

## **Social Networking Considerations for Schools**

The purpose of this document is to assist schools in focusing their discussion about staff or student use of public social networking sites. Although the document uses Facebook as its prime example, there are other social networking platforms that present similar challenges to schools.

Social networking sites have created opportunities for communication and collaboration. Many young people and adults are finding them easy to use platforms for organizing and promoting events and forming online communities of interest. The rapid growth and rate of change in social networking sites has also created some concerns for educators. As well as providing quick and easy channels for communication, social networking has brought to light a number of issues arising from the public nature of opinions and comments and the amount of personal information that is publically accessible.

School administrators, particularly have expressed concerns around three areas:

- the appropriateness of teachers, students or their parents using these platforms to interact.
- the public nature of material posted by educators and how this may reflect on them as professionals.
- students' ability to make public comments about each other, their school and their teachers

This document is divided into 5 sections. The first 4 sections have information about some aspects of social networking. Section 5 lists discussion points educators might use to establish a common point of view for their school context. There are quick links at the end of the document for further information.

- 1. Do we need a school policy on teacher/student use of social networking?**
- 2. Concerns for students.**
- 3. Concerns for staff.**
- 4. What have been some school responses?**
- 5. Discussion points for our school.**

## **Section 1. Do we need a school policy on teacher /student use of social networking?**

A large number of teachers and students are already using social networking to communicate and follow their interests.

Social networking provides opportunities to share ideas rapidly with a large numbers of people. The public nature of these interactions can have both positive and negative consequences in an educational context.

Some schools are developing policies or guidelines for staff specifically about the use of social networking sites. Other educators feel the [New Zealand Teachers Council](#) already provides clear guidelines for appropriate professional relationships and that additional school policies are not required.

## **Section 2. Concerns for students**

Young people are using social networking to extend friendships, many of which are school based. Comments that young people post from their home computers outside of school hours often have an impact on relationships and behaviors at school. Many educators are worried that young people may not realize the broad and lasting impact of their online comments.

Teachers have also expressed unease that younger and younger students are using social networking. They worry these young users may not have adequate skills or knowledge to manage potential risks: i.e. controlling privacy settings, protecting account security, understanding a site's terms and conditions of use.

There are further concerns that young people may not see a need to protect their personal information.

### **Section 3. Concerns for staff**

School administrators are concerned about staff use of social networking sites in relation to their work as professionals. Some feel uneasy that staff may have overstepped professional boundaries by 'befriending' students in online environments. They see potential risks for staff and students when it appears that lines between personal and professional communication has been blurred.

Online communication with parents of students has also been identified by as a professional risk.

Administrators are also concerned public comments and opinions expressed by students could reflect poorly on a teacher's professional reputation.

### **Section 4. What are other schools doing?**

There have been a range of responses regarding access and use of social networking sites in New Zealand schools including:

- blocking access to social networking sites from school networks for students, but not staff.
- developing a written policy that prohibits teachers from sending text messages to or communicating with students through social networking sites.
- using social networking sites as an educational tool for students to explore and analyze values and perspectives in relevant current issues.

The keen interest young people have in using social networking can provide teachers opportunities to address a number of issues in the classroom including: privacy, copyright, rights and responsibility, values, and digital literacy.

## Section 5. Discussion Points for our school

The following discussion points are provided as a guide for educators to consider within the context of their school community.

- Do we have a common point of view about the value / challenges of social networking in our education programmes?
- Can we develop a proactive school-wide approach and avoid a re-active response?
- What opportunities are there for us to teach students the safe and ethical use of social networking?
- How can we know what strategies our students have for managing challenges in social networking?
- Do we need a policy or guidelines on the use of social networking for our staff? For our students?
- How can we assess parent expectations about the use of social networking?
- How should we respond to posts on social networking sights that reflect on our school or our staff?

### Quick links for Further Information

Facebook provides guidance on the personal and professional use of Facebook for educators and student safety.

[Facebook for Educators](#)

Guidelines for Principals, Teachers and Boards of Trustees from the New Zealand Privacy Commission

[Privacy in Schools –A guide for Principals, Teachers and Boards of Trustees](#)

The New Zealand Privacy Commission has developed a Youth Privacy Kit for schools to help young people learn about privacy issues in a digital world.

[Youth Privacy Kit](#)

NetSafe provides a central hub of content for educators to address all aspects of cybersafety and digital citizenship in their school

<http://www.mylgp.org.nz>

*NetSafe develops guidelines and discussions documents in collaboration with New Zealand educators. The NetSafe team would like to thank all who take time to provide comments and feedback. We are always interested in talking to educators about how they use NetSafe resources. If you have comments or suggestions about this document or any NetSafe services, please contact us at [queries@netsafe.org.nz](mailto:queries@netsafe.org.nz)*