

Quitman County

School District

Georgetown, GA



**Purpose for Social Media Guidelines**

Quitman County Schools (QCS) recognizes that access to technology in school gives students, parents and teachers greater opportunities to learn, engage, communicate, and develop skills that will prepare them for work, life, and citizenship. Effective communication with colleagues, students and families is vital for a thriving school environment where all stakeholders feel heard and engaged.

To this aim, Quitman County Schools has adapted the following guidelines to provide direction for faculty, staff, and students when participating in online social media activities. Whether or not an employee chooses to participate in a blog, wiki, online social network or any other form of online publishing or discussion is his or her own decision. Free speech protects individuals who want to participate in social media, but the laws and courts have ruled that school districts can discipline employees if their speech, including personal online postings, disrupts school operations.

These guidelines have been formed as a resource for you. It is important to create an atmosphere of trust and individual accountability. Keep in mind that information produced by QCS employees is a reflection on the entire District and is subject to the District's Acceptable Use Policy. Personal postings, even if marked private, may also be subject to relevant QCS policies and procedures, as well as to relevant local, state and federal laws. By accessing, creating or contributing to any blogs, wikis, podcasts or other social media for classroom or district use, you agree to abide by these guidelines. Please read them carefully before participating in any social media application.

**What is Social Media?**

Social media is the collective of online communications channels dedicated to community-based input, interaction, content-sharing and collaboration.

Tools include, but are not limited to:  
• Blogs (Blogger,WordPress, etc.)  
• Wikis (Wikispaces, Google Sites, etc.)  
• Social Networking sites (Facebook, Ning, MySpace,YouTube, LinkedIn, etc.) • Photo and Video Sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr, etc.)  
• Social Bookmarking (Diigo, Delicious)  
• Podcasting and Vodcasting

**Personal Responsibility**

• Quitman County Schools (GCS) encourages district employees with a personal online presence to be mindful of the information they post. Your online behavior should reflect the same professional and personal standards of honesty, respect and consideration that you use face-to-face and in work-related settings.

• Please note that even if you delete personal information, it still may be stored on the website’s server for a longer period of time. Information that is marked “private” rarely is private on the Internet. It is very easy for “friends” to copy and paste information about you and send it or forward it to others, for example. There is no realistic expectation of privacy on the World Wide Web.

• The lines between public and private, personal and professional are blurred in the digital world. By virtue of identifying yourself as a QCS employee online, you are now connected to colleagues, students, parents and the school community. Use these connections wisely and well. You should also ensure that content associated with you is consistent with your work at QCS and your role as a public school/State employee.

• It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the appropriate security settings for any social media (personal or professional) that you may use. Be sure that the settings are such that your intended audience may only view any personal content. Be aware that, even if your privacy settings are set properly, it is still possible for anyone who you’ve allowed to see your profile to copy and paste text and send it to someone else. It is also easy for others to “tag” or identify you in photos that they publish with or without your knowledge and permission. Similarly, if you enable settings such as Facebook’s ability to allow “friends of friends” to view your content, it is extremely likely that unintended viewers will have access to pictures and other personal content.

• It is inappropriate to use e-mail, text messaging, instant messaging or social networking sites to discuss with a student a matter that does not pertain to school-related activities. Appropriate discussions would include the student’s homework, class activity, school sport or club or other school-sponsored activity. Electronic communications with students are to be sent simultaneously to multiple recipients, not to just one student, except where the communication is clearly school-related and inappropriate for persons other than the individual student to receive (for example, e-mailing a message about a student’s grades).

• Engaging in personal social-networking friendships on MySpace, Facebook or other social networking sites is prohibited with students. A recommendation for staff to respond to “friend” requests on their personal pages is:

*If you are a student or parent requesting to be my “friend,” please do not be surprised or offended if I ignore your request. As an employee of Quitman County Schools, District procedures and practices discourage me from “friending” students on my personal pages. I would encourage you to friend our school’s (and/or classroom’s, department’s, the Quitman County Schools Facebook pages, etc.)*

• Material that employees post on social networks that is publicly available to those in the school community must reflect the professional image applicable to the employee’s position and not impair the employee’s capacity to maintain the respect of students and parents/guardians or impair the employee’s ability to serve as a role model for children.

