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Parents Council Social Media Support

POLICY PURPOSE:

The purpose of this document is to help clarify how PTCO Boards can best enhance and protect personal and professional reputations when using social media as a means for parent communication.

When considering using social media, personally as well as for board communications or parent discussions, there are four basic principles we recommend focusing on:

- **Confidentiality.** Don't post about deliberations during board meetings, complaints brought privately to the PTO, etc.
- **Privacy.** Don't post people's names, thoughts or pictures without their permission, and remember that anything you post will have a permanent place on the internet, even if individual comments are removed by an administrator.
- **Transparency.** Be open and honest about the fact that you're a PTO board member in any post involving the school or PTO. Use this platform to post important information about your board, such as Bylaws, meeting minutes, etc.
- **Professionalism and respect.** Follow this rule of thumb: "if you wouldn't say it in face-to-face conversation, don't post it."

Establish your social media strategy and objectives

Define and document your purpose: Why are you using social media? How does it integrate with your other forms of communication? Who is your intended audience? What are your key messages? What is your character (voice and tone)?

Maintain a consistent schedule of posts – Voice and tone should be consistent based on your objectives for the site. Get into a rhythm of posting proactively, for instance, once per week, twice per month, etc. As your community grows, you can experiment with increasing your frequency.

Speak as a team – Because you're managing a site as part of your PTCO, remember that your page represents a team of volunteers, so be sure to say "we" rather than "I" or "me".

Handling negative posts – Unfortunately, people sometimes use social media to complain or voice negative comments. Be calm, thoughtful, and strategic when dealing with a negative post. Take some time to consider how to respond, and consider going offline. Make sure you know the facts related to the post, and remember that often, people who are upset simply want to know their complaint has been heard. If handled well, this may be an opportunity to strengthen your community by solving a problem or generating a good discussion.

Facebook – www.facebook.com

Facebook fan pages and groups have become one of the most popular PTCO parent engagement tools over the past five years. At Parents' Council we encourage our PTCOs to utilize this social media platform, with its potential to foster some amazing conversations and great networking opportunities for board members as well as fellow parents. However, with all of these benefits - there are also some inherent risks with utilizing Facebook, or any social media platform. That being said - creating a set of “house rules” or social media guidelines will encourage productive participation by users and grow a transparent community.

FACEBOOK PAGES vs. FACEBOOK GROUPS

Facebook Pages are ideal for two-way communication. If your main goal for communicating with parents with Facebook is simply to push information from the PTCO to your fans/parents (those that ‘like and follow your page), and from your members to you (if you authorize it), but not so much between fans, this is a great option.

Benefits and considerations to think about regarding having a Facebook page include –

- Posts come directly from the organization, The School PTCO, instead of from an individual person, giving the news a more professional appearance.
- Posts can be prescheduled to save time for the administrator
- Pictures and Events can be posted and shared by visitors with Facebook friends
- Administrators have the ability to set restrictions related to visitor’s comments, meaning they can set to “approve” comments or not.
- You can only post jpg images – not PDF files
- Approved comments, conversations and Q&A between PTCO and fans/parents, may get lost on the page. They don’t have a very prominent area for visitors to see unless they really look around.

Facebook Groups allow equal communication between all members of the group. This is a good way for the PTCO Board, parents and teachers to connect and network amongst each other on school and student activities related topics. The PTCO Board acts as an administrator in this case, sometimes adding events and PTCO information; however, no one person or subgroup dominates the messaging. These private groups promote online community, and are generally not too much of a burden to populate with content, as they are active discussion forums which engage the parent community. Parents are encouraged to post pictures of their students participating in school activities and share applicable information as a collective group. **Benefits and considerations** to think about when hosting a Facebook Group:

- More engaging conversations and relationships are built among the community group
- Can be member managed – because any member can answer a question posted by another member, there is not a need for PTCO admin to moderate every discussion.
- You can invite even non-Facebook friends to join the private group, via email invitation
- Members can add and invite other members helping to spread the word more efficiently.
- PDF files can be added - great place to house templates, fundraiser flyers, newsletters, bylaws, meeting minutes, agendas, etc.

- Events, Polls, Videos can also be posted
- Conversations are not moderated as closely, therefore the chance of negative feedback is more likely.

