

# Policy 482

## Employee Use of Social Media



HEARTLAND LAKES COMMUNITY  
SCHOOL EXISTS TO EMPOWER  
SCHOLARS TO:  
BRAVELY LIVE THEIR TRUTH,  
TO BECOME WISE STEWARDS OF  
THE LAND AND RESOURCES  
AND TO IGNITE LASTING  
CURIOSITY THAT LEADS TO  
POSITIVE CHANGE IN THEIR  
SCHOOL, THEIR COMMUNITIES,  
AND THEMSELVES.

<b>Adoption:</b>	December 16, 2024
<b>Revision History</b>	
<b>Last Board Review:</b> December 16, 2024	
<b>Next Board Review:</b> December 2027	
<b>Review Frequency:</b> Every 3 Years (per Policy 208)	

### I. PURPOSE

Various forms of electronic communication, and social networking including, but not limited to, text messaging, personal Websites, Web logs (blogs), online forums and virtual worlds can provide a unique means of communication and education, but it must not be allowed to create unintended and/or improper communication between staff and students. It is the Heartland Lakes Community School Board's intention to use these types of electronic communications as a way to further the goals of the school, while protecting staff members, students and the school from harmful incidents.

### II. POLICY STATEMENT

HLCS encourages staff use of social media provided it is used in a manner that does not violate state or federal law or school policies and does not create unintended and/or improper communication between staff and students. Public social media outside of those sponsored by HLCS cannot be used for instruction or for school-sponsored activities without the prior written authorization of the Director, or designee, and parental consent for student participation on social networks.

When employees choose to join or engage with HLCS students, families or fellow employees in a social media context outside of those approved by HLCS, they must maintain their professionalism as employees of HLCS and have responsibility for addressing inappropriate behavior or activity on those networks, including requirements for mandated reporting.

### **III. GUIDELINES**

- A.** HLCS encourages all staff members to maintain active interest and engagement in a wide range of activities, intellectual pursuits, causes, etc., including social, political, religious and civic-oriented groups, organizations, blogs, publications, etc. At the same time, this must be balanced with HLCS's right to manage public communications issued directly or indirectly in its name or on its behalf.
- B.** Staff members will establish and maintain appropriate privacy settings and personal content to ensure that posted content does not reflect poorly on HLCS or conflict with its educational philosophies in any way.
- C.** Staff members are discouraged from posting messages indicating or implying a connection to HLCS.
- D.** Employees must be respectful and professional in all communications (by word, image or other means). Employees must not use obscene, profane or vulgar language on any social media network or engage in communications or conduct that is harassing, threatening, bullying, libelous or defamatory or that discusses or encourages any illegal activity, or the inappropriate use of alcohol, use of illegal drugs, sexual behavior, sexual harassment or bullying.
- E.** Employees must make clear that any views expressed are the employee's alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of HLCS. Employees may not act as a spokesperson for HLCS or post comments as a representative of HLCS except as authorized by the Director, or designee.
- F.** Employees should not use their HLCS email address for communication on public social media networks that have not been approved by HLCS.
- G.** When making personal, non-work related posts online, staff members may not use working time, HLCS equipment or their HLCS email addresses in the message or for reply purposes.

### **IV. COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER STAFF MEMBERS**

- A.** Staff members will use good judgment when making or accepting "friend" (or "link" or "connection") requests to or from other HLCS staff members. Staff members in supervisor/subordinate work relationships are discouraged from making and/or

accepting "friend" requests with one another. This is due to the potential for both parties to feel awkward or pressured to accept the request and thus potentially impacting the work and social relationship.

- B.** Staff members are encouraged to be mindful of not only their own profiles, but those of their friends as well. Photographs and comments on the profiles of friends that reflect poorly on the staff member must be considered.

## **V. COMMUNICATING WITH STUDENTS**

- A.** Other than familial relationships, staff members will avoid personal off-duty relationships with students. Staff members should be aware that, even when interacting with students outside of the school environment, these interactions have a direct impact on the professional relationship within the school environment.
- B.** Staff members will refrain from sharing personal email addresses with students, text messaging students, using social network sites or engaging in other similar behavior that might compromise an appropriate and professional relationship in the classroom and within the school.
- C.** Staff members will be diligent in maintaining the highest ethical standards when using social media and must ensure that they do not create inappropriate personal relationships with students.

## **VI. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

- A.** Staff members must understand that they are responsible for their online presence and are accountable for all written or posted materials and are to exercise good judgment at all times. The permeating and permanent effect of social networking cannot be overstated.
- B.** Confidential information is to be protected at all times and may only be disclosed pursuant to HLCS policy or Minnesota Statute. Accordingly, no electronic communication, including but not limited to text messages, blogs or social network posting may communicate any confidential information. If a staff member believes that confidential information may have been revealed, he/she is required to notify the appropriate Director or the employee's supervisor immediately.

- C.** Staff members will have no expectation of privacy when using online forums. Information posted on or exchanged through social media may be accessed by parents, students, co-workers and members of the public. Therefore, when communicating via online social media, school staff will remember that their conduct represents HLCS and any information posted or exchanged should always be in the best interest of serving HLCS and its students.
- D.** Employees must not post images on any social media network of co-workers without the co-worker's consent.
- E.** HLCS must not post images of students on social media without written parental consent, except for images of students taken in the public arena such as at sporting events or fine arts performances. Employees must not post images of students on their personal social media pages at all, without written parental consent that stipulates the use of their personal page.
- F.** Employees must not post any non-public images of the HLCS premises and property, including floor plans.
- G.** Staff members will not misrepresent themselves or any part of HLCS in any social networking or blogging posts and will not be asked by supervisors or administrators to misrepresent themselves or their position with HLCS.
- H.** Staff members are not permitted to use official HLCS photographs or photographs of students or student property without the written consent of HLCS administration.
- I.** Staff members will not use media sites to harass, threaten, libel, malign, defame, disparage or discriminate against members of the school community including but not limited to students, parents and/or guardians, co-workers or the administration or Board. Employees may not write about, post pictures of or otherwise refer to any student, parent and/or guardians, co-workers or administrators without their permission.
- J.** HLCS recognizes that student groups or members of the public may create social media representing students or groups within HLCS. When an employee chooses to join or engage in these social networking groups, they do so as an employee of HLCS. Employees have responsibility for maintaining appropriate employee-student relationships at all times and have responsibility for addressing appropriate behavior or activity on these networks. This includes acting to protect the safety of minors online.

- K.** Non-compliance with this policy will result in disciplinary action, which may lead to termination.

*Note: The applicability and enforceability of this policy 482 is limited to, and qualified by, Minnesota or Federal law that, at the time any such circumstance within the scope of the policy arise, may be contrary to some aspect or all of the policy.*