**Professional Responsibility**

• While social media can be a powerful communication tool and an educational tool for students and parents, QCS employees are personally responsible for the content they publish online. Be mindful that what you publish will be public for a long time—protect your privacy.

• Remember that social media in the classroom is an extension of your physical classroom. What is inappropriate in your classroom should be deemed inappropriate online.

• Teachers who use social networking to interact with students and/or parents in an educational manner or as a communication tool must find ways to interact without giving students and parents access to their personal information and posts. Many social network sites allow you to create “groups” or “pages” where you can interact with students without giving them access to your personal account. Please see detailed Facebook guidelines for more information.

• When contributing online do not post confidential student information. Do not post pictures of any students on your personal sites.

• Use a QCS provided e-mail as your e-mail contact for official or school-related pages. Do not use your QCS provided e-mail as a username or e-mail contact for personal pages.

• Please remember that all QCS policies and procedures, as well as relevant local, state and federal laws (copyright, fair use, Family Education Right to Privacy Act, personnel statutes, criminal statutes, etc) apply to social media communications.

**Overall Guidelines for Using Social Media**

The following are general guidelines for using social media whether personally or professionally.

**Be Transparent**

How you represent yourself online is an extension of yourself. Do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else's identity or misrepresenting your identity. Be honest about who you are, where you work and what you do.

**Always a School Employee**

Although the lines between public and private, personal and professional, can become blurred in the digital world, you will always be considered to be a QCS employee. Whether it is clearly communicated or not, you will be identified as an employee of the School District in what you do and say online. If you don’t want it on the 10 p.m. news or in the daily newspaper - don’t share it online.

**School Values**

Represent QCS district values. Express ideas and opinions in a respectful manner. All communications should be done in good taste. Build trust and responsibility in your relationships. Do not denigrate or insult others including students, staff, administrators, parents or other districts. Any online contributions must be in accordance with the appropriate policies, guidelines and relevant laws. Consider carefully what you post through comments and photos. A violation of these policies, guidelines and/or relevant laws could be regarded as a form of professional misconduct and may result in disciplinary action.

**Build Community/Positively Represent School**

Represent QCS, the students and parents you serve in the best light. Respect the privacy and the feelings of others. Under no circumstance should offensive comments be made about students or colleagues (including administrators) nor the District in general. Negative comments about people may amount to cyber-bullying and could be deemed a disciplinary offense. Your posts and comments should help build and support the school community. Do not comment on nor forward unsupported information, e.g. rumors. You are responsible for what you and others post, even if on a personal page, so be certain it is accurate and supports your organization. It is a good idea to monitor your profile page to ensure that all material posted by others doesn’t violate these guidelines. Once posted you can’t take it back.

**Other Online Activities**

Part of the Internet’s popularity is its many online diversions. Be careful of gimmicks or games that many websites use to increase web traffic. Examples can include risqué surveys or quizzes. Often comments or information thought to be shared in private are capable of being shared publically. Also, employees may be disciplined for using their online access for non work-related purposes.

**Share your Expertise**

Write what you know and be accurate. Add value to the discussion. Post something useful. Provide worthwhile information and perspective. A district’s most valuable asset is its staff represented by its people and what you publish may reflect on the school. Speak in the first person with your own voice and perspective.

**Respectful and Responsible**

Employees, parents, and students reflect a diverse set of customs, values and points of view. Be respectful for others’ opinions in your posts or comments. You are responsible for the content you post. Do your tags, descriptions and your image portray you and the District in a professional manner?

**Own and Correct Mistakes**

If you make a mistake, admit the mistake and correct it quickly. Share your error with your principal, Human Resources, or Superintendent so they can help address the issue effectively. Clearly state if you’ve corrected a previous post. Even though damage may be done, it is best to admit your mistake and correct it. Apologize if appropriate.

