) Twitter (ES, MS, HS)

What distinguishes a site created by a school system employee for school use versus an employee's personal site?

Sites created for AACPS instruction and communication are designated as Professional Social Media Sites. Those created for personal use are designated Personal Media Sites. In general, Personal Social Media Sites should not be used to communicate with AACPS students.

Professional Media Sites must contain the name of the appropriate school in the title of the site.

What is the process for using approved sites during class, and how will parents be informed that social media sites are being used in their child's class?

Professional Social Media Sites must receive approval from administrators or supervisors (in most cases, school principals or department heads) before being created and/or used. When sites are used for communication purposes, those creating a site are required to provide their administrators or supervisors with administrative rights to access the site.

Parental/Guardian written consent must be obtained for Professional Social Media Sites to be used for instruction or to communicate between students and staff. A parental consent form will be sent home with students early in the school year at all schools. Students will not be allowed to access social media sites on school system devices until the form is signed by a parent and returned to the school. A single consent form will cover all school uses of social media in a given school year.

Note: Parental consent is not required in instances where teachers use an approved social media site on a classroom Smartboard or other classroom device used for viewing by all students in a class. In these cases, teachers will be charged with determining appropriate content for lesson plans, just as they have done previously.

Parents and guardians must be offered general access to the site, and schools must provide annual notifications about the site's existence along with the kinds of materials that may be accessed via the site. Permission forms will be available for principals in August.

How will teachers know which students have parental consent to access social media sites?

Students will be marked in the student database (Chancery/SMS) as not being able to access social media sites until written parental consent is received. Teachers have access to this information through class lists in the student database.

What about parents who do not want their children to have access to social media sites?

Teachers must provide an alternate activity for any student who does not have parental consent to access social media sites on AACPS devices.

The AACPS student database will be set up so that a child whose parent does not return the consent form will be shown as "opting out" of social media access. Once a consent form is returned, the Chancery/SMS record can be changed to reflect an "opting in." Teachers will be able to run reports of class lists to note the status of students in this regard.

With regard to sites that require user names and passwords, whose responsibility is it to set up those accounts?

Accounts must be set up by parents outside of school system devices so that parents can monitor the activity of their children. AACPS personnel will not establish accounts for students. Students whose parents have not established an account on a social media site being accessed in class will be provided with an alternate activity during that class time.

What about students without computers at home or who do not have smart devices?

Students can take advantage of computer access at all branches of the Anne Arundel County Public Library and at many community centers in the city of Annapolis and the Annapolis Boys & Girls Clubs.

Once a site is approved, how will it be unblocked on AACPS servers?

The Technology Division will handle this effort. However, schools are highly encouraged to develop schoolwide plans for social media use so that thousands of individual requests from teachers are not forwarded to the Technology Division throughout the year. Teachers should be encouraged to give proactive thought to the use of social media in classrooms. Wherever possible, schools should submit yearlong requests for access.

Once sites are approved and in use, whose responsibility is it to monitor?

The use of social media for instructional purposes is part of a teacher's classroom practice, and will be monitored and evaluated in the same manner as other parts of that practice.

Once a site is approved, can it be unapproved?

Yes. A site can be taken off the approved list if it is determined by the Deputy Superintendent that use of the site has created an unwelcome disruption to the educational environment or that AACPS is unable to accommodate the technological capacity to access the site. It can also be

taken off the approved list if the purpose or nature of the site changes to something that is not deemed appropriate for classroom use.

Violations of the policy and regulation by employees should be reported to the AACPS Office of Investigations. Inappropriate use by students should be reported to a classroom teacher or school administrator, who will handle the issue appropriately based on the circumstances. Police may be involved in any incident where use may constitute criminal behavior or can be construed as a threat.

With regard to communicating through social media, are sites limited to those approved by AACPS?

Yes.

We strongly suggest that with regard to general posting to sites such as Facebook, that the page be configured to allow only page administrators to post items. This is the way the AACPS Facebook page, for example, is configured. It allows comments on posts, but not original postings from anyone other than a page administrator. With regard to pictures, this setup also limits extraneous picture postings.

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