As educators and public employees, our online presence has a direct impact on our professional lives, our students, and our school community. This document is intended to provide guidance and support to help you navigate the digital world safely and professionally. Our goal is to empower you to use social media responsibly while protecting your career and upholding the integrity of our profession.

The "Front Page Test"

Before you post, comment, or share anything online, ask yourself this simple question:

"Would I be comfortable seeing this on the front page of a newspaper, on a television news report, or projected on a screen at a School Committee meeting?"

If the answer is no, or even if you hesitate, it is best not to post it. Remember, nothing online is truly private, even in "closed" groups or with strict privacy settings. Screenshots can be taken and shared instantly.

Guidelines for Online Conduct

Personal Social Media Profiles (Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, etc.)

- **DO** set your privacy settings to the highest level. Regularly review who can see your posts, photos, and personal information.
- **DO** assume that students, parents, and colleagues will eventually see what you post.
- **DO NOT** post photos or comments depicting illegal activities, excessive alcohol use, or other content that could call your judgment as an educator into question.
- **DO NOT** "friend" or follow current students on your personal profiles. This creates a dual relationship that can compromise your professional boundaries.
- **DO NOT** complain about your job, specific students, parents, or colleagues online. Such posts can be considered unprofessional conduct and may lead to disciplinary action[1].

Town Community Pages & Public Forums

These spaces can be particularly challenging. While we are all members of the Monson community, our roles as educators mean our comments carry different weight and are subject to greater scrutiny.

- **DO** navigate these pages with extreme caution. Often, the most prudent action is to observe rather than engage in debates about school-related issues.
- **DO NOT** engage in arguments with parents or community members about school

1 Article XVII: Professional Ethics (pg. 43 of the Unit A Contract)

policies, budget issues, or specific incidents. This can quickly escalate and reflect poorly on you and our union.
- **DO NOT** attempt to correct misinformation in a combative or emotional way. If you see something that requires a factual correction, please forward it to your building representative or an MEA officer. We can address it through official channels if necessary.
- **DO NOT** disclose any confidential student or staff information. This is a serious ethical and legal breach.

Engaging in Town Politics

As private citizens, we have every right to participate in the political process; however, we must be mindful of how our professional roles are perceived.

- **DO** exercise your right to vote, attend Town Meeting, and stay informed on local issues.
- **DO** advocate for issues as a private citizen.
- **DO NOT** use your professional title or position (e.g., "MHS Teacher") in a way that suggests you are speaking on behalf of the school or the district when endorsing a candidate or taking a political stance, unless it is an official, union-sanctioned action.
- **DO NOT** engage in online arguments or post disparaging remarks about elected officials, including members of the School Committee.

Your Contracts & Our Professional Standards

Our conduct, both online and offline, is connected to our professional responsibilities. Several documents govern our standards of behavior:

- **Professional Ethics:** Our contracts (e.g., Unit A, Article XVII) and our MEA Constitution reference the National Education Association Code of Ethics, which defines acceptable professional behavior[2]. Breaches of these ethics can be reported to the administration and the Association.

- **Public Complaints:** A negative social media post can lead to a formal complaint being filed against you by a parent or community member, triggering an investigation as outlined in school policy (Appendix C of the Unit A contract and the District Handbook)[3].

- **Harassment and Hostile Environment:** Online posts, even on personal time, can be viewed as creating a hostile environment for a student or colleague[4]. The District Handbook is clear that cyber-bullying and harassment are prohibited and can lead to discipline.

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2 MEA Constitution (pg. 4): Article III, Section 5; MEA Constitution (pg. 3): Article II, Section 1; Unit A contract (pg. 43): Article XVII;

3 Unit A contract (pg. 56): Appendix C: Alleged Non-Criminal Activity

4 MPS Handbook (pg. 40) 1.9.1; (pg. 41) 1.9.5;

- **Just Cause:** For members with professional status, discipline must meet a "just cause" standard. Unprofessional conduct online can be used by the district as grounds for discipline[5].

When in Doubt, Don't Post.

Your digital footprint is permanent. A single thoughtless post can have lasting consequences for your career. If you are ever unsure about posting something, please err on the side of caution. If you have questions or find yourself in a difficult online situation, please reach out to your building representative or an MEA officer for guidance *before* you act.

We are here to support you.

5 Unit A contract (pg.36): Article XIV, Section I; Unit C contract (pg. 7): Article V, Section D; Unit B contract (pg. 20): Article IX, Section E.