**Confidential Information**

Online postings and conversations are not private. Do not share confidential information whether it is internal school discussions or specific information about students or other staff. What you post will be seen by others and will be online for a long time. It can be forwarded or shared in just a few clicks. Do not write about colleagues or students without their expressed permission.

**School Logos**

Obtain written permission before using any school or district logo or image. School logos may only be used in a professional capacity. When using social media for QCS or school-related purposes, please follow the QCS Style Guide.

**Posting Photos or Movies without Permission**

Do not post or tag photos or movies of others without their permission. Do not use photos or movies taken at school without permission. Do not post photos or movies that contain students without parent consent.

**Responding to Negative Comments and Criticism**

How you respond to negative comments or criticism will say more about you and your character than what you post. When in doubt, it’s best not to give it credibility by acknowledging it with a response publicly; perhaps a private response would be more appropriate. See the response guidelines for more information on responding to these types of comments.

**Response and Post Regularly**

To encourage readership, post regularly. Don’t post to your blog and then not post for three weeks. Readers won’t have a reason to follow you if they cannot expect new content regularly. Respond to other’s posts. Answer questions; thank people even if it’s just a few words. Make it a two-way conversation.

**Spell Check and Abbreviations**

Any online contribution should be well written. What you post will be online for the world to read. Follow writing conventions including proper grammar, capitalization and punctuation. Be cautious about using common abbreviations. While your circle of friends may understand what you are saying, you may have readers from across the world that won’t understand. When in doubt, define the abbreviation at least once in a post or include a definitions page on your site.

**Copyright and Fair Use**

Respect copyright and fair uses guidelines. Share what others have said by linking to the source and using embedded content. Be sure to cite your source when quoting. When using a hyperlink, confirm that link goes where it should and that the content is appropriate. Keep in mind that copyright and fair use also applies to music. Do not post presentations or videos using popular music, or any music or art that you have not obtained the appropriate permissions for use.  
For example, just because you’ve purchased something for personal use doesn’t mean you’ve purchased the right to broadcast it to others online.

**Personal Information**

Be careful about sharing too much personal information. People often share personal information such as their pet names, their parents and children’s names, where they grew up, and more. This information may help a hacker guess your passwords. If you share that you will be out of town, a criminal may use this to target your home for a burglary. Do not share with a student your personal problems that would normally be discussed with adults. Be smart and don’t share too much information.

**Video**

The Internet is becoming an increasingly popular educational tool and place to share personally created movies. You are responsible for all you do, say, and post online, including video. Anything you post online should represent you in a professional manner, as others will see you as connected to the School District. You should preview anything you show in your classroom in its entirety, prior to any student seeing it. Consult a supervisor if you feel the content may be questionable.

**Staff-Student Relations**

Employees are prohibited from establishing personal relationships with students that are unprofessional and thereby inappropriate. Examples of unprofessional relationships include, but are not limited to: employees fraternizing or communicating with students as if employees and students were peers such as writing personal letters or e-mails; personally texting or calling students, or allowing students to make personal calls to them unrelated to homework, class work, or other school-related business; sending inappropriate pictures to students; discussing or revealing to students personal matters about their private lives or inviting students to do the same (other than professional counseling by a school counselor); and engaging in sexualized dialogue, whether in person, by phone, via the Internet or in writing.

Employees who post information on Facebook, Instagram, MySpace or similar websites that include inappropriate personal information such as, but not limited to: provocative photographs, sexually explicit messages, abuse of alcohol, drugs or anything students are prohibited from doing must understand that if students, parents or other employees obtain access to such information and report this to the district, their report will be investigated by school and district officials.

