



## FIVE FAST FACTS

# Social media and schools

Social networking has grown dramatically over the past decade and shows no signs of slowing down. Individuals, businesses and organizations are using websites like Facebook and Twitter to engage in multi-directional conversations and communicate in a way that was never possible before. Schools, increasingly, are using social media, too.



### **1. Social media is widely used by people around the world, including people in your community.**

Facebook has more than 750 million unique monthly users, making it the most popular social networking website in the world. Studies show social media is widely used by people of all ages, incomes and communities in the U.S. A December 2012 survey by the Pew Research Center found that the majority of people living in rural (63%), suburban (65%) and urban (72%) areas are on Facebook. Twitter has a third as many unique monthly users as Facebook, making it the second most popular social networking website, followed — in order — by LinkedIn, Pinterest, Myspace and Google+.

### **2. Many school districts are embracing social media as a new way to communicate with their community.**

More and more schools in Ohio and the nation are using social media. A survey released by the Center for Digital Education in April 2013 found 74% of U.S. school districts are on at least one social media network, which is up 44% from two years ago. While Facebook is the most common social networking website used by schools, many districts also are using Twitter and YouTube. Many districts display their social media feeds on the home page of their websites or provide prominent links to their social media pages.

### **3. Social media presents rewards and risks for school districts.**

Social media allows schools to: highlight positive news and student achievement; increase awareness of school events and activities; spread breaking news and important reminders; engage community members in dialog and answer questions; and drive traffic to district websites, blogs or other electronic content. Perhaps best of all, it's free. Social media,

# FAST FIVE FACTS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND SCHOOLS

## RESOURCES

Report: “District use of social media networks up 44% over two years”

<http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/79698>

“The demographics of social media users — 2012”

<http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/34192>

“Why public school leaders must embrace social media now”

<http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/31487>

“Social media helps schools build bridges”

<http://links.ohioschoolboards.org/33038>



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however, also presents risks for districts. Each district must determine how it will use social media, if comments will be allowed, what comments are acceptable, and how comments will be monitored and addressed. It is important districts adopt a social media policy and comply with all relevant policies, laws and regulations, including privacy laws like the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act. OSBA's legal division can provide guidance to school districts.

### 4. School districts can start or expand social media efforts by engaging staff and community members.

It is helpful for school districts to assess what and how their community is using social media, as well as what type of content residents would like the district to share on social media. Use this process to get buy-in from your community and district and create a content hierarchy, which determines the most important content to share on social media and who is responsible for generating those items. A single individual should take ownership for managing and monitoring social media, but other staff members can assist by supporting that person. Be sure to promote social media efforts wherever possible, including at board meetings, school events and in newsletters. Use social media analytic tools (like [www.twittercounter.com](http://www.twittercounter.com)) to monitor progress, such as new followers or “likes,” and set goals for growth.

### 5. It's important to follow best practices when using social media.

Be sure to maintain a positive and professional tone on your social media pages. You want followers to develop an expectation that they will routinely see new content that has value to them, but you don't want to overwhelm them with content either. Use a free, Web-based social media management system (such as [www.hootsuite.com](http://www.hootsuite.com)) to schedule content to appear hours, days or weeks in advance — this saves you time and effort; you can use these tools to post to several social networking websites at once. Try to be engaging when you write social media content, and always avoid jargon or acronyms. Remember, it's nearly impossible to erase a digital footprint, so think carefully before you post anything and always proofread carefully. OSBA's communications division can provide guidance to school districts.