

SOCIAL MEDIA



These scenarios include the use of a social media platform.

Allowing Students to Use Teacher Social Media

Mr. Speckles is a teacher at Brady Middle School. In an effort to establish rapport with the students, Mr. Speckles sometimes shows them his social media sites and even allows two students, Clarice and Einie, to use Instagram on his mobile device.

Questions for discussion:

- › Is it appropriate for Mr. Speckles to allow social media use in this way?
- › Are there any problems with Mr. Speckles allowing students to use his mobile device?

USER'S GUIDE: Allowing Students to Use Teacher Social Media

Here's how we see it:

- › Use of social media in school, by both educators and students, is likely covered under district policy, and Mr. Speckles and the students should adhere to that policy. Mr. Speckles could be violating school social media policy by allowing his students to view and engage on his account. For example, there is the possibility that school policy prohibits educators and students from “following” one another on social media. In the rare case where it is not covered under district policy, consent to use is platform-specific, i.e., governed by the various social media platforms.
- › Regardless of whether and how it is covered under district policy, educators need to be careful about the content that students can see on the educator's device. Even if student access to an educator's personal phone is allowed, there may be messages, pictures, and other content that are inappropriate for students to see.
- › Mr. Speckles should also consider the perspective of these students' parents/caretakers and if they would be okay with this behavior.

For further discussion:

- › What are the potential problems that could arise from this situation?
- › What happens if the students see something inappropriate on a teacher's device such as lewd pictures or texts?
- › How does such action open the teacher up for potential problems?

Unintended consequences:

- › Both the teacher and students could be harmed if students discover pictures or texts of inappropriate behavior (drinking, partying, sex). Students could spread this information to others resulting in severe consequences to the teacher's career and reputation.
- › Parents/caretakers may feel this practice is inappropriate and unsafe for their child.

Cyberbullying

Mrs. Alice is a teacher at Dunkin Middle School who keeps in touch with her students using social media. Jax is one of her students. As Mrs. Alice scrolls through student posts, she notices a post by Jax in response to some pretty nasty exchanges from other students. Clearly Jax is being bullied online.

Questions for discussion:

- › What should Mrs. Alice do? What data should Mrs. Alice use to confirm her suspicions and observations?
- › Would it be different if:
 - Jax has not said anything to anyone about this situation?
 - Jax comes to Mrs. Alice about the posts that he is receiving from classmates?
 - Another student reports to Mrs. Alice that Jax is being cyberbullied?
 - Mrs. Alice inadvertently sees something on a student's device that potentially indicates that Jax is being cyberbullied?
- › What are the data needs and restrictions here?

USER'S GUIDE: Cyberbullying

Here's how we see it:

- › Mrs. Alice should seek guidance from administration on how to address this situation as many schools have a policy on social media use and cyberbullying that may take place on these platforms.
- › This policy could also include whether teachers are allowed to friend and/or follow students on social media.
- › If risk or evidence of cyberbullying is brought to a teacher's attention, it should be addressed and discussed with the appropriate school officials and parents/caretakers.
- › Even though cyberbullying takes place off of school grounds, as it is in a virtual environment, and can take place outside of school hours, parents/caretakers typically expect schools to address cyberbullying issues, especially when it involves students from school. This is why many schools have adopted social media use and cyberbullying policies.

For further discussion:

- › To whom should Alice speak? To Jax? To his parents/guardians? To school officials?
- › If cyberbullying occurs during school vacations, weekends, and off campus, does that matter?

Unintended consequences:

- › Cyberbullying results in significant harm to students and can lead to serious safety issues.

Cyberbullying Screenshot

Ms. Wilson is a teacher at Hope School. Harry is one of her students. Harry brings to Ms. Wilson a screenshot taken from a non-district social media post of comments students are saying about another student, Homer. The screenshot clearly shows that Homer is being bullied.

Questions for discussion:

- Given that a student has discovered through social media evidence of bullying, what should Ms. Wilson do?
- Does it matter that the student saw the post? What if Ms. Wilson had directly seen the post?

USER'S GUIDE: Cyberbullying Screenshot

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For further discussion:

- To whom should Ms. Wilson speak? To his parents/guardians? To school officials?
- Is the screenshot usable evidence, even though it came from a student?

Unintended consequences:

- Cyberbullying results in significant harm to students and can lead to serious safety issues.

Facebook Discussion

Ms. Sophia is a middle school parent and asks a question on the Facebook page for Ava Middle School. In the comments, a teacher, Ms. Mazie, asks, “Are you Maggie’s mom?” Ms. Sophia responds yes, and Ms. Mazie responds with a smiling emoticon, “I have her in my class.” Ms. Sophia responds that Maggie likes Ms. Mazie a lot. Other parents chime in with comments of how much their kids like Ms. Mazie.

Questions for discussion:

- › Was it okay for Ms. Mazie to say on Facebook that Maggie is in her class?
- › Was it proper to have this kind of communication via social media?

