

Social networks are Web-based, online communities that allow individuals to come together to share personal information, photos and other common interests. Examples of social networks include Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and LinkedIn.

As time goes by, WEA is finding that students, parents and co-workers are all using social networks to keep in touch with family and friends. We do not discourage the use of social networks, but we do want to offer simple suggestions to protect you in your role as an educator.

You should:

- Make sure only your friends can view your search listing and profile. Under "Settings," lock all options in "Privacy" to accept "Only Friends."
- Remove yourself from Google search listings. Facebook profiles now show up in Google search listings, but you can opt out of search entirely to prevent your students from knowing you're on Facebook. In "Privacy," review the "Search Result Content" to limit the information people can see about you.
- Be vigilant about what others post about you. "Untag" photos of yourself that you don't want students or parents to see.
- Before posting something, ask yourself, "Would I want my (principal, students, parents) to see this?"
- Be careful about linking your Facebook with other social networking sites. If you update your status on a linked Twitter account, it will publish to Facebook where others might see it.

- Monitor what is being published about you. If you're concerned that old friends or contacts could include you in online postings without your knowledge, try setting up a Google alert with your name, just to be safe. A Google alert will send you an e-mail anytime you are published. Visit: <http://www.google.com/alerts> and enter your name to be searched, how often you want to receive the reports and your e-mail address.
- Sort your friends by lists. If you're friends with your fellow educators and principals, you may want to add them to a school list with restricted viewing abilities. Once you've created your list, go to "Settings," and navigate to the Profile section. From there, you can select "Edit Custom Settings," which will open a field for "Except These People."
- Use common sense when you're using social media.

Some Don'ts:

- Don't accept friend requests from current or potential students or their family members.
- Don't accept anyone whom you do not know personally as a friend. Just like e-mail, information and photos from sites like Facebook are not fully protected and can be obtained.

- Don't join groups that may be considered unprofessional or inappropriate, and leave any such group of which you may already be a member.
- Don't post vulgar or obscene language, materials, photos or links that may be considered inappropriate or unprofessional. If you wouldn't want to see it on the front page of the local newspaper, don't post it.
- Don't post any negative information about your students, co-workers or school administrators.