Setting Expectations

Most Facebook fan page conversations, good or bad, are constructive. But unfortunately, people won't always play nice. Having a plan and fair guidelines that you can point your community to will save you a bigger headache in the long run. **If you plan to remove posts, set expectations.** If you are going to remove certain types of content, be clear about what that means, right from the beginning. Hopefully, you'll be able to personally handle any escalating situation offline, should it arise. The best way to encourage appropriate behavior is to use consistency in identifying what crosses the line.

Remember, fan pages are public, so posts there aren't guarded by the same posting privacy you're used to on your personal page. It's up to you to know what type of content is appropriate for your brand and your audience. Overall, there are some common themes in many house rules policies. At the same time, Facebook Groups are generally meant to encourage dialogue between members which means that there will be differing opinions at times.

Designate a person as your social media administrator. Limit administration privileges to one or two people to keep things simple. Administrators set up the accounts, add photos, post information, and monitor and delete comments as needed. In the group setting – the administrator also approves new members and removes members if necessary.

It is a good idea to connect with your principal to convey your plans for using social media to communicate with parents. Technically, you don't need the principal's permission if you are an independent group. But most principals will appreciate a heads-up.

For Facebook pages, plan regular discussions with your board to decide what content to post. It helps to plan ahead and you'll find it saves lots of time especially because you can preschedule messages.

For Pages and Groups alike, encourage comments and don't squelch negative ones unless they are inflammatory or false. Respond to negative comments with a helpful, constructive post. These are actually good opportunities to get out information or clear up a misunderstanding. Try to treat complaints as customer service opportunities first and house rules violations second.



Social Media Policy & Sample Guidelines

(Facebook specific – can be applied to other platforms)

Sample Guidelines for posting to Facebook Pages & Groups

The sample guidelines on the following page can and should be edited to fit your PTCO's needs, as well as posted and "Pinned" to the top of your Facebook Page or Group so that all fans or members can clearly see what is expected of all parties who utilize the page or participate in a group.

SAMPLE GUIDELINES

"Purpose of FB page (or group): The purpose of our Facebook page (or group) is to provide an online community for parents and families at _____ (name of school).

Goal: Our goal is to share information and tips, update the community on events and programs, and showcase the achievements of students, teachers, parents, and other community members.

Community Rules

- We encourage you to ask questions and share information. We request that you keep discussions focused directly concerning our school community.
- We encourage posts that highlight our community's accomplishments and constructively raise issues for discussion.
- When posting, please use appropriate language. Children can see our page (or group).
- If you choose, you can post photos of your children at school events. Do not post photos of other children. If you have any questions about posting a particular photo, please check with the Facebook page (group) administrator.
- Do not post about concerns, problems, or conflicts with individual teachers, administrators, students, or parents. We will immediately delete posts that in any way put down or discriminate against individuals.
- Online threats will be taken seriously, and proper authorities will be immediately notified.
- Do not post information commonly understood as confidential, such as student grades.
- Any inflammatory statements that make allegations against individuals or organizations will be deleted.
- Keep in mind what you post is public information (or, if this pertains to a Facebook group, state that it is public to all members of the group).
- Any advertising for businesses is not allowed.
- Do not publish content as your own that has been created by others.
- Add any additional elements that pertain to your specific school community.

The PTCO Board and PTCO Facebook administrators reserve the right to delete comments and block users who are not following the rules stated above."

NOTE: PTCO Fan Pages, may only need a few simple rules, while larger Facebook Groups may have more detailed guidelines.



Social Media Policy & Sample Guidelines

(Facebook specific – can be applied to other platforms)

Other Social Channels**

Time permitting, you can set up additional accounts for the other popular social media platforms like Pinterest, Instagram, and Twitter. Make sure you have the manpower to monitor these accounts, and post on a schedule that works for you. Utilizing a Social Media Management software is a wonderful tool if you will have several platforms to manage. [Hootsuite](#) is recommended – and is free to manage up to three social media accounts.

Keep in mind that photos and videos attract the most interest on the most popular social media platforms and you will generate more engagement by including them. Make sure you have the necessary permissions from the staff and parents to use photos.

School / PTCO Apps –

School Apps are becoming more popular as a one stop shop for communicating with parents, students, teachers, staff as well. Many PTCOs are able to connect with the administrator of their school's app to get event reminders and activity updates sent through push notifications to subscribers. A small number of PTCOs also have administrative rights for sending their own notifications as well. *Coming soon* – School App Comparison fact sheet will soon be available as a resource through Parents' Council for those interested in pursuing this option.

