



# Social Networking Sites - Update

October 2009

As social networking sites such as My Space and Facebook continue to be used by OEA members, the Ohio Education Association (OEA) has monitored and evolved our initial guidance on the use of such sites. These sites, when used appropriately, can be powerful tools for sharing information and building community around important issues, including public education. Nonetheless, the use of social networking sites may expose members to unintended consequences which could impact jobs and careers. The following tips can help minimize the possibility of any adverse consequence on members' employment and teaching licenses.

- Members should not post, do, say or write anything on a social network that they would not want to see on the front page of the local newspaper or would not say or do in front of students, parents, or the board of education.
- Members should not post material to their sites that may be considered inappropriate or unprofessional, including pictures and links. Members should monitor the content of their "pages" and remove anything inappropriate or questionable immediately. Members should not join and should end affiliations with sites that are unprofessional or inappropriate.
- Members should never post any information that would identify a student, and members should refrain from posting critical comments about students and school officials. Unfortunately, school employees do not have the same free speech rights as the general public, and the content and impact of some speech may subject members to discipline, including termination.
- Members should educate themselves about and take all appropriate precautions available on the social networking sites they are using. For example, "pages" should be marked private, and all requests to become "friends" should be approved by the member. A member should never grant access to his or her "page" without knowing who the person making the request is.

If a member is threatened with discipline by his or her local board of education or the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) because of the use of a social networking site, he or she should contact his or her Labor Relations Consultant (LRC) immediately. The member may be eligible for legal services to assist with the issue.

This document is not meant to be comprehensive or substitute for common sense when using social networking sites, and it is not intended to provide legal advice. For additional information, members should contact their Labor Relations Consultant (LRC).



