

# Impact of Social Media at School: Some Bad / Some Good

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**NOTE:** The information set forth in these materials is intended to provide an outline of the law existing as of the presentation date. It is not intended as, nor should it be considered, “legal advice.” If you are presented with a specific issue, you should consult with legal counsel.



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# Social Media Defined

The U.S. Department of Education defines social media as:

“Forms of communication either Internet or text-based that support social interactions of individuals”

**U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Healthy Students (2012)**

# Most popular social networks worldwide as of January 2022, ranked by number of monthly active users (in millions)

Becton Loveless, *Is Social Media Good or Bad for Students?*, Education Corner, Aug. 15, 2022, available at <https://www.educationcorner.com/is-social-media-good-or-bad-for-students/>



# How old are the people using social media?

Aaron Smith and Monica Anderson, *Social Media Use in 2018*, Pew Research Center, March 1, 2018, available at <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>

People in the age group 18 to 30 are the biggest social media users, most of them being students.

| <u>Age</u>   | <u>Percentage of Users</u> |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| 18-29        | 88%                        |
| 30-49        | 78%                        |
| 50-65        | 64%                        |
| 65 and above | 37%                        |

# Problems with Student Use of Social Media

- 1) Cyberbullying or online conflicts with peers or school employees can spread quickly and lead to harassment or ridicule.
- 2) Quick and widespread communication of embarrassing sexual photos (sexting) or shameful information.
- 3) Rapidly increasing rates of student anxiety and depression have links to social media (perfect life/body apps can lead to low self-esteem).

# Problems with Student Use of Social Media (*continued*)

- 4) Potential for creating “crisis contagion” (1–5% of suicides are believed to be due to learning about one crisis that leads to another crisis).
- 5) 24/7 access to social media leads to sleep deprivation and a distraction from homework and other responsibilities because students lack maturity to turn it off.

**National Association of School Psychologists: School Safety and Crisis (2016)**

# CASE EXAMPLE #1: The Jilted Cheerleader

- B. L., a 9th grade student, tried out for the varsity cheerleading squad.
- B. L. was not selected.
- While at a convenience store off campus on a Saturday afternoon with a friend, she posted images on Snapchat.
- Snapchat showed images of B. L. and her friend with middle fingers raised.
- Caption: “Fxxk school . . . fxxk cheer, fxxk everything.”
- Image viewed by cheerleaders, other students, and cheerleading coaches.

***Mahoney Area School District v. B. L., U.S. Supreme Court (2021)***

# CASE EXAMPLE #1: The Jilted Cheerleader

*(continued)*

## Discipline Appropriate?

**Yes**

**No**



# CASE EXAMPLE #1: The Jilted Cheerleader (*continued*)

## Discipline Options by the School:



**Suspension**



**Expulsion**

# CASE EXAMPLE #1: The Jilted Cheerleader (continued)

## Discipline Upheld by the Court?

**Yes**

**No**



# CASE EXAMPLE #2: Rap Against Teachers

- High school senior posted a rap recording on his public Facebook page and then on YouTube.
- Rap recording was profane and vulgar, and included threats and intimidating language against two coaches. Example:
  - “You fxxking with the wrong one / going to get a pistol down your mouth / Boww”*
- Image widely viewed on Facebook.

***Taylor Bell v. Itawamba County School Board (5th Cir. 2015)***

# CASE EXAMPLE #2: Rap Against Teachers

*(continued)*

## Discipline Appropriate?

**Yes**

**No**

# CASE EXAMPLE #2: Rap Against Teachers (continued)

## Discipline Options by the School:



**Suspension**



**Expulsion**

# CASE EXAMPLE #2: Rap Against Teachers (continued)

## Discipline Upheld by the Court?

**Yes**

**No**



# CASE EXAMPLE #3: Saucy Photos

Two 9th grade girls had a weekend sleepover.

- Took photos of themselves sucking lollipops shaped like sexual objects.
- Pretended to kiss each other.
- No nudity (girls wore pajamas).
- Posted photos to Myspace and Facebook “friends”.

***T.V. v. Smith-Green Community School Corp. (U.S. Dist. Ct. Indiana 2011)***

# CASE EXAMPLE #3: Saucy Photos (continued)

## Discipline Appropriate?

**Yes**

**No**



# CASE EXAMPLE #3: Saucy Photos (continued)

## Discipline Options by the School:



**Suspension**



**Expulsion**

# CASE EXAMPLE #3: Saucy Photos (continued)

## Discipline Upheld by the Court?

**Yes**

**No**



# Social Media Postings

## Factors to Consider Before Making a Disciplinary Determination About On or Off Campus Social Media Posting

- Is there a threat to students, school administrators, teachers, or school staff?
- Does the social media posting subject students, the school, school administrators, teachers, or staff to public ridicule, scorn, or threats?
- Does the social media posting constitute cyberbullying or harassment?

**TIP:** *Act quickly to collect and preserve photos, text messages, voice or video recordings, or other important evidence.*

**WARNING:** Avoid jumping to a quick conclusion. What type of investigation would be useful?

# Benefits of Social Media in Schools: The Good

- 1) Allows for quick dissemination of accurate information to students, parents, and the public (weather emergency / crisis).
- 2) Helps keep parents, teachers, and students on the same page about class grades, homework assignments, class activities, and school events.
- 3) Can make education more accessible for students, increase student participation in class, and provide access to useful resources for homework.

# Benefits of Social Media in Schools: The Good (continued)

- 4) Allows students to showcase individual talents on various apps.



- 5) Can help students become academically and socially involved in school and can improve learning outcomes.

# Questions?

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