

Facebook can get you fired: Research reveals the perils of social networking for school employees

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School administrators are facing a growing dilemma resulting from social networking that goes beyond preventing cyber-bullying among students. They're also faced with balancing the rights of privacy and free speech of educators with what should be the appropriate behavior of teachers as role models.

Janet Decker, a University of Cincinnati assistant professor in UC's Educational Leadership Program, reveals more on the dilemma in an article published in the January issue of *Principal Navigator*, a professional magazine by the Ohio Association of Elementary School Administrators.

Decker explains that a large number of educators have been fired for [Internet activity](#). She says that some teachers have been dismissed for behavior such as posting a picture of themselves holding a glass of wine.

"Despite the evolving issues, the courts have not provided extensive [guidance](#) for administrators," writes Decker. "Part of the difficulty is that technology advances at a quicker pace than legal precedent, leaving school employees and administrators unsure of their legal responsibilities."

Decker's article highlights cases that have landed in court as a result of school policies on [social networking](#) that "were not clear or effective."

The article also examines the law surrounding [sexual harassment](#) or abuse of students and [freedom of speech](#) for public employees and employee privacy.

"In general, it is important to understand that school employees are expected to be role models both inside and outside of school – even while on Facebook," concludes Decker.

Decker's article features the following 10 recommendations as she encourages school administrators to implement technology policies for school employees:

1. Educate! It's not enough to have written policies; schools should also offer professional development about these issues. By doing so, staff is notified about the expectations and they have a chance to digest and ask questions about the content of the policies.
2. Be empathetic in policies and actions. Administrators may wish that the school's computers will only be used for educational purposes; however, an expectation such as this is unrealistic.
3. Create separate student and staff policies. Much of the law pertaining to students and staff differs greatly.
4. Involve staff in [policy](#) creation. This process will help school employees comprehend the policies and will also likely foster staff buy-in.
5. Be clear and specific. Policies should include rationales, legal support and commentary with examples.
6. Ensure your policies conform to state and federal law.

7. Include consequences for violations in policies and implement the consequences.
8. Provide an avenue for appeal and attend to employees' due process rights.
9. Implement policies in an effective and non-discriminatory manner.
10. Amend policies as the law evolves. Much of the law related to technology is in flux. What is legal today may not be tomorrow.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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