**Social Media Guidelines for Students**

1. Social media venues are very public. What you contribute leaves a digital footprint forever, usually even after it is deleted. Do not post anything you wouldn't want friends, enemies, parents, teachers, or a future employer to see. Make sure what you post promotes a positive image to the world.
2. Follow the school's code of conduct when writing online. It is acceptable to disagree with someone else's opinions, however, do it in a respectful, constructive way. What is inappropriate in the classroom is inappropriate online.
3. Be safe online. Never give out personal information, including, but not limited to, last names, any phone numbers, addresses, birthdates, and pictures. Do not share your password with anyone besides your parents, and teachers if necessary.
4. Linking to other Web sites to support your thoughts and ideas is recommended. However, be sure to read the entire article prior to linking to ensure that all information is appropriate for a school setting.
5. Do your own work! Do not use other people's intellectual property, including pictures, without their permission. It is a violation of copyright law to copy and paste other's thoughts without proper attribution. When paraphrasing another's idea(s) be sure to cite your source with the specific web address. Verify you have permission to use the material or it is under Creative Commons attribution.
6. How you represent yourself online is an extension of yourself. Do not misrepresent yourself by using someone else identity.
7. Blog, wiki, and other online posts should be well written. Follow writing conventions including proper grammar, capitalization, and punctuation. If you have permission to edit someone else's work be sure it is in the spirit of improving the writing.
8. If you run across inappropriate material, that makes you feel uncomfortable, or is not respectful, tell the supervising adult right away.
9. Cyber bullying is not tolerated. What constitutes cyber bulling, the actions you should take to document cyber bullying if you feel you are a victim, and the actions that may be taken against participating individuals are clearly outlined in the student handbook.
10. Students who do not abide by these terms and conditions may lose their opportunity to take part in the project and/or access to future use of online tools.

**Disclaimers**

* Quitman County School District employees are highly encouraged to include disclaimers within their **personal** blogs that the views are their own and do not reflect on their employer.  For example, "The postings on this site are my own and don't necessarily represent Quitman County School District's positions, strategies, opinions, or policies."
* This standard disclaimer does not by itself exempt Quitman County School District employees from a special responsibility when blogging.
* Classroom blogs do not require a disclaimer, but teachers are encouraged to moderate content contributed by students.

**Adapted From:**

Social Media Guidelines Wiki

**Referenced Sites and Resources**

Barrow County Schools: http://www.barrow.k12.ga.us/

Social Media Guidelines for Educators

(Facebook group): http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=80354045978

Social Media Guidelines for Schools - Andy Mann, Calhoun ISD http://www.scribd.com/doc/28430149/Social-Media-Guidelines-for-Schools

Social Media Guidelines for Schools Wiki - http://socialmediaguidelines.pbworks.com/ •

Social Media Suggestions: http://blogs.stvrain.k12.co.us/helpdesk/2010/03/29/social-media-suggestions/

Think Social Media Guidelines: http://thinkingmachine.pbworks.com/Think-Social-Media-Guidelines

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Example of Social Media Guidelines

Parent Permission Form for Student Participation

Dear Parents:

This year, to help our students develop their reading and writing skills as well as cultivate our understanding of different people and cultures; our students are participating in using a variety of social media applications (blogs, wikis, podcasts) via the Internet. When students are able to safely share their ideas with an audience broader than just our classroom, often they can discover their voice and become even more motivated to learn, communicate and share their ideas effectively with others.

Often we hear negative stories in the mainstream media about the ways young people use the Internet and social media websites. One of the reasons we are participating in some collaborative social media projects this year is to help our students learn through experiences, ways to safely use the Internet to share information and collaborate. Quitman School District is writing to let you know what we are planning to do, and to obtain your permission for your child to participate.

Planned Activities: We are planning to use several different social media tools to let our students safely share their work and ideas with other students as well as with our school community. (You!) A list of the district recommended websites is located at <http://socialmediaguidelines.pbworks.com/District-Recommended-Social-Media-Sites>. We encourage you to visit the site to learn more the district’s social media guidelines for students, teachers and parents. Projects may be shared privately with other classes over the Internet and with parents, and also may be shared publicly on the Internet. To protect student privacy and ensure safety throughout all projects we will:

1. Only use student first names, if names are used at all, in identifying student work and ideas
2. Not use pictures of individual students, identified by full name
3. Only use GROUP pictures of students that do not identify individuals by name if we share pictures of students working in class.

