



Reaping Social Media Benefits While Minimizing Pitfalls

- **Be courteous, honest and respectful:** Social media is a forum where your constituents will share their opinions, whether it's negative or positive. Think twice before responding and pay attention to the tone of your words.
- **When it gets negative, take it offline:** When handling social media complaints or criticism, respond publicly once to show you are responding, but do not address the substance of the complaint. Instead ask for contact information to continue the conversation offline. If the complaint is against the board/superintendent/school employee, direct them to your board secretary for policy handling citizen concerns.
- **Think before you tweet/post:** Don't blog, tweet or post anything you don't want to go viral on social media, splashed across the front page of a news website, leading the evening news, or printed in the newspaper.
- **Understand legal and ethical aspects:** Board ethics and conflict of interest policies apply to social media outlets. Don't use social media to leak closed session materials and/or information that is protected by law. Understand what constitutes a public record and how that should be managed.
- **Less is more:** Social media is a time commitment, so don't overdo it. Pick one or two social media channels you want to focus on, rather than juggling too many and wasting energy.
- **Focus on shared values and unity:** Don't criticize other board members, school employees or students. Remember, you are part of a team with shared vision and goals.
- **Be careful what you share online:** Don't retweet or like posts that could be ostracizing, seem like conspiracy theories, or can't be proven as factual. Your constituents are across the political and social spectrum.
- **Clarify your individual viewpoint:** It is important to share upfront that you are not representing the viewpoint of the whole board.

Adapted from *Telling Your Story: A Communications Guide for School Boards*, a publication of the National School Boards Association.