



## **Suggested Guidelines for Ethical Use of Social Media and Ethical Remote Learning**

Social media and remote learning environments provide rich opportunities for communication, learning, and instructional innovation, yet come with ethical risks for educators in working with students, parents, and educational colleagues. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) offers these suggested guidelines to proactively guide educators' professional decision-making for appropriate, ethical use of social media and remote learning environments.

### **Considerations for General Online Behavior**

1. Are my online activities consistent with my role in the educational community?
2. Am I taking the time to think about what I am doing online, or am I allowing myself to get caught up in a digital frenzy of emotional posts, retweets, and likes?
3. Have I taken a break from digital technology recently? Have I given my eyes, my mind, and my emotions a chance to recalibrate?
4. What digital tools do I need to do my work and communicate with friends and family, and what digital tools can I shut down or discard?
5. Have I taken the time recently to talk to a trusted family member, friend, or colleague about my use of digital technology and any personal concerns I might have?

### **Considerations for Ethical Use of Social Media**

Most social media cybertraps and ethical violations can be avoided through regular reflection on the **5 W's** that have been used by journalists for decades:

1. Who -
  - a. Who am I? What is my role in the school community? What are the personal or professional issues with which I am dealing right now?
  - b. Who am I communicating with? Is the conversation appropriate for my role as an educator or member of the school community?
  - c. Who might see the conversation? Would I be embarrassed if my comments and/or contents were revealed to a colleague, supervisor, parents, community member, or the general population?
2. What -
  - a. What am I saying to the other person in the conversation?
  - b. Is my language appropriate?
  - c. Am I communicating professionally?

3. Where -
  - a. Where is the conversation taking place?
  - b. If I am communicating directly with a student, am I doing so on a service that can be archived (i.e. school email or archived message service)?
  - c. If I am using a direct messaging service (texting, Messenger, Snapchat, WhatsApp, etc.), is the conversation transparent (i.e. another adult is part of the conversation)?
4. When –
  - a. At what time of the day (or night) is the conversation taking place?
  - b. Is the conversation occurring at a time that might raise concerns about your judgment or your motives?
5. Why –
  - a. Why is the conversation taking place?
  - b. Am I discussing classwork, homework, activities, etc., or am I discussing personal issues?
  - c. Put another way, what are my motivations for having the conversation? Are those motivations consistent with my role as an educator or a member of the school community?

### **Considerations for Ethical Remote Learning**

1. Have I conducted a review of the material I am presenting through remote learning to ensure I am meeting the standards? Are students successfully learning the material?
2. Do I have strategies in place to identify and respond to different levels of student learning? Have I consulted with colleagues and/or supervisors on how to adapt my remote learning techniques to meet differing student needs?
3. Do I understand the remote learning platform(s) I am using well enough to prevent any potential problems or to respond to inappropriate activity? For example, if a student is using in appropriate language or exhibiting inappropriate conduct, do I know how do quickly turn off his/her feed?
4. Am I presenting myself as a professional member of the school community? When students or other members of the school community see my personal space during remote learning, is it consistent with my role as an educational professional. Am I dressed appropriately? Is there anything in my background not appropriate for students and/or their family to view? Have I asked a friend or family member to look at my space in person or remotely to see if anything inappropriate is viewable?
5. Am I aware of the potential privacy risks of moving my device around the house during online teaching sessions to a location that might be embarrassing or inappropriate (for instance, to the bathroom)?
6. Do I respect the privacy of my students during online learning sessions? For example, am I sensitive to those may have personal reasons for not showing their home environment?
7. Have I discussed with colleagues and/or supervisors how to respond to possible indications of child abuse? Am I familiar with the threshold for triggering my responsibility as a mandated reporter?

8. Am I aware of the increased scrutiny from family members of students and/or other members of the school community who have the opportunity to virtually join the classroom?
9. Have I taken reasonable steps to prevent disruption or distraction from members of my own household?

**Notes:**

- The guidelines above are not meant to be inclusive of all considerations in the appropriate, ethical use of social media and in remote learning environments.
- Additional resources are available upon request.
- A special thank you to Dr. Fred Lane and to Human Resource Directors from across Georgia for their contributions to these guidelines.