If you have questions about our projects please contact your child’s teacher(s). Teachers will be in contact with you with specific to share links to specific projects as we create them! Please complete, sign and return the bottom of this form to me as soon as possible. Thanks!

\_\_\_\_\_\_ YES, my child has my permission to participate in teacher-moderated, Internet-based social media projects this year. My child may share recordings on the Internet and participate in the planned collaborative activities outlined here.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ NO, my child does not have permission to participate in these activities.

Date:

Student Name: Student Signature:

Parent Name: Parent Signature:

***Sample Permission to Blog Letter***

Dear Families:

From now to the end of the year, Mr/Ms \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ class will be taking part in a pilot writing program designed to help them develop their writing and explore their interests by sharing their writing with a real audience. Students will be using personal Weblogs to post their writing to the Internet.

A Weblog, or blog as they are commonly called, is a special type of Web page that can be created and easily updated using a Web browser. Each new entry has its own date stamp. Each entry has a comments section where visitors to the blog may leave comments for the author.

**How it Works**

Each week Ms. Wenn will teach a writing lesson using the 6-Trait writing model. After the lesson, students will write an entry for their blog. They may choose the topic, but they need to make use of the skills taught in the lesson to help the craft their writing. The emphasis is on the quality, not the quantity of what they write. When students are done polishing their writing, they have it reviewed by a teacher before it is published to the Web.

Students will have two extra computer sessions most weeks to provide them with the time needed to complete their weekly blogging assignment. Students may also work from home. All that is required is an Internet connection and a Web browser. Students are able to save their work as drafts before publishing it to their blog. Directions for working from home will be provided.

Having a real audience is one of the key components to this program. In addition to receiving comments from their classmates, Ms. Wenn’s students will receive comments from Ms. Wenn. Parents are also invited to visit the blogs and respond to the writing. Potentially, anyone on the Internet could respond to our blogs, however, it is not likely that the world at large will stumble across them.

**Security**

This blogging project is designed to minimize risk to your child. The only personally identifying information included in the blog will be their first name. There will be no mention of our school name or our location. Students are allowed to post their interests and opinions, but not their age, email address, photographs of themselves, or other sensitive information.

**Assessment**

The weekly blog assignments will be part of your child’s language arts grade this term. As with other projects they have completed this year, students will receive a scoring rubric that explains the expectations for these assignments. The rubric will include a section for the comments they leave in other students’ blogs.

**Resources**

- Blogs created by fifth grade students in the USA

<http://itc.blogs.com/marcos/>

- BBC News article about blogging in a school in the UK

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/3804773.stm>

**Permission**

Before your child may start posting to their blog, we are asking for you and your child to discuss and sign the following form. Please return the form to Ms. Wenn.

***Blogging Terms and Conditions***

1. Students using blogs are expected to act safely by keeping personal information out of their posts. You agree to not post or give out your family name, password, user name, email address, home address, school name, city, country or other information that could help someone locate or contact you in person. You may share your interests, ideas and preferences.

2. Students using blogs agree not to share their user name or password with anyone besides their teachers and parents. You agree to never log in as another student.

3. Students using blogs are expected to treat blogspaces as classroom spaces. Speech that is inappropriate for class is not appropriate for your blog. While we encourage you to engage in debate and conversation with other bloggers, we also expect that you will conduct yourself in a manner reflective of a representative of this school.

4. Student blogs are to be a forum for student expression. However, they are first and foremost a tool for learning, and as such will sometimes be constrained by the various requirements and rules of classroom teachers. Students are welcome to post on any school-appropriate subject.

5. Students blogs are to be a vehicle for sharing student writing with real audiences. Most visitors to your blog who leave comments will leave respectful, helpful messages. If you receive a comment that makes you feel uncomfortable or is not respectful, tell your teacher right away. Do not respond to the comment.

6. Students using blogs take good care of the computers by not downloading or installing any software without permission, and not clicking on ads or competitions.

7. Students who do not abide by these terms and conditions may lose their opportunity to take part in this project.

I have read and understood these blogging terms and conditions. I agree to uphold them.

student’s signature:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

parent’s signature: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_