



Six Social Media Myths

That Silence Your School's Voice

Andrea Gribble

I

t's October, and likely you have seen some tremendous accomplishments at your school already this year — sports victories, music performances, and students reading for the first time or making new friends. These all deserve to be celebrated, but are you sharing the stories with your community?

Traditionally, schools have used monthly newsletters, newspaper articles and even website updates to share news. But many people in today's society get their news in a much different, real-time way — social media. If this is how many

people communicate, why haven't some schools utilized social media as a means of getting the word out and building community spirit?

In the last 20 months of studying, listening, learning and practicing social media with schools, I think I've heard every possible concern. I've identified six myths that come up regularly in conversations with school administrators, teachers and staff, and I have asked leaders from across Wisconsin for their firsthand experience in addressing concerns. After you hear their responses, I hope you will be more confident in taking the leap into social media.

1

MYTH 1: Negative comments will fill the newsfeed

Are you afraid creating a Facebook page will give an open microphone to complainers?

“People who have a negative view on the school will be voicing their opinions on social media whether we have a school account or not,” said Brad Saron, superintendent of Sun Prairie Area School District. “Social media gives schools the opportunity to own the story and promote the facts on all the awesome things happening at our school.”



Oconomowoc Schools @econschools · Sep 1
Lining up for the 1st day of school at Greenland Elementary. Welcome back!



In more than 5,000 posts for school districts, I have been amazed at the outpouring of positive feedback. A few negative voices have surfaced, but nothing that couldn't be handled with a kind response thanking them for their feedback and inviting them to the school for further discussion.

"When we take time to share positive stories on a consistent basis through platforms like Facebook and Twitter, we can outweigh any negativity that may exist," said Saron.

2

MYTH 2: It takes too much time

Schools are certainly a busy place, and adding another responsibility to your already stretched staff is often a concern. However, Joe Sanfelippo, superintendent for the Fall Creek School District, explained that most social media tools are easy to use and don't take much time.

"Once you learn how to use the tool, it takes you less than 30 seconds to post something to Twitter," he said.

In our discussion, Sanfelippo and I concurred that 10 seconds is often enough to create a photo-only post. Proper training and incorporating the activity of sharing your classrooms with the world can become part of your daily routine.

"Being transparent with the great things happening in your school and bringing the community along on the journey is just priceless,"

Sanfelippo said. "It truly is an opportunity to transform your culture, 30 seconds at a time."

3

MYTH 3: Student privacy is too difficult to monitor

Images posted on social media are very easy to share. This leaves some schools leery about sharing photos of students on channels like Instagram and Facebook.

"We make certain we carefully guard student privacy by having a clear board of education policy and identifying students by only the first name if we use names in our tweets or posts," said JoAnn Sternke, superintendent of the Pewaukee School District. "We have found that parents truly love when we post

pictures of students engaged in learning or when we highlight student successes in a blog or post. It helps everyone develop #PiratePride!"

After working with nine districts, my experience has been similar. The parental feedback has shifted from "don't put my child on social media," to "why isn't my child on Facebook?" Getting proper policies and permissions in place is a manageable and must-do task for your district.

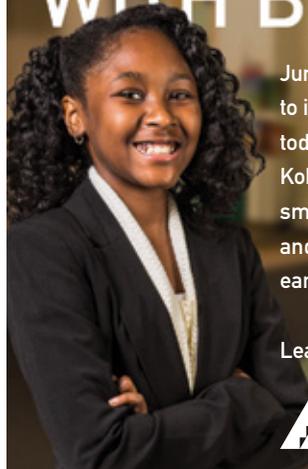
"Celebrating student achievement and engagement is something parents and community members look for school districts to do," Sternke said. "Social media is a great way to develop pride in our schools, and we can honor student privacy and still have a strong presence in social media. It can be done!"



School District of Black River Falls
4 hrs · 1/8

It's official - the first concrete has been poured for the new elementary school! We also have our address: 410 Hwy A. Don't forget that if you have suggestions for the name of this new school, please call the District Office and share. #BuildBRF

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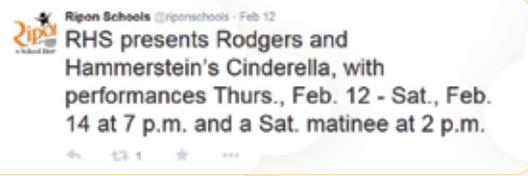




4 MYTH 4: We don't need it; we have a good website

Do you think that your newly updated and mobile-friendly website is enough? Damian LaCroix, superintendent of the Howard-Suamico School District and a member of the League of Innovative Schools, said

social media cannot be ignored. "In the Howard-Suamico School District, we believe that effective communication means meeting our audience on their turf, on their time, using mobile technology tools," he said. "Increasingly, that means employing social media ... Traditional modes of communication will not be effective for a growing and tech-savvy audience, including our students. Rather, multiple modes of communication are most effective and that means yesterday's website and newsletters are only the beginning."



5 MYTH 5: It's too overwhelming; where do we even start?

With new social media sites popping up all the time, it can be stressful just knowing where to begin. Perhaps you've just figured out Instagram and now you hear about something called Periscope and you wonder if you ought to pursue using it?

Douglas Keiser, Superintendent of Hustisford School District shared his school's strategy of focusing on just one platform — Facebook.

"Our biggest obstacle was just getting the page set up correctly," Keiser said. "We reached out for some help to get those settings



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Policy Considerations

Sample policies and other information regarding the use of social media is available upon request from the WASB Policy Services team via Policy Librarian Teresa Kimball (tkimball@wasb.org). Subscribers to the WASB Policy Resource Guide (PRG) can find Background Information and sample policies on district use of social media in the PRG under the policy code 821.5.

right and then it was easy to manage.”

Facebook can be mastered by staff of all ages and it's by far the most widely used platform for schools to reach parents, grandparents, students, community members and alumni. I strongly recommend starting with Facebook.

Establish responsibilities and connect with your followers before starting on other platforms such as Twitter and Instagram. Keiser said he and the two principals post on the page and the visibility in their community is tremendous. “We have since launched other accounts, but starting with Facebook was a great first step.”

6

MYTH 6: It's a trend that will soon fade

Over the years, fads come and go, but social media is definitely not one of them.

“There are over 1.4 billion monthly active Facebook users, and nearly 1 billion of those use it on a daily basis,” Cameron School District Administrator, Joe Leschisin, stated. “It is not going anywhere soon.”

“We are a small school district with a village population of 1,700 people,” Leschisin continued. “We are still in our first year of our district's Facebook page and have nearly 1,000 followers. Parents, students and community members

are now relying on our page more than any other form of communication. There is no going back for us now and I can't imagine doing without it.”

Share and Celebrate

Students deserve to be celebrated, and dedicated teachers merit appreciation and applause. Social media is a free platform that can pay huge dividends for the entire community when you use it well. You just heard it from six Wisconsin districts! ■

Andrea Gribble is a social media consultant who helps schools celebrate their students and connect communities through social media. Reach her at andrea@social-school4edu.com.

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