**Pinterest - www.pinterest.com

Pinterest has evolved from an online bulletin board to a pretty powerful way to save and organize visual information. You can set up a series of boards using categories that reflect what your group does—for example, welcome-back party, fall festival, community service, etc. Then upload photos (again, check on photo usage issues) and populate your boards.

**Instagram - www.instagram.com

Instagram is a popular photo- and video-driven channel that would be a great way for your group to share images from events and program. Think of Instagram as a truly mobile channel. While you can view Instagram on your desktop or laptop, it needs to be managed from your mobile device.

A rule of thumb: It's best to share photos and video that capture a moment rather than share general information in an image format. In other words, grab a series of photos from the ice cream social and post them to Instagram. Infographics, instructions, calendars, flyers, and other visual information items tend to perform better on Facebook or Pinterest.



Social Media Policy & Sample Guidelines

(Facebook specific – can be applied to other platforms)

****Twitter - www.twitter.com**

Twitter continues to be a great way to send out short bursts of information. For PTCOs, this channel works best for reminders, announcements, and sending out thank-yous to volunteers. Lots of folks regularly include images in their tweets now as well, and Twitter has made it easier to attach photos and quick videos. It can also be a great channel for sharing links to articles and other resources on parenting, education, and parent group topics, like fundraising and parent involvement.

****Facebook Live - A New Way to Host PTCO Meetings**

Facebook Live, a live video streaming tool you can use right from your Facebook account, can be a great option for PTCO leaders looking for new ways to reach out to parents. Leaders can use it to:

- broadcast monthly meetings to parents at home;
- give short updates on upcoming events that can be broadcast live and then posted to a group's Facebook page;
- show how much fun everyone is having at events at school!

Once the live broadcast is wrapped up, the video lives on a group's Facebook page and can be viewed at any time. Broadcasters also can save the video to their camera roll on their phones.

Want to practice your live broadcast among peers – other PTO, PTA, PTCO leadership from around the country – before going live with your school's parents? Click here to join this amazing closed group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1734986190108928/> and they'll provide helpful feedback.

PTO & PTA Facebook Live Practice Group shares some [basic broadcasting tips](#) below

- Attach your phone to a tripod or prop it somewhere safe that won't be shaky or fall loose during your broadcast.
- Check the background where you will be sitting to make sure it doesn't contain anything you wouldn't want viewers to see.
- Keep a list of items you will be discussing near the phone so you can glance at it to remind yourself of your "talking points."
- When you first go live, take your time and allow a few minutes for folks to join you. Group members get a notification that you are live and may need a few moments to tune in.



Social Media Policy & Sample Guidelines

(Facebook specific – can be applied to other platforms)

How to Act on Camera

- Conduct yourself as you would at your regular in-person PTCO meeting. Be conversational and relaxed. No need to sound scripted.
- Keep interacting with your viewers. When someone joins, say hello and welcome them.
- Reintroduce yourself and your topic (or topics) a few times throughout the broadcast because parents will likely join in at different times.
- Have props; a little bit of show-and-tell makes it visually interesting. (refer to and show financial documents, or meeting agenda, or any documents you may have sent to parents prior to meeting)
- Don't worry if something unexpected happens. If you are broadcasting from home and one of your kids walks in, just roll with it. Remember you are broadcasting to other parents, so they will understand!
- If someone posts a question, repeat the question to your audience and then answer it. If you don't get to all the questions during the specified meeting time, follow-up via email or in your next newsletter.
- Be sure to say good-bye when wrapping up the video!

Parents Council Social Media Support

If you have additional questions or need support please feel free to contact our Parents' Council Social Media Coordinator at webmaster@ccparentscouncil.org or our Communications coordinator at communications@ccparentscouncil.org

Current year PTCO leadership (Presidents, treasurers, and communications board members) are invited to join our Grade level PTCO Facebook forums. These groups are a great way to network with leadership at other schools in the district too – to find out what is working for them as far as communications and social media.

Join CCSD Elementary PTCO Leadership Facebook Forum

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/CCSDElementaryPTCOGroup/>

Join CCSD Middle School PTCO Leadership Facebook Forum

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/CCSDMiddleSchoolPTCOGroup/>

Join CCSD High School PTCO Leadership Facebook Forum

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/CCSDParentsCouncilHighSchool/>