USER'S GUIDE: Facebook Discussion

Here's how we see it:

- This is potentially a violation of FERPA, as rosters can be classified as educational records, which are protected information under FERPA. It is also not a recommended best practice. Some parents or students would not like to be mentioned in this way. Further, it is possible that a teacher might accidentally divulge more information than just naming a student in their class. In general, it is best to keep student names and identification off of social media if at all possible.
- Teachers should consult their district's social media policy for teacher/parent interaction.

For further discussion:

- Ava Middle School is a public school and Maggie walks into Ms. Mazie's class every day. Why does it matter that Ms. Mazie identified Maggie?
- Would it be any different if another parent would have said something negative about Ms. Mazie or her class?

Unintended consequences:

- One source of potential harm is if someone sees the post that should not have and becomes aware of the location of a certain student. This is particularly sensitive when there is a restraining order or some such information block to a particular individual. It generally is prudent to be cautious because one can never know who has access to such information.
- Disclosure of this information could potentially be a violation of FERPA and/or school social media policy.

Field Trip Pictures

Ms. Daisy takes her science class on a field trip to a local museum. The students are really excited and they start taking pictures of the exhibits for their projects. Some of the photos include their fellow students, without those students knowing that their picture was taken. Three students, Razoo, Sally, and Cacey, post some of the pictures to social media. Ms. Daisy also takes pictures and posts them to her classroom website and to her personal social media account to promote the exciting trip her students just took.

Questions for discussion:

- Is it ok for Ms. Daisy to post pictures to her classroom website? To her social media account?
- Is it ok that students posted some of their pictures to social media?

USER'S GUIDE: Field Trip Pictures

Here's how we see it:

- › Whether the photos can or cannot be posted legally on Ms. Daisy's class website or social media account can depend on a number of complex factors, and teachers should be at minimum familiar with the existence of these laws and, and familiar with the content of relevant policies. Teachers should consult school policies and/or their school administrators on appropriate use of these photos. Another consideration is whether any of Ms. Daisy's students have opted out of the sharing of their directory information as it is likely these photos are likely to be considered directory information.
- › Students posting pictures on their own social media is something a school probably cannot control and would likely fall outside of FERPA. However, it is crucial for Ms. Daisy to explain to the students the need for caution, especially if they are taking pictures of other students, some of whom may not want their picture posted online. This may also fall under a school's Acceptable Use policy or codes of conduct that discuss respect for others' privacy.

For further discussion:

- › What is other content Ms. Daisy can post to her class website from the field trip that does not include photos of students?

Unintended consequences:

- › Depending on district and school policy, Ms. Daisy could face punitive action for posting the picture on social media.
- › This could also lead to a break in trust with parents/caretakers who do not want their child's face on social media.
- › Some students may feel the photo shows them doing something embarrassing or is just a photo they do not want on social media. The photo can also lead to bullying and stigmatization. There is also potential harm in how long this photo will stay up on social media and who can comment on the photo.
- › Potential harm also lies in the extreme, but possible situation of someone seeing the location of a particular student, and that student's safety being put at risk. For example, a parent where there is a restraining order.

Friending Students on Social Media

A popular high school teacher, Ms. Lola, is friends with her students on Instagram and Snapchat. Besides being fun, Ms. Lola finds benefit in it because it gives her a window into their lives beyond what she sees at school, allowing her to better connect and understand them and their needs. Ultimately, Ms. Lola believes this extra information helps her teach her students better.

Questions for discussion:

- › Is it acceptable for Ms. Lola to friend her students on social media? Why or why not?
- › What are the specific benefits? What are the potential problems?

USER'S GUIDE: Friending Students on Social Media

Here's how we see it:

- This does not likely violate any federal privacy laws — with both Instagram and Snapchat, the user is responsible for controlling who sees their information and who does not.
- However, it might violate district policy or even state laws about how teachers are allowed to friend or contact students on social media. Teachers should ask administrators if their school has a specific policy or rules for this.
- Ms. Lola should consider the ethical implication of this practice:
 - Understanding more about your students could help teach them.
 - It is possible Ms. Lola may share information with them about her personal life that she may later regret.
 - Even though students are posting information available publicly, they may feel that it is creepy or a violation of trust for teachers to look at their social media posts.
 - What is Ms. Lola posting on her social media accounts? When deciding to follow or friend students on social media, consider using a professional social media account instead of a personal one. Teachers may want to create a professional account for even just looking at student posts, since some social media networks will proactively notify users when another user is looking at their profile or posts, and students may then be able to find their personal account. Having a professional account can help to safeguard personal privacy while still allowing teachers to connect with students.
 - An age-old unanswered question in teaching is: how close do you get to your students?
 - Parents/caregivers may feel uncomfortable with teachers following/friending their kids.

For further discussion:

- What if Lola sees posts on social media and talks to other teachers about it?
- What if Lola sees posts on social media and talks to students about it?

Unintended consequences:

- One potential source of harm is if one student accuses Lola of favoritism to another student or even accuses her of inappropriate behavior. Lola must also consider if her students' parents/ caretakers are okay with their children's teacher connecting with them on social media, breaking trust and possibly leading to other legal ramifications.
- Another potential harm is if Lola somehow crosses the line of professionalism with one of her students.
- This practice may violate state law and/or district social media policy.
- Students may feel overly surveilled with a teacher following them on their social media account and feel restricted on what they can post about.

Posting Screenshot of Virtual Class

Ms. Pujols is a middle school science teacher who has just started her virtual classes. Once a week, Ms. Pujols has virtual class on her district's approved video conferencing tool with groups of 15 students. During the first week, she shares screenshots of the grid of students to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The screenshots show the students and their names. She shares these because she is excited about the meetings and because she believes it can create buy-in from parents/caretakers and students.

Questions for discussion:

- › Is it okay for Ms. Pujols to share screenshots of the students in this way? Why or why not?
- › Would it matter if it were just student pictures but not names?
- › Does it matter if she shares only to Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram — but not all?

USER'S GUIDE: Posting Screenshot of Virtual Class

Here's how we see it:

- › Sharing student images and names may be a violation of student privacy laws. Whether it is a violation depends on school policies regarding directory information and whether parents have opted in or out of such sharing.
- › In any case, this is not recommended best practice. Especially while students are learning remotely and video is a window into their homes, students may see this as a violation of trust and their privacy. For everyone's protection and to respect their students' privacy, teachers should avoid sharing student images and names whenever possible without express consent from students and parents/caretakers as applicable.
- › Virtual learning, especially under challenging circumstances, is setting new standards as it adapts to crisis situations. The protection of privacy becomes even more important.

For further discussion:

- › What if some students in the class agree to be posted and others do not?
- › If student names and faces were blurred out, how would that impact the ethics of sharing the screenshot?

Unintended consequences:

- › Potential harm could ensue if a blocked parent somehow determines where the child might be, leading to possible physical harm or abuse to the child or parent with custody.
- › Another potential harm is break of trust with parents/caretakers who may not have social media or do not approve of their child's name and face being posted on social media.
- › Depending on Ms. Pujol's school and district policy, she may be in violation and have to face punitive measures.

Using Student Social Media to Explain Absence

Dora is a student in Ms. Kitty's ninth grade science class. Dora has been absent a lot lately and Ms. Kitty is concerned about her. Two of Dora's friends and classmates, Dickey and Pearl, show Ms. Kitty some social media posts. The posts indicate that Dora may not be sick at all. They show that she is out doing social stuff rather than going to school. Looking at the posts, it is hard to interpret them any other way than that Dora is skipping school.

Questions for discussion:

- › Is Ms. Kitty right to look at the posts? Who or why not?
- › Can Ms. Kitty use the information to take action? Why or why not?
- › To whom should she or can she speak?
- › Is it permissible to use second-hand information? Why or why not?

USER'S GUIDE: Using Student Social Media to Explain Absence

Here's how we see it:

- › A main part of this issue is whether it is permissible to use second-hand information and whether Ms. Kitty has appropriate access to that information. Ms. Wilson should seek out her school's social media use policy on whether viewing a student's social media account through other students is permissible.
- › Social media posts are not a reliable source of information to make assumptions about Dora's absences. Ms. Kitty should rely on reaching out to Dora and/or her parents/caretakers or speaking with the student counselor if the absences become excessive.

For further discussion:

- › Should Ms. Kitty talk to Dora about what she has discovered?
- › Should she talk to Dora's parent or guardian?
- › Does Ms. Kitty have rightful access to this information?

Unintended consequences:

- › If the interpretation is inaccurate, Dora can be harmed by a false accusation.
- › Dora's privacy was violated by the teacher viewing her social media posts without her knowledge which could negatively impact her relationship with Ms. Kitty.

Viewing Student's Social Media

Through the course of scanning through her students' Instagram posts, Ms. Annie notices something potentially disturbing about one student, Jake. It might be nothing but then again, there could be a potentially difficult or even dangerous home situation.

Questions for discussion:

- › What should Ms. Annie do with this information?
- › Is it ok for Ms. Annie to get student information from social media? Why or why not?

USER'S GUIDE: Viewing Student's Social Media

Here's how we see it:

- › If Ms. Annie sees something where she has significant confidence that a student is in harm, then she should consult appropriate school authorities. Teachers are mandatory reporters and therefore have an obligation to report potential harm. This includes possibly contacting child protective services or law enforcement outside of school hours.
- › If Ms. Annie is unsure, she should consider seeking out more information if possible.
- › Ms. Annie needs to be familiar with her school's social media policy as it will have important information on what type of behavior is allowed. For example, there is the possibility that educators are not allowed to "friend" or "follow" students from their personal social media accounts.

For further discussion:

- › Should she talk to the student, Jake?
- › Should she talk to Jake's parent or guardian?
- › Should she talk to Jake's friends who know him better?
- › Should she contact school authorities to tell them what she saw?
- › Is it ok for Ms. Annie to follow her students' social media accounts?

Unintended consequences:

- › Ms. Annie could be violating district social media policy by friending/following her students.
- › Reporting this event could lead to a harmful and disproportionate response by school officials, child protective services, or law enforcement.
- › Failure to report what was seen could lead to possible harm.
- › Jake may feel violated or inappropriately surveilled.